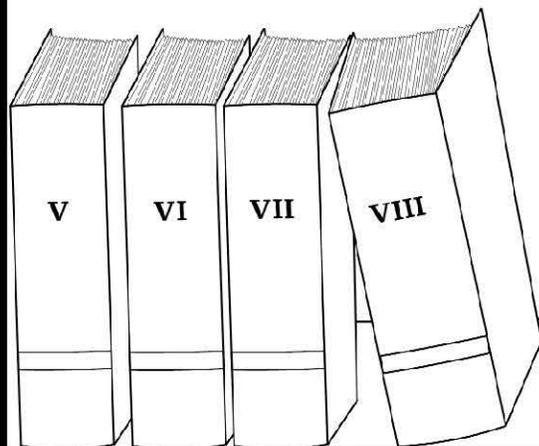


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The Editorial Board of the Undergraduate Political Review welcomes you to the Spring 2019 Edition. Last semester, we continued the established tradition of selecting a broad political theme, and working closely with student writers to develop original articles on that basis. Featuring topics ranging from human rights to globalization, UPR has consistently brought attention to nuanced yet critical political issues as a platform for undergraduate discourse. Hoping to attract a greater number of undergraduate student writers, this semester we made the decision to forgo selecting a specific topic, instead putting out an ‘open-call’ for papers. In addition to our desire to work with new writers, our hope was to produce an edition of the Review with unparalleled diversity of both style and substance. Combining original articles with course papers adapted for the Review, our hope is that the Department of Political Science is better represented within the contents of the Spring 2019 Edition than ever before. Without a greater level of commitment from our student writers than in previous years, presenting such a diverse array of undergraduate articles would have been impossible. Featured articles, ranging from historical portraits to investigative essays, are intended to demonstrate the versatility of the students featured in the Review. Our collective ability to present such a vast array of topics and perspectives is entirely owed to the tenacity of each writer published. With that in mind, all of us that serve on the Editorial Board want to sincerely thank all writers who contributed to UPR this semester. It is our hope that this experience will lay the foundation for UPR to expand its readership, continue to attract more talented and passionate students, and always work to elevate the political discourse at the University of Connecticut. We are proud to faithfully present the following articles, and hope all who read these pages appreciate not only the efforts of all involved, but the importance of the political issues featured throughout.

The Path Forward on Social Security

By Kyle Adams

One of the most important issues facing the United States in the next twenty years is the impending collapse of its Social Security program. This social insurance program, which provides protection against income losses due to old age and disability, plays a crucial role in providing financial security to millions of retired Americans. Without congressional action, social security is expected to go “bankrupt” by 2034, and this threatens to destabilize the American economy and drastically increase elderly poverty rates. It is critical that Congress acts quickly to provide solvency to Social Security by modestly raising the retirement age and slightly raising the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax.

To understand the best options to reform Social Security, it is first important to understand the history of the program. Social Security’s historical roots lie in an 1862 law passed by the Union government that allowed disabled veterans from the Civil War to apply for government pensions.¹ While this law did not create a program structurally similar to the Social Security program that the United States has today, it marked the first occurrence in American history of the government providing any sort retirement assistance. However, the government continued to stay out of retirement pensions and insurance until the Great Depression began in 1929. The elderly population in the United States was hit especially hard by this severe economic downturn as the elderly poverty rate astonishingly reached almost 50%. This high elderly poverty rate can largely be attributed to changes in the structure of American society in the early

¹ “Social Security Act.” HISTORY. January 26, 2018. Accessed April 25, 2019.
<https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/social-security-act>

20th century. Industrialization and urbanization broke up extended families and left many elderly Americans living alone without the financial support of their children.

President Roosevelt recognized the dire situation facing much of the United States' older population and pushed for the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935 to help reduce elderly poverty rates. The bill fundamentally established a right to a basic pension in old age, and it established a government social insurance program to provide for that right by requiring forced retirement savings. Americans would pay into the program while they worked and then receive benefits from the program that roughly corresponded to the amount that they contributed into the program. Today, workers pay into the program through a 12.4% FICA tax (6.2% is levied on the workers themselves and 6.2% is levied on their employers) on their earnings up to \$127,200.² They can then collect monthly benefits based on their average monthly earnings when they retire as long as they have worked for ten years.³ Workers can start claiming monthly benefits at age sixty-two, but they cannot claim full monthly benefits until they reach age sixty-seven.

The structure of Social Security has left it vulnerable to several factors that are contributing to its impending collapse. First, the program has seen a drastically falling worker-to-beneficiary ratio.⁴ In 1940, the worker-to-beneficiary ratio was 159.4, while today it is only 2.8.⁵ This places an enormous financial burden on the program which now must make payouts to an

² Backman, Maurie. "How Does Social Security Work?" The Motley Fool. November 22, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.fool.com/retirement/general/2015/11/22/how-does-social-security-work.aspx>.

³ Frankel, Matthew. "Here's How the Social Security Retirement Benefit Formula Works." The Motley Fool. May 26, 2018. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.fool.com/retirement/2018/05/26/heres-how-the-social-security-retirement-benefit-f.aspx>.

⁴ Williams, Sean. "The 4 Biggest Problems Facing Social Security." The Motley Fool. August 27, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.fool.com/retirement/2016/08/27/the-4-biggest-problems-facing-social-security.aspx>.

⁵ "Ratio of Covered Workers to Beneficiaries." Social Security Administration. 2013. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.ssa.gov/history/ratios.html>.

increasing number of retirees without receiving pay-ins from an increasing number of workers. Second, the program has faced additional financial stresses due to increasing life expectancies. With Americans enjoying longer retirements, Social Security must make benefit payments to individuals for longer periods of time. Finally, record low bond yields have posed additional issues for the program. When Social Security collects money through FICA taxes, it uses it to buy long-term United States treasury bonds. The Federal Reserve has kept interest rates extremely low in the aftermath of the Great Recession to discourage savings and encourage investment in the private sector. This has decreased demand in the treasury bond market and reduced the return that Social Security makes from investing in these bonds. When combined with congressional inaction, these three factors have left Social Security on the verge of bankruptcy by 2034.

Proposed fixes to Social Security typically encompass some combination of changes to the benefit calculation formula, the cost-of-living-adjustment, the FICA tax, the retirement age, or the maximum taxable earnings limit. The most prominent current Congressional proposal to fix the issues with Social Security is the Social Security 2100 Act introduced by Representative John Larson (D-CT) and co-sponsored by over two-hundred Democratic legislators.⁶ This bill aims to provide solvency to Social Security until 2100, while increasing benefits without increasing the retirement age. The bill does this primarily through changes to the FICA tax and the maximum taxable earnings limit. The FICA tax would gradually increase by about \$.50 per week from 2020 to 2043, so that the FICA tax rate would effectively increase from 12.4% to 14.8%. This would bring additional revenue into the Social Security trust fund as workers would

⁶ Larson, John. "The Social Security 2100 Act." Office of Rep. John Larson. 2019. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://larson.house.gov/social-security-2100>.

be required to contribute a larger portion of their salaries to the program. Additionally, the bill would change the maximum taxable earnings limit, which describes the amount of income on which an individual must pay FICA taxes. Currently, an individual only pays FICA taxes on the first \$127,200 that they make, and any additional earnings are not subject to the tax. However, under Representative Larson's proposal, the government would continue to apply the FICA tax on the first \$127,200 that an individual makes and then begin applying it again to any wages that an individual earns above \$400,000. This would bring additional revenue into the Social Security trust fund by increasing the amount of total income in subject to taxation.⁷ The increase in government revenue from these reforms would be enough to allow Social Security to pay full benefits until 2100.⁸

While the Social Security 2100 Act is an important starting point in the debate on how to best fix the program, the proposal's primary mechanisms of achieving solvency threaten to harm American economic growth. Such a sizable increase to FICA taxes would have a significant impact on wages, employment, and the amount of disposable household income in the American economy. Employers, who bear half the statutory burden of paying FICA taxes, would likely be forced to reduce the wages of their current workers since they must now contribute additional funds into Social Security for each of them. Some firms would also choose to reduce the number of workers they employ in order to mitigate the implications of an increase in FICA taxes. Decreases in wages and employment would leave Americans with less disposable household

⁷ Bauer, Elizabeth. "So, Hey, Why Not Just Remove the Social Security Cap?" Forbes. April 28, 2018. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ebauer/2018/04/28/so-hey-why-not-just-remove-the-social-security-earnings-cap/#4095fbad2b23>.

⁸ Thornton, Nick. "With Social Security 2100 Act, Rep. Larson Says Get Reform Process Right Don't Rush." BenefitsPro. January 30, 2019. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.benefitspro.com/2019/01/30/with-social-security-2100-act-rep-larson-says-get-process-right-dont-rush-to-floor/?slreturn=20190309200231>.

income that they could spend on goods and services that drive economic growth, or that they could save in personal retirement accounts. Some macroeconomic models suggest that the costs of such an increase in the FICA tax rate would cost the American economy upwards of 277,000 jobs per year, reduce disposable income by \$302 per family per year, and reduce personal savings by \$46.9 billion per year.⁹ Similarly, removal of the maximum taxable earnings cap for wages exceeding \$400,000 threatens to penalize career success and fundamentally alter the nature of the Social Security program. Although this measure would increase government revenue by upwards of \$1 trillion over the next ten years, it would transform Social Security into a government redistribution program in which high-income earners would subsidize the retirement savings of low-income earners.¹⁰ Social Security was never initially intended to serve this purpose, and changing the program in this manner would have additional negative implications for the American economy in terms of employment, personal savings, and disposable household income.¹¹

A better path forward on Social Security avoids such drastic changes to the FICA tax structure. Congress should only modestly increase the FICA tax rate and the maximum taxable earnings limit. This will serve to provide additional government revenue without running the risk of severe negative economic implications. Congress should accompany these modest tax changes with an increase in the retirement age to achieve long-term solvency for Social Security. A small

⁹ Hederman, Rea and William Beach. "The Unacceptable Costs of Raising Payroll Taxes to 'Save' Social Security." The Heritage Foundation. January 13, 2005. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.heritage.org/social-security/report/the-unacceptable-costs-raising-payroll-taxes-save-social-security>.

¹⁰ Olson, John. "Payroll Taxes: The Good, the Bad, and the Solutions." The Tax Foundation. August 2, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://taxfoundation.org/payroll-taxes-good-bad-and-solutions/>.

¹¹ Wilson, Mark. "Removing Social Security's Tax Cap on Wages Would Do More Good than Harm." The Heritage Foundation. October 17, 2001. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.heritage.org/social-security/report/removing-social-securitys-tax-cap-wages-would-do-more-harm-good>.

increase in the retirement age would reduce the length of time that Social Security must payout benefits for individuals and (as a result) reduce the cost of the program. American life expectancy has increased significantly since Congress last raised the retirement age in 1983. Since Americans now live longer, it makes sense to raise the retirement age to accommodate the increased length of retirement that results from higher life expectancy. A plan enacting these three reform measures could achieve permanent solvency for the program with gradual increases of the FICA tax to 13%, the retirement age to 69 years old, and the maximum taxable earnings limit to \$195,000.¹²

In conclusion, Social Security has long played an essential role in providing financial security for millions of retired Americans. However, the social insurance program faces a number of structural issues that threaten its ability to payout full benefits to retirees beginning in 2034. It is critical that Congress takes immediate action to reform both Social Security's funding and benefit structures. By slightly increasing the FICA tax, slightly raising the maximum taxable earnings cap, and slightly increasing the retirement age, Congress could provide a bipartisan legislative fix to save a critical government program.

¹² Gross, Stephen. "Social Security Actuarial Analysis." The Bipartisan Policy Center. June 9, 2016. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SSA-Analysis.pdf>.

Climate Justice, Human Rights, and Lexical Priority

By Austin Beaudoin

The global process of adapting to the realities of climate change ostensibly demands a coherent notion of climate justice, the ethical considerations needed to evaluate the efficacy of climate policies, affording protections and assigning duties accordingly¹³. For leaders and policymakers to do so with respect to the global impact of climate change, a coherent theoretical notion of climate justice becomes crucial. Thomas Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* seems an ideal place to start, particularly due to its ability to balance the conflictual notions of liberty and equality. While Rawls's theory does indeed provide a useful understanding of the nature of power, social institutions, and justice, it is ill-suited to adjudicate disputes in the context of climate change. In order to meaningfully engage the most vulnerable and ensure their rights are protected, a human rights approach to climate justice is crucial for the equitable distribution of resources and development of new legal norms and institutions. The notion of lexical priority, coupled with a pragmatic theory of human rights, serves as an applicable theory of climate justice while avoiding non-historical and untenable Rawlsian notions of political power.

The human rights tradition has been often criticized for its idealism, and incompatibility within existing political institutions¹⁴. Simon Caney developed a theory of human rights in the

¹³ The Mary Robinson Foundation, *Principles of Climate Justice*. 2019. <https://www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/>

¹⁴ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Climate Change and Human Rights*, 2008. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/Submissions/136_report.pdf

interest of circumventing these challenges, specifically through the emphasis of negative rights, understood as inalienable freedoms that simply require others to “abstain from certain actions”¹⁵. Caney identifies the basic human rights to life, health, and subsistence as clearly violated by climate change and those that contribute to its exacerbation, for example through the increased frequency of natural disasters and the spread of disease as temperatures continue to rise globally. By focusing on “minimum moral thresholds”¹⁶ instead of positive rights that necessitate considerable political action, such a theory of human rights sheds light on the insidious linkages between climate change and global systems of production and governance. Crucially, the Rawlsian concept of lexical priority is applied to human rights and climate justice. Caney argues “...human rights generally take priority over moral values...if there is a clash between not violating human rights on the one hand and promoting welfare on the other, then the former should take priority”¹⁷. An applied theory of human rights can in this way become an invaluable framework through which climate disputes are resolved, and provides a foundation for climate justice policies to be developed on the basis of rights-bearers and corresponding duty-bearers, tasked with avoiding the violation of basic human rights¹⁸.

Lexical priority is a product of Thomas Rawls’s theory of justice, later updated and in his work *Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical*. His conception of justice as fairness is derived from the principles of liberty and difference, intended as a methodology for liberal

¹⁵ Simon Caney, *Climate Change, Human Rights, and Moral Thresholds* (Climate Ethics, ed. Gardener et. al, Oxford University, 2010), pp. 164-177.

¹⁶Ibid, 165.

¹⁷Ibid, 165.

¹⁸ United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, Human Rights and Climate Change Overview, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HRAndClimateChange/Pages/HRClimiteChangeIndex.aspx>

society “...as a system of fair social cooperation between free and equal persons”¹⁹. The liberty principle ensures that basic rights and liberties are afforded to all, while the difference principle attaches two qualifiers to social inequalities; namely, that the source of these inequalities must be attached to non-aristocratic positions in society, and that the social distribution of goods must benefit the least advantaged in society²⁰. In instances of conflict between these two principles, Rawls argues that the liberty principle must reign supreme, as it is unjust to deprive those of their fairly acquired resources on the basis of social need, thereby proposing a liberal conception of justice prioritizing negative liberty over positive action. The principles find their justification in the thought experiment known as the ‘veil of ignorance’, where Rawls essentially asks the question, ‘If you had to structure a society where you don’t know the social position you will occupy, what rules would you choose?’. Maintaining that his two principles (governed by lexical priority) promote a society built on an objective notion of justice coupled with a subjective pursuit of ‘the good’, Rawls argues for social cooperation on the basis of justice as fairness while allowing individuals to pursue their own rational advantage²¹.

The methodological use of this ‘veil of ignorance’ has been criticized in its ignorance of historical legacy in developing these principles of justice. By relying on a thought experiment that removes personal identity from the political calculus of determining which principles should govern society’s institutions, the theory is at risk of disregarding the dehumanizing legacies of colonialism and racism. As a result, it has been defined as an applied moral theory, and non-

¹⁹ Thomas Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical* (Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 14, No.3, 1985, Princeton University Press, pp. 223-251).

²⁰ Ibid, 228.

²¹Ibid, 228.

political in nature²². Since the norms and institutions that govern society were produced with these forces at work, no political theory can simply be separated from their influence. Rawls responded to such a critique by arguing that his theory of justice is in fact political, in that it regulates power on a (sophisticated) Hobbesian basis, employing principles of justice and the concept of overlapping consensus to regulate self-interest and promote social cooperation²³. Although both sides of the debate can be reasonably defended, a Hobbesian notion of political relations is simply incapable of providing the foundation for designing institutions governed by principles of climate justice.

Recent literature on climate justice makes apparent the dangers of promoting solutions to climate change on this basis. Titled *Climate Leviathan*, its authors couple classic tenets of Marxism with contemporary empirical data and scholarship to develop a disturbing narrative of the future of “capitalist social relations”²⁴. Without a fundamental re-examination of how we approach climate mitigation and adaptation, the authors argue climate reforms will occur to the extent that they allow “...capitalist elites to stabilize their position amidst planetary crises”²⁵. Such a grim outlook is based on the view that climate change will disrupt political relations to the extent that the modern nation-state will eventually become obsolete, producing a kind of “planetary sovereignty” in its wake. Its radical prescriptions for political recourse notwithstanding, such a view works to demonstrate the dangers of relying on traditional liberal

²² Lewis Gordon, *When Justice is not Enough: Towards the Decolonization of Normative Life*, (Chapter 2, Rowman and Littlefield International, ed. By Bragato and Gordon, 2017), 31-48.

²³ Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical*, 275.

²⁴ Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann, *Climate Leviathan* (Verso Books, 2018).
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3687-climate-justice-and-the-emergence-of-planetary-sovereignty>.

²⁵ Ibid, *Climate Leviathan*.

concepts in the pursuit of climate justice. A ‘Climate Leviathan’, composed of global elites wielding their influence to sustain social stability and existing economic systems of production, stems from Hobbesian justifications of political relations. Without primarily considering the impact of climate policy on human rights, climate change will exacerbate current socioeconomic inequality.

Despite the difficulties of applying human rights to existing political and legal institutions, the necessity of doing so becomes clear when considering the future of climate justice initiatives. A radical shift in the way we consume, govern, and distribute critical resources is of paramount importance, and the lives impacted by emergent climate policies should be the focal point of this transition. The human rights tradition is able to take a ‘bottom-up’ approach to climate justice, focusing on the avoidance of basic human rights violations. As reported by the International Bar Association, “...international human rights law can provide redress for *individuals or communities* who have suffered a particular environmental harm that can be linked to a breach of a protected right”²⁶. While its potential is clear, current human rights law chiefly concerns “...the responsibilities of States towards individuals within their own territory or under their effective control”²⁷. In the face of such entrenched challenges to its meaningful implementation, the report additionally suggests class actions lawsuits, efforts to hold elected officials accountable, and organized political action aimed at the largest global emitters.

Integrating human rights principles into existing policies and legal norms may be a gradual process, yet recent efforts by concerned citizens and groups have illustrated the capacity

²⁶ International Bar Association, *Climate Change Justice and Human Rights Task Force Report* (British Library Catalogue in Publication Data, 2014), 61-94).

²⁷Ibid, 68.

of non-institutional climate justice initiatives to combat unethical business practices. Recent efforts to hold Royal Dutch Shell PLC (commonly known as Shell) accountable for its significant contributions to climate change offer a glimpse into evolving strategies of climate justice. Filed by Friends of the Earth Netherlands on behalf of various groups and thousands of private citizens, the suit compels Shell to meaningfully address the knowing role the corporation has played in climate change²⁸. Identifying the direct link between fossil fuel emissions produced by the company with deliberate efforts to hinder the development of climate change regulations, among the justifications for the lawsuit is a direct appeal to human rights. Citing U.N. treaties, for instance the U.N. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Shell is accused of neglecting its commitments while violating the human rights to “life, health, and basic needs”²⁹. Although it is one of many legal arguments aimed at forcing the company to drastically reduce its annual CO2 emissions, relying on human rights treaties and their willful violation is an innovative approach to climate justice. Identifying the rights of private entities to pursue profits within legal parameters alongside the obligations of corporations to avoid the direct violation of basic human rights offers a glimpse into what could be the future of climate justice initiatives.

Mass protests organized in response to Shell’s harmful business practices, coupled with legal challenges to their business model, offers a tangible approach to realizing climate justice³⁰. Both efforts imply a notion of lexical priority concerning the rights of individuals and groups to

²⁸ Center for International Environmental Law, “Historic Climate Lawsuit Against Shell Filed in The Netherlands”, 2019. <https://www.ciel.org/news/historic-climate-case-against-shell-filed-in-the-netherlands/>

²⁹ Kijken, Anders, and Kiezen, Anders, “The Summons of the Climate Case Against Shell”, *Milieudefensie*, <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/english-summary-of-legal-summons.pdf>.

³⁰ Cannon, Matthew, “Extinction Rebellion: Climate Protesters Block Roads”, *BBC News*, (April 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-47935416>.

be protected from the violation of their basic rights. In order for human rights principles to be further incorporated into institutions tasked with protecting groups exposed to the dangers of climate change, however, an explicit appeal to human rights considerations as superseding the priorities of private enterprise is imperative. Lexical priority can provide the basis for legal and political redress in the event of the willful violation of the basic rights to life, health, and subsistence, establishing basic protections for all in the process.

Working in Harmony: The European Union is in Need of Restructure

By Kylee Dostie

Financial crime has become a pressing issue across the world, ranging from money laundering scandals to terrorism financing. It has been estimated that “financial crime is so widespread that as much as 10 percent of the global GDP is estimated to be laundered funds”³¹, which begs the question of how financial institutions around the world handle such a pervasive issue. This ‘dirty’ money is usually hidden in plain sight, through either ordinary banking or shell companies, which are companies that only exist on paper, and possess no office or employees. In response to these numbers and the ever-growing threat of financial crime, the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence was implemented in the United States to coordinate the efforts suggested by the Financial Action Task Force, which is an international policy-making and standard-setting body dedicated to combating money laundering and terrorist financing. Some of these recommendations include criminalizing any terrorist group financing and requiring financial institutions to report any suspicious activity in an effort to track down these groups’ funding sources. However, as previously mentioned, the money is often hidden in plain sight and has gone unchecked by many national and international financial institutions. Although the procedural framework is offered, it does not mean that adequate precautionary steps are being taken to prevent such a crime from occurring right under our collective noses.

Recently, it has been revealed that U.S. authorities have discovered a massive money laundering scheme that connects to the former Soviet Union. The scale is hard to estimate, but

³¹ Eben Kaplan, "Tracking Down Terrorist Financing," Council on Foreign Relations, April 4, 2006. . . <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/tracking-down-terrorist-financing#chapter-title-0-2>.

the number may be up to “\$1 trillion moved out of Russia over the last 25 years”.³² This flow of money laundering dates back to the Baltic states and the chaotic fall of the former Soviet Union as it transitioned to capitalism. These cash flows are routed through offshore zones, making it difficult to distinguish between money that has been used for legitimate business and funds stemming from criminal activity. It is known that portions of this dirty money helps to sustain the Kremlin’s patronage system, and some of the money laundered has found its way into prominent international banks, such as the Danske Bank in Denmark and the Nordea Bank in Finland.³³

With some of the money being traced back to Baltic states, blame was initially assigned to former Russian-bloc states, such as Latvia. Latvian banks are no strangers to money laundering scandals since the currency conversion to Euros in 2014. The governor of Latvian banks, Ilmārs Rimšēvičs, was imprisoned in February 2018 for soliciting bribes, but the government argues that “the accusations against Rimšēvičs could be part of a mysterious ‘disinformation campaign’”.³⁴ Latvia is often criticized by the EU when any scandals occur, and are usually the first one to get accused when any financial criminal activity occurs within the Eurozone. However, in this case of money laundering, Nordic banks have predominantly become the financial hubs for these Russian criminals through their Baltic units. The Nordea bank itself is connected to potentially 700 million euros (\$793 million US dollars) in ‘dirty money’, with

³² White, Gregory. "How Europe’s Banks Wound Up Laundering Russia’s Money." Bloomberg.com. March 5, 2019. . <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-05/how-europe-s-banks-wound-up-laundering-russia-s-money-quicktake>.

³³ "The European Union Must Change Its Supervisory Architecture to Fight Money Laundering." PIIE. February 25, 2019. <https://piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/european-union-must-change-its-supervisory-architecture-fight>.

³⁴ "Europe's Central Bank Unable to Stop Russian Money Laundering." A2 Global Risk. April 10, 2018

some of it being connected to the death of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky. Magnitsky was Russia's largest foreign portfolio investor and was the one to report the largest fraud in modern Russian history connecting back to Russian government officials. He was then jailed and tortured before he died less than a year after being taken into custody.³⁵

While understanding that Latvia has endured financial scandals in the past, assigning the state inordinate amounts of blame suggests cultural bias within the European Union. Much of this scandal concerns Nordic banks compared to their Latvian counterparts. Former Soviet states such as Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Estonia are viewed as the 'eastern bloc' of the European Union, and were recently incorporated as of 2004-2007. These countries notably had to make the shift from authoritarian regimes to democracy, and required financial assistance from the Union in order to make this shift, leading to political discord amongst many member states. It has caused a rift within the European Union, and makes it difficult for states to cooperate on many issues, due to the distrust and bias between the Western and Eastern blocs.

The European Central Bank has the power to audit bank officials and send delegates to banks all across the Eurozone, but the head of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi, claims is that resources are scarce and their officials simply are not equipped to tackle the massive issue of money laundering. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has cited concern over the ECBs limitations, and stated she does not believe they can properly oversee the approximately 5,500 financial institutions that are located in the Eurozone.³⁶ The bank acts more as an instrument for

³⁵ "Sergei Magnitsky, Russia." Physicians for Human Rights. . <https://phr.org/sergei-magnitsky-russia/#top>.

³⁶ "Europe's Central Bank Unable to Stop Russian Money Laundering." A2 Global Risk. April 10, 20189

financial stability rather than the authority on compliance issues, and leaves much to the individual member states of the EU.

The root to this problem is the fact that there is no adequate centralized force to protect against money laundering, leaving it up to the individual states that vary greatly in their capacity to police the issue. Without a cohesive plan of action and a set of policies to follow, countries can either go too hard or too soft on these issues, producing a lack of harmony between the states and their punishments. The Council of the European Union has laid out framework that attempts to standardize the states on the criminal penalties of money laundering³⁷, but the issue remains. The European Union needs to pour more resources into combating the money laundering scandal if it wishes to not continuously fall victim to massive money laundering schemes, and needs to also recognize the lack of cooperation and standardization is doing irreparable damage. Fixing these issues will ostensibly require new laws and policies aimed at better organizing policing efforts.

The fact that U.S. authorities were the ones to discover this massive scandal, rather than the E.U. doing so internally, should be taken as a wake-up call. European Central Bank officials and commissioners now have to explain just how this happened, and not much has been said yet. The President of the ECB, Mario Draghi, has not addressed this pressing issue and claims not to possess the “investigative powers to uncover such deficiencies”.³⁸ Strong leadership is lacking

³⁷ "Council Framework Decision 2001/500/JHA of 26 June 2001." Eclan.

³⁸ "Europe's Central Bank Unable to Stop Russian Money Laundering." A2 Global Risk. April 10, 2018. <https://www.a2globalrisk.com/analysis/europe-russia/europes-central-bank-not-stopping-russian-money-laundering/>.

within the bloc, and they are only as strong as their weakest links, demanding more cooperation between member states on financial crimes.

It is a slippery slope that presents greater dangers down the road. This information has gotten very little attention and goes to show that while there is a façade of legal framework to protect against terrorism financing, current policies and institutional safeguards are inadequate. With weak institutions in place, along with the lack of cooperation and harmonization between the member states, the EU cannot properly fight and defend against money laundering. This is going to severely affect their foreign policy down the road, and hopefully lead to meaningful discussion about how one of the largest government blocs in the world, made up of twenty-eight nations, cannot self-regulate as well as one could hope.³⁹

³⁹ "Council Framework Decision 2001/500/JHA of 26 June 2001." Eclan. Accessed April 12, 2019. <http://eclan.eu/en/eu-legislatory/council-framework-decision-2001-500-jha-of-26-june-2001-on-money-laundering-the-identification-tracing-freezing-seizing-and-confiscation-of-instrumentalities-and-the-proceeds-of-crime>.

Implications of Gendered Thinking in Sex Crimes

By Xavier Duncan

Key to any examination of interpersonal or intergroup relations is the understanding that power is dynamic. This is salient to the recognition that individuals and groups are not determined to some unchangeable status, and that status itself has positive and negative consequences. For example, many in the United States consider men to invariably be physically strong, assertive, and aggressive while also considering women to be physically weak, timid, and meek. Although female and male feminists have been arguing against gendered virtues for over two centuries, there continues to be a particular kind of gendered thinking that is widely accepted by men and women across the political spectrum. Specifically, many maintain that women are all but incapable of committing sex crimes, with male perpetrators sometimes being denied the presumption of innocence on the basis of gendered assumptions. While existing figures do indeed suggest gendered patterns in perpetrators and victims of distinct categories of crime, widely held, gendered assumptions enable people to accept and repeat data and figures that additional research and reflection would reveal as exaggerated. Moreover, widely held beliefs about gendered behavioral patterns have led some university administrators and faculty to handle alleged sex crimes in ways, under other circumstances, they would not find acceptable. Sexual crimes committed by men and women against men and women are serious problems that occur too often, and should never be ignored. Procedures supporting victims and punishing those who commit sexual violence are clearly essential. However, we are less likely to address them effectively if we indulge in gendered thinking with implications that extend beyond the question of sex crimes.

From trying to preserve conservative gender values to advocating for a historically marginalized group, those who ascribe traits, such as aggression and weakness, exclusively to men or women, lack the firm logical foundation to base policy solutions, or social values, off of. The essential question to ask, then, is: “Are behavioral characteristics gendered?” This question is quite simple to address because it is absurd on its face. For a characteristic to be gendered is for a characteristic to be exclusive. That is to say, if aggression is a male characteristic, then women are incapable of aggression. However, there are countless examples of individual women committing the most extreme manifestations of aggression, such as murder. Many would object to this definition of gendered characteristics as too narrow; that a characteristic can be considered gendered because of its correlation *with* men or women, not its exclusivity *to* men or women. This definition is worrisome because it is unknown how much these characteristics are influenced by gender, and how much is influenced by socialization. If a society encourages its men to be aggressive, and discourages women, it can become unclear how much the prevalence of aggression in men, compared to women, is due to their sex rather than the cultural norms they were socialized to embody. Expressions of aggression, similarly, can differ because of socialization. Murder is an overt physical expression of aggression. In a society that discourages aggression in women, women may be more likely to express their aggression in more covert ways, such as emotional abuse and passive-aggression.

Given the shoddy foundation of this narrative, each further extrapolation is illogical. Moreover, each crime is unique as it brings with it distinct circumstances and fact patterns. In many cases, people simply repeat trends, figures, and narratives they have heard throughout their lives that seem logically consistent enough with their thinking so as not to provoke cognitive dissonance. In many other cases, the narrative of assumed female victimhood and male

perpetration is based on inductive reasoning. Nevertheless, this reasoning is inherently flawed within the context of crime. When inductive reasoning is applied to discussions of crime and social attitudes about victimization, the result is a society wherein women are perceived as potential victims in need of society's protection, and wherein men are perceived as potential perpetrators in need of society's condemnation.

Perhaps one of the most substantial manifestations of the narrative of female victimization and male perpetration, relevant to contemporary issues, is rooted in sexual crimes. With the explosive rise of the 'Me Too' movement, the handling of rape and sexual assault allegations on university campuses, and the denigration of those crimes committed by female perpetrators against male victims, public discussions of sexual crimes often assume female victimhood, which, in some cases, can have negative consequences. For example, early last year actor Aziz Ansari was accused of sexual assault and possible rape by an anonymous woman going by the name Grace. Her accusations were broadcasted on mainstream media outlets. Questions arose as to the credibility of Grace's claims, but only after Ansari's character and career were devastated. Only toward the end of 2018 had Ansari made his return to work on his comedy show tour. The assumption of Grace's victimhood and Ansari's perpetration has had lasting effects on Ansari. However, Ansari's experience is not a singular outlier. False accusations of sexual assault and rape by women against men, and particularly against men of color, are not unusual historically. From mainstream examples such as the Duke Lacrosse Team case, the Rolling Stones article on the alleged rape of "Jackie" at the University of Virginia, to historical examples such as the murder of Emmett Till, the victimhood of women, and particularly white women, is often assumed before it is factually supported.

Many of these false accusations garner support and are generally believed by the public because of the narratives surrounding the prevalence of sexual assault and rape. For example, it is often purported that one in five women will be raped or sexually assaulted in her first four years at a university in the United States. However, there are reasons to be suspicious of this claim. Looking at the data collection of the Association of American Universities (AAU), we can examine that the primary, and most recent, study on campus rape and sexual assault has flawed methods. The survey pool was self-selecting, and respondents were not representative of the overall university population.⁴⁰ The authors of the study noted that female respondents and victims of sexual misconduct were more likely to complete the online survey than male respondents and those who were not victims of sexual misconduct. The population was neither randomly, nor systematically sampled, so any data from this pool of respondents will have a higher degree of sampling error. Moreover, the response rate of the most cited study on university rape and sexual assault is so low that the authors of the study themselves acknowledged “This implies that the survey estimates related to victimization and selected attitude items may be biased upwards”.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this statistic is repeated so often that those who challenge it are either dismissed as ignorant or accused of challenging the victims of sexual assault and rape. In truth, false accusations and inadequate data do a disservice to the victims of sexual assault and rape by diverting attention and resources away from solutions and efforts to end sexual violence, and toward sensational narratives.

⁴⁰ Cantor, David, Bonnie Fisher, and Susan Chibnali. "Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct." (n.d.): n. Pag. vi-vii Westat, 20 Oct. 2017. Web. 10 Feb. 2019

⁴¹ Ibid.

The most reliable data on campus sexual assault and rape come from the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) databases and victimization surveys because their samples are representative, and the response rate of their 2017 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) is an incredibly high, at 74%.⁴² According to FBI, NCVS, and BJS figures approximately 6.1 out of every 1,000 women enrolled in postsecondary education, ages 18-24, experience rape or sexual assault, either attempted or completed.⁴³ This is not to diminish the severity of these crimes, but rather to be accurate about its prevalence so as to not contribute to sensational narratives and give up the importance of due process in the mission to punish these horrendous crimes.

Many accusations of sexual assault, misconduct, and rape are reviewed, investigated, and decided by the now common university tribunals. These tribunals are not bound to the standards of due process enshrined in the criminal justice system, and are often composed of university faculty. Some argue that their proceedings are often biased against the accused as many tribunals do not allow legal defense, cross examination or even the questioning of evidence, and decisions by the board are effectively unappealable within the university system.⁴⁴ Faculty, exposed to the same gendered narratives and questionable statistics as the rest of society, are expected to adjudicate truth and falsity when they could feel guilt over the history of victim shaming, or the risk of not bringing an alleged perpetrator to justice. Criminal activity anywhere requires a

⁴² "Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey Resource Guide". *National Crime Victimization Survey and the Bureau of Justice Statistics*, Dec. 2018. Web. 13 Feb 2019

⁴³ "Rape and Sexual Assault Victimization Among College Age Females". *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, Dec. 2014. Web. 14 Feb 2019

⁴⁴ Villasenor, John. "Is a Higher Standard Needed for Campus Sexual Assault Cases?" *The New York Times*, The New York Times Company. 4 Jan. 2017. Web. 12 Apr. 2019

response by our civil institutions, yet the procedures implemented by universities offer less protection to both the accused and the accuser. This is not to say that universities can do absolutely nothing to address sexual crimes on campus. They absolutely should. Universities can devote resources toward rape education or supporting victims on campus. However, the power of adjudication in criminal matters, or in civil matters with criminal stakes, should give some weight to law enforcement and the courts.

Sexual crimes are serious problems regardless of where they happen. When they do, justice should be pursued for anyone victimized by a criminal. Victimization does not always follow the neat gendered narrative of female victimization and male perpetration. In fact, the studies and surveys that are manifestations of this narrative, and that produced the one in five statistic, were non-representative, self-selecting surveys riddled with a statistical errors and issues that even the study authors admitted. Just as behaviors are not gendered, victimhood is not gendered either. Women and men can be, and are, victims of sexual crimes. Women and men, can be, and are, perpetrators of sexual crimes. While most reject gendered virtues, believing that people should be free to be who they want, they subscribe to these virtues in their thinking about sexual crimes. This allows them simultaneously to accept misleading figures and participate in the handling of cases in a manner they would otherwise recognize as wrong. Gendered narratives and exaggeration shed little light, and produce *no* solutions. Instead, they detract from a very real problem that impacts thousands of people every year in the United States, corrode the most important aspects of the criminal justice system, and further entrench society in the prison of gender.

Sexual Violence and Deviant Femininity: The Bandit Queen

By Mahika Jhangiani

Casteism and sexism, dating back centuries, are two of the greatest evils which plague Indian society to this very day. Wealthy, upper caste men dominate much of India's historical narrative, and among the few women that are recognized, many of them also hail from distinguished families. For example, out of the 389 members of the constituent assembly that adopted the Constitution of India, fifteen of them were women. Of those fifteen women, only one was from a suppressed class, one was Muslim, and another Catholic.⁴⁵ While there has been a small group of Indian women who have been able to emerge as leaders, they have almost all been elite members of the same circles as the men who have historically run this country, an example being Indira Gandhi, who came from a family of politicians. The make-up of the constituent assembly exemplifies the lack of representation for women and minorities in India, which is why the remarkable story of Phoolan Devi is one that really stands out. Phoolan Devi was born into poverty in rural Uttar Pradesh in 1963 and despite horrendous circumstances, prevailed. One of the reasons Phoolan Devi's story garnered so much attention was because her circumstances were not unique in India but actually the reality for many, subject to either caste or gender discrimination. Phoolan Devi's life suggests that a woman, from a low-caste community—more characteristic of India's majority— could exercise political power on the national stage. The attention she received has not been meant to idolize her life as a criminal but rather to share the story of a woman who despite “having gone through all that she did still had

⁴⁵ Srivastava, Yoshita (2018, January 26). *Feminism India*. Retrieved from <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/01/26/15-women-draft-indian-constitution/>

the courage to come out and start again.”⁴⁶ Phoolan Devi’s life represents the paradigm that a woman can make her own path in India, but by living life on her terms and advancing the interests of her community she required a different conception of power.

Phoolan Devi was born in 1963 into Mallah (boatmen) community. She was the youngest of three siblings, however she and her sister were the only ones to make it to adulthood. As a girl raised in a poverty-stricken family, she and her sister were often seen as a burden, and neither of them received a formal education. Arrangements such as the recently criminalized tradition of dowry, amongst others, make female children more expensive to raise than boys, leading to alarming rates of female infanticide. Similar to many young girls born in poor regions, Phoolan Devi was born a liability. Consequently, she was barred from the kinds of uplifting opportunities—like education—that might have enabled her independence. The confluence of these factors led her family to arrange her marriage at the age of eleven to a man almost three times her age, who repeatedly raped and abused her. In spite of her resistance, multiple attempts to escape, and after several family conflicts leading to police intervention, she was sent back home only to be abandoned by her husband’s family. Upon returning home, however, her village shunned her for the failed marriage. When she was raped and abused, no one came to her aid, instead blaming her for defending herself when no one else would. Without a political-legal system protecting her, already stripped of her innocence and shunned by many for being a “troublemaker,” Phoolan was forced to turn to banditry to fulfill her dignity.

⁴⁶ Snyder, Michael (2017, November 13). *Roads and Kingdoms*. Retrieved from <https://roadsandkingdoms.com/2017/indias-bandit-queen/>

Similar to gendered social, political, and legal systems within countries around the world, India has repeatedly shown its failure to bring justice to abused women. In Phoolan's case, she was forced to seek justice for herself and others on her own. She did so by joining those also outside the protection of the legal system—outlaws. The only way for her to live with bodily integrity was to break norms and rules. During her time in the gang, Phoolan Devi is said to have gone back to her husband's village, stabbing him in front of the whole village—leaving a message that men who married and abused young girls would share a similar fate.⁴⁷ The aim was to protect herself and women's' bodily integrity and sexual vulnerability by imposing punishments where the justice system and laws could not. Common across the world, male-dominated justice systems often times fail to prioritize and protect women's rights. Having experienced sexual violence in a community with a gendered justice system, Phoolan turned to a life of crime to resist gendered power and fight for her own justice and the justice other women deserved. Another instance when Phoolan Devi had to take matter into her own hand is what is famously known as the Behmai Massacre. One of the gang leaders, Babu Gujjar, attempted to rape Phoolan. Vikram Mallah, another low caste boatman, responded by killing him and becoming the head of the gang.⁴⁸ Angered by the fact that their leader had been murdered and replaced by a low-caste boatman, two upper-caste Rajputs took revenge by murdering Vikram. Phoolan was kidnapped and locked away in a room in Behmai, the Rajput village, where she was raped and abused for many days. When she finally managed to escape, she joined a new gang and convinced them to help her get revenge.⁴⁹ On February 14th, 1981, she led her gang back to

⁴⁷ The Famous People. Retrieved from <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/phoolan-devi-8422.php>

⁴⁸ The Famous People. Retrieved from <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/phoolan-devi-8422.php>

⁴⁹ Snyder. Roads and Kingdoms. Web

Behmai, where she ordered her men to shoot the men who had abused her; twenty-two of whom died.⁵⁰ It is said that in the years following the Behmai massacre, most of which she spent on the run from the police, she also acted as a ‘Robin Hood’ by stealing from the rich and redistributing among the poor.⁵¹ Once again, in the absence of a fair justice system, Phoolan was forced to protect herself. As a result of her extra-judicial actions, her community christened her “Devi”, meaning goddess, in Hindi.

Two years later, Phoolan Devi had “a price of \$10,400 on her head, and a score of murders and more than thirty cases of kidnapping and banditry in her name.”⁵² After two years of hiding, Phoolan Devi surrendered herself to the authorities. In *India’s Bandit Queen*, journalist Mary Anne Weaver describes Devi’s conditions of surrender. The conditions included that her gang members not be hung, that they be released from prison after eight years, that the surrender and trials would only happen in Madhya Pradesh rather than her home state Uttar Pradesh, that land which was stolen by her cousin be returned to her father, that her brother be given a government job, and lastly that her family be resettled in Madhya Pradesh. Phoolan Devi, even at the brink of persecution, wasn’t thinking about her self-interest. On the day of the surrender, she came with her family and members of her gang, a .315 Mauser hanging from her shoulder, and a red bandanna tied around her head. A devotee of Ma Durga, the Goddess of Shakti (power and strength), Phoolan Devi requested a portrait of the Goddess and Gandhi be at her surrender as well. She bowed to portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and Goddess Durga before turning toward a

⁵⁰ Snyder. Roads and Kingdoms. Web

⁵¹ Waghule. Feminism India. Web.

⁵² Weaver, Mary Anne (1996, November). *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/11/indias-bandit-queen/304890/>

huge crowd of journalists and policeman and raising her rifle above her head. The nature of Phoolan Devi's leadership can be seen through her demands; she stood up for others, whether it be the fate of child brides, those living in poverty, the family who disowned her, and of course her gang. Phoolan Devi was able to leverage her surrender in a politically astute way that translated into great public respect and esteem for her among others overlooked by political institutions. Weaver says "there was little sense in the crowd that day that a legend had come to an end; indeed, there was the feeling that a new one was about to begin."⁵³

After her release from jail, Phoolan Devi began her political career. She won the Lok Sabha (house of the people) election as a member of the Samajwadi (socialist) Party and fought for securing the rights of women and the poor. She didn't only learn from and engage with resources of bandits and her time in the gang but, in her ability to do the unprecedented, she was also seen as divine. Her ability to command power outside the typical institutions by joining a gang and taking on the persona of Goddess Durga demonstrates the necessity of those in oppressed groups to fundamentally remake the system. Her life in the public eye eventually led to her assassination by a Behmai villager who sought revenge. Her story offers hope to many women and low-caste communities. Despite the inhumane circumstances she endured before even becoming a teenager, she prevailed. She turned those moments of powerlessness into strength and fought not only for her redemption but others too. Despite society's attempt to show her 'her place' in the world as a woman from a poor low-caste family, she demanded respect and the rights she deserved as a human being. Even after having committed multiple heinous crimes, Phoolan Devi went on to impact systemic change by joining Parliament. Phoolan Devi's story is

⁵³ Weaver. The Atlantic. Web.

an example of how those who are made weak and seen as liabilities by socio-political systems must break laws to try and live with dignity.

Vaccination Implications: When Choice Clashes with Norms

By Marianna Kalander

The power of choice has been a key pillar in the foundation of America's democracy. Society originated and progressed through the allowance and practice of personal choice. However, in recent times, the idea of personal choice has come into clash with societal preferences. Since its creation, it seems, vaccines have been an unspoken norm. Society preferred that every student get vaccinations before starting school, for example. Now, people have taken the initiative to decide to not vaccinate their kids, for reasons ranging from personal preference to skepticism about vaccine ingredients. On the flip side, there are ardent supporters of vaccines due to their major health benefits individually and collectively for the betterment of the whole country. One can see that there are sides to both arguments, thus creating a fine line between making a choice that impacts yourself, and a choice that could impact everyone.

An obvious factor in the support of vaccinations is that they save lives. The 19th and 20th century, especially, saw many people die from diseases preventable by vaccines, such as measles and polio. As required vaccinations in the U.S. became more administered during the mid-20th century, the rates in death by these diseases significantly dropped. For example, in the 20th century, the baseline amount of cases for measles was 503,282. By 2006, after immunizations became more prevalent, the amount dropped by 99.9% to 55 cases⁵⁴. The numbers are clear,

⁵⁴ "Immunize For Good | Respect the Facts. Protect Your Child. Immunize for Good." *Benefits vs. Risks | Immunize for Good*, Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition, 2019, immunizeforgood.com/fact-or-fiction/benefits-vs.-risks.

distinct support that there is actual improvement in the health of society with the use of vaccines. From there, one can argue, vaccinations keep not only individuals safe from disease but other people as well. Getting vaccinated can help keep those safe who are too young to get vaccinated, pregnant women, and elderly people. Thus, many pro-vaccination people preach that individuals not getting vaccinated can greatly impact the health of society as a whole. Another argument for pro-vaccination is that vaccines are actually very safe. Many that chose not to vaccinate themselves and/or their children believe that the ingredients in the vaccinations are harmful. However, studies show that “vaccines are only given to children after a long and careful review by scientists, doctors, and healthcare professionals”⁵⁵. Powerful government agencies such as the CDC and FDA often review the creation and administration of different vaccines to ensure their safety. Possible negative side effects of vaccines are shown to be extremely rare as well as “the overall incidence rate of severe allergic reaction to vaccines is usually placed around one case for every one or two million injections”⁵⁶. Therefore, children are more likely to be harmed by an unknown food allergy than a vaccine. The allergic reactions from vaccines that do occur are so miniscule in occurrence that it is hard for doctors and lawmakers to support the allowance of choice in vaccinations. Yet, this shows the growing skepticism of not only vaccines, but government involvement as well.

⁵⁵ “Partners | Childhood Immunization Drop-in Article | 5 Reasons to Vaccinate Your Child | CDC.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, 6 Jan. 2017, www.cdc.gov/vaccines/partners/childhood/matte-articles-5-reasons.html.

⁵⁶ “Vaccine Myths Debunked.” *PublicHealth.org*, PublicHealth.org, www.publichealth.org/public-awareness/understanding-vaccines/vaccine-myths-debunked/.

Although it is a societal norm to get vaccinated, there are alternative ways to get out of receiving them, such as through exemptions. This is considered the middle ground between pro and anti-vaxxers, as exemptions are thought to be allowed for legitimate reasons. One type of exemption is a medical exemption, such as those who are medically proven to be allergic to a component in a vaccine. “All 50 states allow children to be exempted from vaccination requirements for medical reasons”⁵⁷ thus not specifically forcing people to get vaccines that physically cannot get them. As stated before, however, allergies to vaccines or its ingredients are rare, but having the exemption still available is attractive to those rare people. Another allowed exemption is for religious reasons. 48 states allow religious vaccine exemptions to those whose religious group has genuine objection to vaccinations⁵⁸. One cannot deny that the states are acting democratic in letting people express and practice their First Amendment right to freedom of religion, but many feel the possible risks of allowing those to not get vaccinated outweigh this benefit.

Although there are exemptions, many argue that exemptions are hard to get granted. Because the states have the power of evaluating the administration of vaccines, and thus have power over the approval of exemptions, restrictions for receiving exemptions can vary. For example, states can choose to not grant religious exemption, and thus exempt one’s right to religious freedom, if the case has compelling state interest. Specifically, after the 1905 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, limiting the spread of serious

⁵⁷ “Vaccination Exemptions.” *History of Vaccines*, The College of Physicians of Philadelphia , www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/vaccination-exemptions.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

communicable diseases has been considered a compelling state interest⁵⁹. Thus, states have a say in handling religious vaccine exemptions. From there, states can require all different types of documentation to prove that the religious group that has true objection to vaccines comes from a religious standpoint, and nothing else, such as a signed affidavit from a pastor. In the end, even with proof, states could still decline a motion for a religious exemption. Thus, these people have their right of choice taken from them. Vaccine exemptions being hard to get have been a focal part of the argument for those that desire the choice of getting vaccines or not. These people feel that as citizens of a democratic government, they have a right to make medical decisions for them and their children. Thus, many argue that vaccines are yet again another way for the government to infringe on the lives of everyone.

Anti-vaxxers come from a strong point of skepticism as “an increasing number of parents question whether vaccines are as safe or effective as physicians and public health officials claim”⁶⁰. It is not to say that these people necessarily want to put their children or themselves in danger of getting a harmful disease. Rather, they are weary of what is being injected into their bodies and if the substances are actually effective and helpful. Thus, many questions the ingredients that are put in the vaccines. Similar to the argument with GMO labeling, anti-vaxxers want transparency in what ingredients are put in vaccines. Because these people are skeptical of the government agencies, and the government as a whole, proof of the FDA and CDC routinely checking the vaccines does not suffice for reasoning to vaccinate. Thus,

⁵⁹ “Vaccine Exemptions FAQs - NVIC.” *National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC)*, 2019, www.nvic.org/faqs/vaccine-exemptions.aspx.

⁶⁰ Navin, et al. “Improving Nonmedical Vaccine Exemption Policies: Three Case Studies.” *OUP Academic*, Oxford University Press, 14 Feb. 2017, academic.oup.com/phe/article/10/3/225/2993965.

often, these people go to alternative routes to ensure their kids and they are safe, such as going to medical providers that use homeoprophylaxis, which “is the use of diluted and potentized disease products, called "nosodes," to elicit an immune response”⁶¹. In contrast to vaccines, homeoprophylaxis is used with all-natural ingredients with no additives. This way, people know what is being put into their bodies while also becoming “vaccinated” against diseases.

On both sides of the argument, there are economic factors that also intersection within vaccines. Those who support vaccines argue that, basically, it is cheaper to prevent a disease outbreak than to treat one. For example, “in Colorado, the cost of treating 538 children hospitalized for vaccine-preventable diseases in one year totaled \$29.2 million”⁶². Colorado lost millions of dollars to a situation that could have been prevented if the children had simply been vaccinated. People would rather see children get simple vaccines than have their state lose millions of dollars that could be allocated elsewhere. On the contrary, however, many argue that with the United States’ already problematic healthcare system, it is not realistic to assume that every person has the equal and full opportunity to go to a medical provider and get a vaccine. For example, education systems that require all incoming students get vaccinations do not take into account how there could be people without a way of getting the vaccinations, such as not having the proper healthcare to cover the costs. Thus, the requirements and idea of “if you want to go to school, then get vaccinated” are tunnel-visioned. However, one can argue, that just because people cannot afford to get vaccines does not mean that they should not be given them. That is

⁶¹ Whatcott, Cilla. “Parents Do Have a Vaccine Alternative.” *GreenMedInfo*, 3 July 2015, www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/parents-do-have-vaccine-alternative.

⁶² “Immunize For Good | Respect the Facts. Protect Your Child. Immunize for Good.” *Benefits vs. Risks | Immunize for Good*, Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition, 2019, immunizeforgood.com/fact-or-fiction/benefits-vs.-risks.

where the argument becomes two-fold. Advocates stress that if the government wants everyone to be vaccinated, then the government should assist everyone in getting them, such as offering subsidized medical providers. Although the solution is more complicated and has more implications, it is clear to see that the administration of vaccinations isn't as simple as it seems.

The controversy of vaccinations is a clear example of the clash between personal choice and societal preferences. Those in favor of having a personal choice on whether to receive vaccinations often are skeptical of the ingredients of vaccines and the process of safety checking them. Although that cannot be generalized to every anti-vaxxer, these ideas have become more and more prevalent. Those in favor of making sure every person gets vaccinated support a platform based on the fact that vaccines are safe, save lives, and help prevent disease outbreaks that are detrimental to society's health and economy. There are policies made that work to mediate the division, such as exemptions, but these policies have their own flaws and restrictions. Thus, although easier said than done, policy needs to be made that ensures the health and safety of our overall society while also taking into account those with genuine adversity towards vaccines, like religion. Simply allowing exemptions does not seem to be the main, effective solution.

The Transformation of Student Activism Through Minority Participation

By Christian Krog

Student activism has played an integral role in the American political sphere since students from historically Black colleges led the initial charge in the civil rights movement. What began as black student activists from Nashville protesting for the right to sit at lunch counters eventually resulted in the civil rights movement, and desegregation. Similar students who faced the draft protested and organized against the Vietnam war, and through their efforts were able to significantly increase the pressure on Lyndon B. Johnson to end the war. Student activism has led to lasting and concrete change in American politics. Within the last ten years, student activism has expanded and developed, which throughout this article I will argue is a byproduct of the changing demographics of college students. The growing number of minority students in college has resulted in the reshaping, intensification, and growing efficiency of student activism campaigns.

The past 50 years has been a period of rapid development in the number of enrolled minorities in colleges across the United States. As compared to the end of the Vietnam war from 1976 to 2008, the number of enrolled black students rose to almost two and a half million, a 250% increase. In the same 32-year time frame, the college Hispanic population increased by almost 600%, as well as the Asian college population increasing by 660%.⁶³ In 1976, minority students made up only 18% of college students, which increased to 37% in 2008. Because the

⁶³ "Table 24.1. Total Number, Total Percentage Distribution, And Percent Female Of Undergraduate Fall Enrollment In Degree-Granting Institutions, By Race/Ethnicity: Selected Years, 1976-2008". 2019. Nces.Ed.Gov. Accessed March 3 2019. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/tables/table_24_1.asp.

demographic shape of the student bodies of colleges changed, so did the student activism. With respect to the black student-led movements during the civil rights movement, the additional access to institutional benefits allowed minority students to organize for their rights and to engage in political activism. While the political movements of the 1970s focused on the Vietnam war and environmentalism, the last decade of student activism has focused on dismantling institutions that disproportionately harmed minorities as highlighted through Black Lives Matter, Connecticut Students for a Dream (DREAMers, the March for our Lives (Gun Control), and the Occupy movement (income inequality).

Building upon the infrastructure of previous campus political campaigns, modern movements have refined outreach, organizing, and mobilizing their campaigns. Social media has played a major role in the rapid development of events, for example when a black Yale student by the name of Lolade Siyonbola had the police called on her for sleeping in a common room because she appeared as if she “didn’t belong”.⁶⁴ The 17-minute video Siyonbola posted on Facebook quickly received 600,000 views and resulted in an increased effort by collegiate Black Lives Matter groups around the country to unite over policing of Black students.⁶⁵ A video of a UC Davis campus security officer pepper-spraying a group of students participating in the Occupy movement became viral. The national outrage resulted in a million dollar settlement for the students, the subsequent firing of the university’s president, a discussion of the over-policing

⁶⁴ "#Blackstudentsmatter: Why Digital Activism Is A Voice For Black Students - Edsurge News". 2018. Edsurge. Accessed March 4 2019. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2018-08-23-blackstudentsmatter-why-digital-activism-is-a-voice-for-black-students>.

⁶⁵ "The White Woman Who Called The Cops On A Black Yale Student Is Waking The US To An Ugly Truth". 2018. Quartz. Accessed March 4 2019. <https://qz.com/1274833/a-yale-university-woman-called-the-cops-on-a-black-student-for-taking-a-nap-and-woke-the-us-up-to-a-racist-truth/>.

of college campuses, and most importantly, it gave attention to their political movement.⁶⁶ Due to social media, student activism campaigns have been able to capture national attention which in turn brings tremendous support to their grassroots initiatives.

The obvious end goal of student activism is to enact lasting political change. For Connecticut Students for a Dream, it was to make attending college more accessible for undocumented students. Just a year after their founding in 2010, Connecticut Students for a Dream was able to extend in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students.⁶⁷ These benefits were expanded in 2015 and then again in 2018, with the latter increase allowing undocumented students to receive financial aid.⁶⁸ For an organization that started as a group of undocumented students who didn't even have the right to vote to be able to shape a decade of policy development is a testament to the effectiveness of a well-run and just student activism campaign. Probably the most defining example of modern student activism is that of the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting survivors who turned their tragedy into Never Again MSD, also known as the organizers for March for Our Lives. The Never Again MSD movement focused on gun control beyond the school shooting that inspired their organization. The organization brought light to the many dimensions of gun violence, suicides, domestic violence, school shootings, and the disproportional violence that guns impacts on black communities.⁶⁹ Never Again MSD's

⁶⁶ Worland, Justin. April 28, 2016. Time. Accessed March 4 2019. <http://time.com/4310737/uc-davis-head-leave-pepper-spray/>.

⁶⁷ "Ct4adream | Our Story". 2019. Ct4adream. Accessed March 4 2019. <http://www.ct4adream.org/our-story>.

⁶⁸ Thomas, Jacqueline, Clarice Silber, Kathleen Megan, Kathleen Megan, Kathleen Megan, Kathleen Megan, and Mark Pazniokas. 2018. "Financial Aid For 'Dreamers' Becomes A Reality In Connecticut". The CT Mirror. Accessed March 4 2019. <https://ctmirror.org/2018/04/25/financial-aid-dreamers-becomes-reality-connecticut/>.

⁶⁹ Fowler, K. A., Dahlberg, L. L., Haileyesus, T., & Annett, J. L. (2015). Firearm injuries in the United States. Preventive medicine, 79, 5-14.

founders, especially the students David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez, were ferocious in gaining as much attention for their group as possible, and within a month, was able to bring enough national attention to influence the successfully passing of gun control legislation in Florida.⁷⁰ The same month Never Again MSD was able to organize the March for Our Lives protest in Washington DC, which has 880 simultaneous events that involved 1.2 million participants in the United States.⁷¹ This quick and effective mobilization and legislative action would never be possible in previous generations of student activism. Student activism has become a national force for rapid political change.

Some modern challenges that affect student activism revolve around institutional limits that hinder the ability to enact positive change. The foremost example of this is the rigid school schedule that limits the ability for student leaders to organize protests, conferences, or demonstrations that fall during the school week.⁷² Although it might sound counterintuitive, one of the most limiting aspects of being a student activist is, in fact, being a student and having to put one's schoolwork before their social change. In addition, many student activists come from poorer backgrounds and have to work a part-time job in order to fund their schooling. Mandatory attendance policies, in-class presentations, or lab projects all would hinder a student activist's ability to commit time and effort into progressing their campaign. Even if an activism campaign is able to reach national attention, a student leader might be required to forgo opportunities in

⁷⁰ Sweeney, Dan (March 7, 2018). "Florida House sends Stoneman Douglas gun and school bill to Gov. Scott". Sun-Sentinel. Retrieved March 8, 2018.

⁷¹ López, Germán (March 26, 2018). "It's official: March for Our Lives was one of the biggest youth protests since the Vietnam War". vox.com.

⁷² Whitford, Emma. "Student Activists' Biggest Obstacle Often Is The Rhythms Of College Activism Itself". 2019. Insidehighered.Com. Accessed April 13 2019. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/03/student-activists-biggest-obstacle-often-rhythms-college-activism-itself>.

order to attend class. Student activists find themselves both empowered and held back by their enrollment in higher education and this odd limitation prevents student activists from achieving their full potential.

It is important to understand the role of student activism when one studies the contemporary American political system. With understanding student activism, one could predict the changing face of the American electorate and the subsequent political platforms that come from these newly empowered voters. The growing number of minority students in college has resulted in the reshaping, intensification, and growing efficiency of student activism campaigns. As this article discussed, these student activists will bring new attention and positive change to unjust and harmful political policies.

Can you handle it? Sexism in the EMT Industry

By Brenna McNamee

‘Can you handle it?’ This is a question women are constantly faced with when they decide to enter the male-dominated territory that is Emergency Medical Services (EMTs). With more than 70% of EMTs and paramedics being male, it is quite clear that there is a serious lack of women in emergency medicine nationwide⁷³. Male employees in the field consistently attribute the relative absence of female first responders to the idea that women are simply not cut out to be EMTs, often assuming that they are not competent enough, not intelligent enough, and definitely not strong enough. These assumptions are often implicit, yet clearly manifest themselves during the course of providing emergency care. While gender roles are certainly changing and more women are entering into positions historically considered men’s work, being an EMT is a different matter. It is thought to be work that requires the intensity of a man’s body, mind, and disposition. In truth, what discourages many women from pursuing careers in this highly rewarding field is the immense harassment, belittlement, and discrimination that they face when they try.

When a male coworker asks whether you can you handle it, he means a bit more than what is on the surface. ‘Can you handle it?’ really means, ‘Are you strong enough to lift?’ ‘Can you hold the front of the stretcher or the foot on the stair chair to carry that patient?’ It really means, ‘Are you capable enough to drive?’ ‘Will you be too emotional?’ The severe pressure, in situations such as continuing to work as blood pours over your hands and everyone around you is

⁷³ Schafer, Kristina, Ryan Sutter, and Scott Gibbons. *Characteristics of Individuals and Employment Among First Responders*. U.S. Department of Labor, 6 Aug. 2015, www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/analytics-reports/. Accessed 14 Sept. 2018.

yelling, or getting down in the mud to secure a patient's airway before they die, are usually considered to be situations better handled by men. If as a female EMT you don't take charge, someone else will, quickly confirming the biases of male coworkers. Answering these questions in the affirmative is assuredly more challenging when you know that many of your male coworkers likely think you're too powerless, too incompetent, or too weak to deal with the considerable demands of being an EMT.

When lifting patients with a female partner, it is not uncommon for one to ask, "Are you *sure* you've got this?" Everyone in the field knows that asking for a lift assist will elicit an eye roll. Showing even the slightest sign of fear will get you shoved behind your male coworkers. Any slip-up just affirms the mumbles about why females should not be allowed to be EMTs. For these reasons, from the moment many male EMTs see a woman walk towards their truck, they are already questioning and thereby undermining the strength, intelligence, and abilities of their new partner with just one look. It can take years upon years of work to earn the same level of trust and respect that can be handed to male counterparts on their first day. When a male EMT slips up, he often gets jokingly teased by his partner. Yet, when a female EMT makes the same mistake, her partner no longer wants to work with someone so incompetent. A male mistake can be seen as an exception rather than the rule, while women are seen as confirming the rule when they fail. In this way, confirmation bias can inhibit talented and passionate women pursuing careers as EMTs.

Such hostility is deep-rooted and multidimensional. Many may insist that men and women are equals, but that men are genuinely stronger than women. The fact of the matter is that men and women have different kinds of strength. For the physical strength relevant to being an EMT, women who have trained and passed the pertinent exams have demonstrated and

developed the physical prowess required. Of course, there are always situations for which training did not prepare you. When such situations extend to physical challenges without precedent, women and men alike would be ill-prepared. When there is no defined way to go about such a situation, intuition outweighs physical strength. Thus, the other type of strength is mental strength. Many argue that men are the natural decision-makers, and as such, are justifiably chosen to fulfill this need. This view leads to the tendency to refute women's ability to occupy positions of power, especially positions that involve making the ultimate decision in times of emergency. Yet, in such stressful and time-sensitive situations, this might not be an option. Men and women can both learn to be decision-makers, and there are men and women who are good and bad at doing so.

Historically, women have been expected to occupy nurturing roles, acting as the caretakers and helping those around them. Their socialization emphasizes the necessary skills and dispositions. Yet, in a time of crisis, all of a sudden women are not capable of fulfilling this role. In such times, it is thought to be suitable for the men to take the lead, and then women can return to help when all the decisive, hard work is done. By this twisted logic, women are expected to be the caretakers, yet at the same time, seen as incapable of being those caretakers.

Women's decisive ability is undervalued, yet research has suggested that women actually tend to be better decision-makers than their male counterparts. For instance, one study investigated the ways in which men and women make decisions in times of stress. Based on their results, men and women actually react very differently. In times of stress, women tend to make thoughtful decisions, engaging multiple potential outcomes, while men have a greater tendency

to make risky decisions.⁷⁴ There is a bit of irony behind the scrutiny that women receive for their decisions, when in fact they may be making better decisions to begin with. In relation to a job in emergency medicine, where stress levels are at an all-time high, it does not seem plausible to rely only on the riskier decision-making of men alone, especially when the life of a patient is on the line. As such, it is in best interest to incorporate a female perspective, that can offer responsible decisions that may yield a better outcome for the patient.

While it is obvious how such a gender discrepancy hinders females, it is not beneficial for men either. The makeup of an emergency department should reflect the makeup of the communities which they serve. Data analysis of patient care reports demonstrates that roughly half of all transported patients (54%) are female⁷⁵, so why shouldn't there be at least 50% of female EMTs available to transport them? How can an all-male crew help a girl who has just been sexualled assaulted by a man? How can an all-male crew comfort a woman facing domestic violence at the hands of her aggressive husband? Can *they* handle it? Men and women approach problems from different angles, respond to stress in different manners, and have different ways of working with others. Men can learn to respond to such situations, but will likely have to learn to do so from female coworkers. In the same way, women can learn from their male coworkers how to respond to instances in which a man may genuinely prefer a male. Furthermore, patients have the right to accept or refuse care offered by EMTs and paramedics. In 2011, a study demonstrated that the frequency of patient refusal actually significantly decreased when EMTs

⁷⁴Mather, Mara and Nichole R. Lighthall. "Both Risk and Reward Are Processed Differently in Decisions Made Under Stress." *Current directions in psychological science* 21.2. (2012): 36-41. *PMC*. Web. 8 Oct. 2018. .

⁷⁵ "Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics." *Data USA*. 2018. <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/292041/>.

and paramedics present were females. Thus, it is in the best interest of the patient to have both male and female presence in their emergency care.

As previously explained, a true factor of success is learning to embrace both male and female perspectives, regardless of the field or industry. It is time to recognize that women *are* capable of careers in emergency services. They are smart enough, they are competent enough, and they sure as hell are strong enough!

The Coming Storm: Climate Vulnerability in Sri Lanka

By Shankara Narayanan

Cities lost to rising tides. Hurricanes leveling neighborhoods. Droughts and famine starving entire populations. Such apocalyptic images are but some of the predicted effects of climate change in the coming century. Climate change policy in its current state seeks to prevent the planet's demise by capping emissions and investing in alternate industries—just look at the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015. Problematically, this approach fails to account for the disproportionate impact climate change will have on select communities around the world. Specifically, industries reliant on natural processes will be hardest hit, while the poor of almost all countries will be most harmed. What happens when industries such as agriculture overlap with impoverished communities? How should climate policy act to protect these vulnerable groups? South Asia in particular hosts climate ‘hotspots’ predicted to suffer severe droughts, floods, and storms in the next fifty years; the region also faces several socioeconomic challenges. Population growth, urbanization, infrastructure modernization, and sanitation all contribute to the discriminating effects of climate change. For example, in Sri Lanka, the effects of climate change include droughts, irregular precipitation, coastal erosion, and increasingly heavy storms. As a result, Sri Lankan farmers are more susceptible to the debilitating effects of climate change than their office-employed peers—their entire livelihood depends on regular weather patterns and rainfall. Using a vulnerability-focused framework, climate policy needs to account for the demographic shifts that will displace the employees of entire economic sectors. Climate vulnerability reveals the challenges faced by farmers, demonstrating the need for a reinvention of climate policy moving away from market-driven reforms to government-led initiatives.

Vulnerability-grounded public policy identifies the specific social groups at risk from climate change. Poverty creates an array of stressors on individual and community life. Poor education, lack of employment, crumbling infrastructure, and inadequate sanitation are just a few of the many problems stagnating impoverished communities. Consequently, climate change's effects can reinforce poverty by, "...interrupting education, stunting children's physical development, destroying assets, forcing sale of productive capital, and deepening social differentiation from poor households' slower recovery."⁷⁶ On a country-by-country basis, using a vulnerability approach puts poor and climate-susceptible communities at the forefront of climate policy, alongside emissions reduction. This raises an important question: what role should public policy play in addressing the vulnerability of poor citizens?

In Sri Lanka, climate change promises to reorganize economic industry, demographic spread, and urban concentrations, demonstrating how climate change harms poor communities. During the 20th century alone, from 1911-1990, meteorologists tracked the expansion of "dry" and "intermediate" zones across the island, reducing rainfall in its North, North Central, Northeast, and East regions.⁷⁷ Problematically, reduced precipitation forecasts for the 21st century promise to expand the dry zones further. The North, North Central, Northeast, and East host key agricultural sites, especially tea plantations and rice paddies. Both crops depend on consistent rainfall to grow, meaning farmers need consistent rainfall for a full harvest.

⁷⁶ Ribot, Jesse C. 2010. "Vulnerability does not just Fall from the Sky: Toward Multi-scale Pro-poor Climate Policy," in Robin Mearns and Andrew Norton (eds.), *Social Dimensions of Climate Change: Equity and Vulnerability in a Warming World*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/Vulnerability>

⁷⁷ Nishadi Eriyagama, Vladimir Smakhtin, Lalith Chandrapala, Karin Fernando, "Impacts of Climate Change on Water Resources and Agriculture in Sri Lanka: A Review and Preliminary Vulnerability Mapping," International Water Management Institute, 2010,
http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Publications/IWMI_Research_Reports/PDF/PUB135/RR135-High_res.pdf

Approximately 72% of paddy production occurs during the wet season (*Maha*) in dry and intermediate zones. With decreased rainfall expanding dry zones, that production will fall. Critically, by 2050, parts of Sri Lanka’s eastern coast will experience surges in irrigation demand as a result of expanding dry zones and irregular rainfall, potentially slashing paddy production. For example, the city of Batticaloa will experience up to 45% more irrigation demand by 2050—all for its hundreds of kilometers of rice paddies.⁷⁸ Clearly, Sri Lanka needs effective irrigation policy to support its agricultural industry in light of such fundamental challenges to its existence. Already, the effects of expanding dry zones are being felt.

In 2017, a 10-month drought scorched North Central and Western Sri Lanka. Over the course of those 10 months, over 150 young workers left the rural town of Adigama.⁷⁹ The majority flocked to Colombo, or migrated across South Asia and into the Middle East, seeking better employment prospects. Sisira Kumara, the village governing officer, explained, “If they get the lowest-paying job overseas, or in a garment factory, they will not return.”⁸⁰ Indeed, when interviewed, 23-year old W.M. Suranga, who left Adigama for Colombo, stated, “At least I am sure of a paycheck at the end of the month. This uncertainty of depending on the rains is too much of a risk.”⁸¹ As rainfall becomes increasingly irregular over successive decades, this type of migration from rural districts to urban hubs can only increase, reorganizing the demographics

⁷⁸ Nishadi Eriyagama, Vladimir Smakhtin, Lalith Chandrapala, Karin Fernando, “Impacts of Climate Change on Water Resources and Agriculture in Sri Lanka: A Review and Preliminary Vulnerability Mapping,” International Water Management Institute, 2010, http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Publications/IWMI_Research_Reports/PDF/PUB135/RR135-High_res.pdf

⁷⁹ “As Rural Sri Lanka Dries Out, Young Farmers Look for Job Options,” Voice of America, August 16, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/rural-sri-lanka-dries-out-young-farmers-look-new-jobs/3989118.html>

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid.

of Sri Lanka while leaving its agricultural sector to wither. For 2017, a report by the World Food Program and U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization forecasted a 40% drop in rice production, 35% lower than Sri Lanka's five-year average.⁸² Clearly, using a vulnerability framework identifies the farming communities of Sri Lanka as highly susceptible to dislocation via climate change. Altered rainfall and expanding dry zones increase the demand for irrigation services in order to maintain agricultural productivity. As Adigama demonstrates, when that demand cannot be met, productivity plummets and farmers move to the city.

Facing such dire consequences, the public policy debate presents two paths forward. First is the argument for implementation of “water markets”, where Sri Lankan Farmers’ Organizations and Water Users’ Associations can buy water on the market. Taking inspiration from India and Bangladesh, many Sri Lankan think-tanks advocate for the use of market reforms to match farmers’ water demand with sellers of water—typically the government, corporations, or other farmers. Small farmers in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, for example, profit from tubewell water sales.⁸³ To the west, the state of Gujarat hosts highly advanced water markets; farmers make substantial investments in pumps and underground pipeline networks to enhance irrigation services. Consequently, competing investment raises the quality of pumps and

⁸² “As Rural Sri Lanka Dries Out, Young Farmers Look for Job Options,” Voice of America, August 16, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/rural-sri-lanka-dries-out-young-farmers-look-new-jobs/3989118.html>

⁸³ Ali Hasanain, Shahid Ahmad, Muammad Zia Mehmood, Sidra Majeed, Genet Zinabou, “Irrigation and Water Use Efficiency in South Asia,” Global Development Network, June 2013, http://www.gdn.int/sites/default/files/WP/WP68-SA-Irrigation-Water_64f.pdf

pipelines on sale in the market.⁸⁴ Similarly, programs sponsored by NGO's in Bangladesh have created markets selling water at subsidized prices to the homeless.⁸⁵

The idea of using markets to match irrigation demand with water-selling firms is sound in theory. However, in practice, it falls well short of protecting climate-vulnerable farmers. Following market logic, efficiency is achieved by allocating goods where buyers (i.e., farmers), are matched with sellers (i.e., firms, companies, the government, or other farmers). What happens to farmers who are unable to compete with their rivals? As the demand for irrigation increases in Sri Lanka's dry zones, farmers from Trincomalee to Batticaloa will be forced to compete over irrigation services, meaning that only a select few will be able to continue their agricultural pursuits—those that cannot will abandon villages just like Adigama, and crowd the city. Smarter climate policy would be investing in agricultural strategies to mitigate dislocation as much as possible. For example, crop adaptation strategies targeting Sri Lanka's staple crops would allow farmers to adapt to expanding dry zones and decreased rainfall. Government investment should be channeled towards ongoing research into developing varieties of rice that can grow in hotter, more humid environments.⁸⁶ Concurrently, the government should work with Farmers' Organizations and Water Users' Associations outside of marketization projects to grow

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Nishadi Eriyagama, Vladimir Smakhtin, Lalith Chandrapala, Karin Fernando, "Impacts of Climate Change on Water Resources and Agriculture in Sri Lanka: A Review and Preliminary Vulnerability Mapping," International Water Management Institute, 2010, http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Publications/IWMI_Research_Reports/PDF/PUB135/RR135-High_res.pdf

rice capable of developing in shorter seasons and requiring less water.⁸⁷ Critically, this type of public policy must be led by government initiatives.

Applying theories of climate vulnerability and climate mitigation in Sri Lanka reveals the importance of government action in implementing appropriate public policies. Traditional marketization approaches will not mitigate the *effects* on climate vulnerable communities as much as direct mitigation efforts. Home to barely 500 people, Sri Lankan villages such as Adigama will continue to empty, with young workers migrating to cities and paddies lying abandoned, if privatization becomes the favored policy approach. As a result, direct mitigation adapting the impacted crops promises much more success. Indeed, in the early 1960s, the agro-genetic engineering efforts of Norman Borlaug created a breakthrough in wheat growth, introducing wheat with shorter stalks and more favorable growing conditions to a famine and drought-ravaged India. Within a decade, India became self-sufficient in all cereal development. Today, similar initiatives are needed, but on a government-funded scale. Ongoing research into crop adaptation should be the focus of the Sri Lankan government, and the focus of governments across the world facing similar challenges to their agriculture sectors as a result of climate change. By 2050, dry zones are predicted to envelope Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, sure to trigger mass migration across the island unlike any seen since the country's civil war from 1983 to 2009. Reorganizing society in this way, climate change poses a fundamental threat to the island's stability. To prepare for the worst, national public policy should buttress its agricultural industries and staple crops. Only then can full-scale rural collapse be averted.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

The Poverty Problem

By Chineze Osakwe

Some historians have labeled the present period in American history as “The Second Gilded Age” due to extreme wealth and income inequality.⁸⁸ Not only are “the rich getting richer” and “the poor getting poorer,” but the number of people in poverty has grown as well. Poverty in the United States has been perpetuated by society’s inability to recognize the political forces that influence economic and socio-political policy changes, which subsequently suppresses the success of the working poor and underclass. A larger social safety net—such as the various programs in President Johnson’s War on Poverty—would create a more equitable society in which the underprivileged have more support, opportunities, and the education and resources necessary to achieve socio-economic mobility.

The number of people in poverty in the United States demonstrates its need for a larger social safety net. The United States Census Bureau has conducted comprehensive research regarding poverty throughout American history, and their findings support the effectiveness of expanding the social safety at reducing the number of people in poverty. They found that the number of people in poverty was around 40 million in 1960, and by 1970 (six years after President Johnson declared a war on poverty), there were about 25 million people in poverty.⁸⁹ This translates to the percent of people in poverty dropping from approximately 23 percent to

⁸⁸ O’Donnell, Edward. “Are We Living in the Gilded Age 2.0?” *History*. January 31, 2019. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.history.com/news/second-gilded-age-income-inequality>

⁸⁹ Fontenot, Kayla, Jessica Semega, and Melissa Kollar. “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2017.” United States Census Bureau. September 12, 2018. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.html>.

around 12 percent. Since 1970, the percentage of people in poverty increased to 15 percent in the 1980s before falling slightly to 12.3 percent today.⁹⁰ These numbers show that the War on Poverty was able to expand the social safety net and visibly reduce the overall number of people in poverty for nearly two decades. It was not until the 1980s that poverty rates began to increase again. The increase in 1980 was in part due to an economic recession and globalization, but it is clear that it was exacerbated by dramatic changes in governmental policy such as tax cuts for the wealthy and cuts to the social safety net (including cuts to addiction rehabilitation, community-based services, cheap housing, and healthcare and disability assistance).

President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty was part of his larger legislative reform program: The Great Society, which was intended to create a more equitable nation. In his state of the Union Address, Johnson claimed that the primary cause of poverty was societal failure rather than personal failings and the culture of the poor.⁹¹ As a result, the War on Poverty created a number of new federal programs and agencies to fight poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act created various organizations such as the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Peace Corps, and Volunteers in Service to America. These organizations led to the creation of things like the Job Corps to train young people in urban areas; all of which were intended to boost the health, educational, and social wellbeing of citizens in lower- income communities. Johnson's War on Poverty pushed back against the standard belief that poverty was a result of nature and culture; by supplementing and supporting the working poor and the underclass with programs and resources that benefited them on a long-term scale. Job training and community building

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Cooley, Aaron. "War on Poverty." Encyclopedia Britannica. March 08, 2018. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/War-on-Poverty>.

programs not only impacted the adults living in the community, but subsequently helped the next generation by providing them with role models and the availability to receive a better and higher education. As a result, Johnson's expansion of the social safety net benefited a vast number of communities and families across the country by providing them with the tools and support to access new opportunities, while led to a reduction in poverty across the nation.

However, by the early 1980s, America saw chronic poverty begin to increase again. Although deindustrialization played a large role in the unemployment of thousands of Americans (and still does today), we cannot neglect the contribution that socio-economic reform had on the increase of poverty during the 1980s. Unlike Lyndon Johnson, President Reagan believed in the "culture of poverty," and therefore "blamed the 'misguided welfare programs' for the 'national tragedy' of broken families, teenage illegitimacy and worsening poverty."⁹² Reagan was an avid critic of the War on Poverty's welfare programs because he thought they encouraged the underclass to be lazy and unmotivated. He believed that the only way to change the *nature* of those in the underclass was to reduce the social safety net by making tremendous welfare cuts. His 'you're on your own' ideology led to tremendous cuts in the Supplemental Security Income program—thus, reducing the number of people on means-based welfare, a tightening of the disability eligibility process—thus, abandoning hundreds of mentally ill individuals, and criminalizing public inebriation and drug use or possession.⁹³ In addition to reducing the social

⁹² Takaki, Ronald. "Poverty Is Thriving Under Reagan." *The New York Times*. March 03, 1986. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/03/03/opinion/1-poverty-is-thriving-under-reagan-788886.html>.

⁹³ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Health and Medicine Division; Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice; Policy and Global Affairs; Science and Technology for Sustainability Program; Committee on an Evaluation of Permanent Supportive Housing Programs for Homeless Individuals. *Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press, 2018.

safety net, Ronald Reagan turned to a tax policy which reduced taxes on the wealthy. The 1980s also saw gentrification, inadequate supply of affordable housing, and tremendous budget cuts to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, all of which contributed to chronic poverty, limited social mobility, and reduced support for underprivileged Americans.^{94,95} This period in American history—although detrimental to society—ultimately reshaped society’s view on government aid and welfare programs set the precedent for future policies.

As a result, in 2017, the United States had the second highest poverty rate among some of the wealthiest and most developed nations in the world—including the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada; all of which had almost half the poverty rate of the United States.⁹⁶ These nations—particularly those in Europe—have higher taxes in exchange for an extensive social safety net. One of America’s trademarks is that it is the land of opportunity, for people to make a name for themselves. This ‘self-made’ ideology prohibits us as a collective society from being open to structural changes that would increase the depth of the social safety net. Many Americans believe that part of what makes this nation great is that people get to where they are by pulling themselves up from their bootstraps, working hard, and getting the proper reward. As a result, the U.S. has a relatively minimal social safety net and governmental aid, while in many other Western nations, governments devote more resources to programs aimed at assisting the

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Dreier, Peter. "Reagan's Real Legacy." *The Nation*. June 29, 2015. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://www.thenation.com/article/reagans-real-legacy/>.

⁹⁶ Merelli, Annalisa. "The US Has a Lot of Money, but It Does Not Look like a Developed Country." *Quartz*. March 10, 2017. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://qz.com/879092/the-us-doesnt-look-like-a-developed-country/>.

working poor and underclass.⁹⁷ In addition to limited government intervention and a lack of institutionalization of policies to reduce poverty, the U.S. also provides states with substantial power and agency which has both negative and positive consequences. One consequence is that some states have higher rates of poverty than others because they lack institutionalized policies that enforce equity. For instance, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Louisiana had the top three highest rates of poverty in the U.S. during 2018; and in all of these states between 20 and 31 percent of the population did not graduate high school, thousands of people were below the poverty line, and unemployment rates were around 6.4 percent.⁹⁸ As a result, not only were there high rates of adults living in poverty, but children in these areas were disproportionately affected by poverty because of the lack of institutionalized equity policies by the local, state, and federal governments. Due to the fact that approximately 27 percent of children in each state were already living in poverty, they were unlikely to experience social mobility out of the underclass in part because they lacked monetary resources, socio-political policy, and probable educational attainment.

Overall, a wider social safety net clearly creates more support for working poor and underclass members of our society by providing them with long-term solutions which ultimately benefit our collective society. Therefore, we should make changes to our current socio-political and economic policies in order to reduce the wealth and income gap that is steadily increasing

⁹⁷ "Why Is Poverty Higher in the U.S. than in Other Countries?" *Confronting Poverty*. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://confrontingpoverty.org/poverty-discussion-guide/why-is-poverty-higher-in-the-u-s-than-in-other-countries/>.

⁹⁸ Bishaw, Alamayehu and Craig Benson. "Poverty Rate Drops in 20 States and the District of Columbia." United States Census Bureau. September 13, 2018. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/09/poverty-rate-drops-20-states-and-district.html>.

today. For instance, changing minimum wage to a level that would keep up with national inflation, while simultaneously providing workers with a proper and livable cost for the regions they live in (e.g. the South versus New England) would greatly reduce the population of the working poor who go in and out of poverty. However, a just minimum wage should also provide individuals with more than just the bare minimum to survive; they should also be able to save money and accumulate wealth in order to attain at the minimum, minor social mobility.

Affordable housing and healthcare are also very important aspects of the social safety net that deserve more attention in our current society. Both housing and healthcare are basic human rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration for Human Rights. We should be providing our citizens with proper medical attention and homes to live in. Finally, every American should have access to all levels of education—from early childhood education to college—because education has become tied to social mobility in our current society. Higher-level jobs demand higher educational achievement, and therefore, every child should be afforded the opportunity to educationally qualify for these positions. All in all, these adaptations to our social safety net would shift our nation towards more wealth and income equity, which in turn means less perpetual and chronic poverty amongst our citizens.

In conclusion, the working class and underclass members of American society are constantly battling poverty due to the lack of depth and width of the social safety net in our nation. President Johnson's War on Poverty expanded the extent of the American social safety and effectively cut the American poverty rate in half. However, as the political and economic atmosphere in America shifted away from Johnson's War on Poverty towards Reaganomics, there have been tremendous cuts in welfare programs and tax reforms that favor the wealthy. As a result, the US has become one of the least equitable developed nations in the globe.

The New Literacy Test: The Criminal Justice and Voter Suppression

By Abigail Sloan

One of the core tenets of democracy is the practice of free, fair, and frequent elections. While many would argue that the United States is one of the strongest democracies in the world, there are a number of ways that political parties, interest groups, and individuals work to make elections less democratic. One of the greatest electoral issues facing the country is the disenfranchisement of convicted felons. Because election laws and regulations are reserved powers to the states, states like Alabama and Nevada have much stricter disenfranchisement laws for felons than states like Vermont and Maine, where virtually no restrictions are put on felons' voting rights. Felon disenfranchisement disproportionately affects black Americans, stripping otherwise eligible voters of their democratic right to vote. The only solution is to enfranchise all felons who have lost their right to vote and to create legislation to prevent future felons from being disenfranchised, an idea that is overwhelmingly popular among public voters, as shown through Florida's vote to restore voting rights to ex-felons in the 2018 election.

Felon disenfranchisement is a nationwide crisis in which people who are convicted of felonies are stripped of their right to vote, with degrees of severity varying across the states. When The Sentencing Project conducted research in 2011, they found two states have no felon disenfranchisement restriction, thirteen states that restrict inmates serving their felony sentence, five states that disenfranchise inmates and parolees, nineteen states where inmates, parolees, and probationers are disenfranchised, and eleven states where inmates, parolees, probationers, and

ex-felons are all stripped of their right to vote.⁹⁹ One in forty adults, 2.5% of the U.S. voting age population, have lost their voting rights due to a felony conviction.¹⁰⁰ This number has greatly increased in the past few decades. 1.17 million people were disenfranchised in 1976, 3.34 million in 1996 and more than 5.85 million in 2010, and the numbers are still increasing today, largely due to harsh sentencing laws.¹⁰¹ Felon disenfranchisement disproportionately affects black Americans at a rate four times greater than that of white Americans.¹⁰²

Many scholars point to the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments as the beginning of felon disenfranchisement. Once American-born freed slaves were declared citizens and voter discrimination based on race was deemed unconstitutional, Southern states found new ways to deprive black voters of their right. The era of Jim Crow laws saw the implementation of poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests to strip black citizens of their right to vote. Although literacy tests and felon disenfranchisement are both clearly means of racial discrimination, at face value it can be argued that they could equally impact white citizens as well. Deciding who passed and failed literacy tests, however, was determined by registrars who were largely unchecked by authority, allowing individuals to deny black citizens the right to vote based solely on their race. Comparing the rates of whites and blacks who were turned away from polls after failing literacy tests in the late 19th century and those currently disenfranchised due to felonies makes it apparent that both tactics were intended to and effective at keeping black

⁹⁹ Christopher Uggen, Sarah Shannon, and Jeff Manza, "State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 2010," *The Sentencing Project*, (July 2012): 3, <https://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/State-Level-Estimates-of-Felon-Disenfranchisement-in-the-United-States-2010.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 2

¹⁰¹ Uggen, Shannon, and Manza, "State Level Estimates," 2

¹⁰² Ibid.

Americans from being politically active¹⁰³. Additionally, since felon disenfranchisement laws became drastically more prevalent once literacy tests were officially outlawed, it is clear that the disenfranchisement of felons is merely a new method to achieve the same goal.

The consequences of felon disenfranchisement are massive, as more than six million Americans have been unjustly punished by losing their right to vote. Perhaps the largest reason that felon disenfranchisement has such racial disparities is because of mass incarceration. In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander breaks down the mass incarceration of black men and how systemic racism disproportionately puts black men in prison, which leads to disproportionate disenfranchisement rates. Beginning primarily with President Nixon's "War on Drugs," black men were quickly targeted and arrested at much higher rates than white Americans, despite equal rates of illegal drug activity. Alexander argues that the "colorblind" United States criminal justice system has allowed a new form of racial segregation to flourish- one where black men are sent to prisons for the same crimes that allow white men to walk free.¹⁰⁴ Because black men are convicted of felonies at much higher rates than white men, they are disenfranchised at much higher rates- in Florida, 23% of black Americans are disenfranchised from voting.¹⁰⁵ In the south where black populations are highest, felon disenfranchisement laws are toughest; this is surely not a coincidence, but rather a means to suppress black votes and voices.

Another subset of consequences within the broader issue of felon disenfranchisement is the disenfranchisement of parolees, probationers, and ex-felons. These groups have completed

¹⁰³ Daniel S. Goldman, "The Modern-Day Literacy Test: Felon Disenfranchisement and Racial Discrimination" *Stanford Law Review* 57, no. 2 (Nov 2004): 611-656. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/stflr57&i=625>.

¹⁰⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Uggen, Shannon, and Manza, "State Level Estimates," 2

their sentences and are reintegrated as members of society, but are still stripped of their right to vote. Not a single other country in the world disenfranchises people who have been released from prison in the way the U.S. does.¹⁰⁶ It's almost like their punishment never ends. Ex-offenders not only have the hard task readapt to life again but also cannot exercise their right to vote like a normal citizen that they are. The only democratic solution of felon disenfranchisement is to enfranchise all felons, parolees, probationers, and ex-felons permanently and to create legislation that will ensure no felons be disenfranchised again. This solution is supported by the public, including in states that have traditionally had strict laws preventing felons from voting, like Florida. Previously, Florida boasted one of the harshest felony disenfranchisement laws in the country, with nearly 1.7 million people permanently disenfranchised.¹⁰⁷ Included in this count is more than 20% of the black voting aged population who make up far less than 20% of the total voting-age population.¹⁰⁸ In 2018, Florida was one of only four states who permanently disenfranchised those convicted of a felony, allowing only the governor the ability to restore these rights through a lengthy, expensive, and difficult process that did not guarantee enfranchisement. However, on November 6, 2018, Floridians voted on a constitutional amendment to automatically restore voting rights to the 1.4 million ex-felons with an overwhelming 65% of the population voting 'yes'.¹⁰⁹ The amendment went into effect in

¹⁰⁶Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 158

¹⁰⁷Sarah A. Lewis "Felony Disenfranchisement: An Annotated Bibliography," *Legal Reference Services Quarterly*, 37 no.2, (January 2019):122-133, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0270319X.2018.1522916>

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Florida Amendment 4, Voting Rights Restoration for Felons Initiative. 2018. Accessed [https://ballotpedia.org/Florida_Amendment_4,_Voting_Rights_Restoration_for_Felons_Initiative_\(2018\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Florida_Amendment_4,_Voting_Rights_Restoration_for_Felons_Initiative_(2018))

January of 2019 and has since inspired other states to evaluate and consider voting rights restoration, including Kentucky Iowa, Minnesota, New Mexico, and New Jersey.¹¹⁰

Enfranchising those who have committed felonies would make all citizens better off. One would argue that if these individuals are being influenced by public policy and government actions, they should have a political voice equal to those around them. Reversing disenfranchisement causes newly enfranchised citizens to increase pro-democratic attitudes and behaviors.¹¹¹ A study in 2002 found that about 35% of disenfranchised felons reported they *would have* voted if they were able to in the presidential election of 1992.¹¹² This finding suggests that enfranchising those previously disenfranchised would increase voter turnout and expand the eligible voter electorate, thus strengthening our democracy. The nation should celebrate the right to vote and exercise that right to its full extent.

Allowing felons, ex-felons, parolees, and those on probation would also make these individuals able to participate as active citizens. When citizens are active, they feel their government works in their interest, and are able to feel represented by their elected officials. Enfranchising ex-felons is supported greatly by the public- a key study found that nearly 80% of the public surveyed supported enfranchising felons who are not in prison, in addition to the

¹¹⁰ “Disenfranchisement News: After Win in Florida, Iowa and Kentucky Consider Reform.” Sentencing Project, Accessed February 2019 <https://www.sentencingproject.org/news/disenfranchisement-news-win-florida-iowa-kentucky-consider-reform/>

¹¹¹ Victoria Shineman, “Restoring Rights, Restoring Trust: Evidence that Reversing Felon Disenfranchisement Penalties Increases Both Trust and Cooperation with Government,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*. (October 2018): <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3272694>

¹¹² Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, “Democratic Contraction? Political Consequences of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States,” *American Sociological Review*, 67, no. 6 (2002): 786, www.jstor.org/stable/3088970

positive effects seen from Florida's reversal of felony disenfranchisement.¹¹³ If a majority of the public supports the idea, lawmakers should be held accountable and act in response to the desires of the electorate. Preventing citizens from voting is too harsh of a punishment in a democratic society that boasts the importance of universal suffrage.¹¹⁴ As aforementioned, felons 'pay their dues' in a variety of other ways and losing their right to vote should not be one of them. Millions of black Americans have been disproportionately stripped of their right to vote and have lost their political voice through the institutionalization of black voter suppression. Giving felons the right to vote would increase voter turnout and democratic confidence- after all, democracy best serves the people who vote. Voting rights must be immediately restored to all felons, parolees, probationers, and ex-felons to ensure a democratic nation while simultaneously increasing voter turnout, expanding the electorate, and motivating more people to vote.

¹¹³ Jeff Manza, Clem Brooks, and Christopher Uggen, "Public Attitudes Toward Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 68, no. 2 (June 2004): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfh015>

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Outgunned: Why the NRA Wins Again and Again

By Andrew Spearing

Much has been said about the gun lobby's enormous, perhaps monopolistic and undemocratic, influence on American politics. Although some of this is overblown (as I will argue), Second Amendment groups are by far the most influential movers and shakers in gun policy and jurisprudence. Observers commonly point out the significant power difference between pro-gun and anti-gun interest groups. Indeed, since 1998, the NRA *alone* has spent over \$200 million on political activities, the vast majority going to independent expenditures (\$145 million) and federal lobbying (\$46 million). In contrast, *all* gun control groups - most notably Everytown and the Brady Campaign - together spent a paltry \$25 million in the same time period.¹¹⁵ As we will see, however, raw spending is only a small part of the story. Much of the pro-gun lobby's influence comes from its ability to create the mere *perception* of political and electoral power. It is, to a large extent, something akin to a paper tiger.

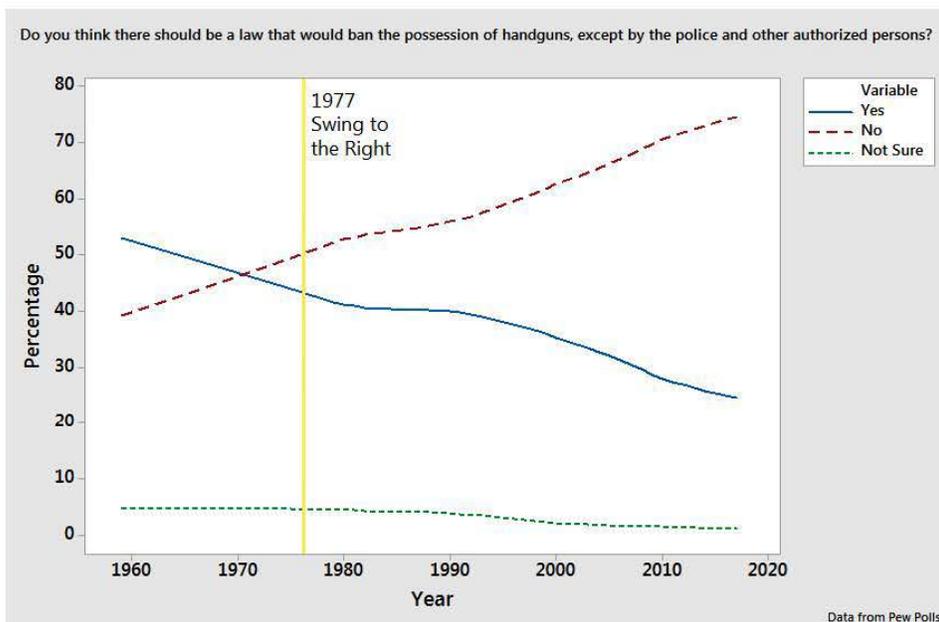
Many scholars on the left, such as the NYU School of Law's Michael Waldman, have suggested that the NRA (and pro-gun interest groups in general) have spent several decades successfully manipulating the public into accepting a radical, revisionist individual-rights interpretation¹¹⁶ of the Second Amendment.¹¹⁷ This engineered shift in public opinion, scholars argue, has permeated Congress, the media, the political parties, and the courts, causing them to

¹¹⁵ Jacobson, Louis. "Counting up How Much the NRA Spends on Campaigns, Lobbying." PolitiFact, PolitiFact, 11 Oct. 2017.

¹¹⁶The idea that the Second Amendment secures the right to bear arms for *individual* members of society, rather than exclusively for members of *collective* organizations such as the militia, police, or gun clubs.

¹¹⁷ Rosen, Jeffrey, director. Examining the History of the Second Amendment. YouTube, National Constitution Center, 4 June 2014.

grant mainstream legitimacy to a view that was once on the legal and political fringe. In other words, recent pro-Second Amendment jurisprudence (such as the controversial *Heller* decision), Republican Second Amendment absolutism (and Democrat sheepishness), and recent Congressional inaction on gun control are all the result of this interest group manipulation. Some empirical data suggest that these observers may have gotten the causation wrong. Using raw data from Gallup polls that asked (over the course of nearly 60 years) whether or not individual handgun ownership should be banned, I used a statistical software to generate polling trends over time.¹¹⁸ I selected surveys on this particular issue because it directly relates to the core question in *Heller* (whether the individual right to handgun ownership is Constitutionally protected), and because it is the best proxy measure of the public's acceptance of the individual rights view of the Second Amendment. The graph below, produced using the polling data, shows that public opinion was trending toward the individualist interpretation (and *Heller*-like thinking) well



before the NRA became a right-wing lobbying powerhouse in 1977. Hence, the general shift of courts, political parties, and Congress toward a more pro-gun, pro-individualist position may have less to do with the NRA and more to do with broader cultural and political

¹¹⁸ “Do You Think There Should or Should Not Be a Law That Would Ban the Possession of Handguns, Except by the Police and Other Authorized Persons?” Gallup, Gallup News.

changes in the U.S. over the past fifty years (that began before 1977), possibly including the rejection of the New Deal and Great Society, the subsequent resurgence of conservatism and right-wing anti-government philosophies, and greater partisanship (in which the right has an advantage, as more people self-identify as conservative than liberal). In other words, instead of the new right-wing NRA helping produce broad political and cultural shifts, broad political and cultural shifts may have helped produce the new right-wing NRA.

It therefore appears that public perceptions of the NRA's monopolistic influence over American society and politics are significantly exaggerated. Still, the dominant view in Washington seems to be that the gun lobby holds significant electoral sway, often determining the fates of key Congressional races through independent expenditures and voter mobilization. To test the veracity of this claim, we will use as a case study the 1994 midterm elections, in which Newt Gingrich's Republicans captured both chambers of Congress for the first time since Eisenhower. Shortly after his party suffered this heavy political defeat, Bill Clinton groused that the NRA had summoned voters to (successfully) punish the Democrats for passing the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban.¹¹⁹ However, the research of political scientist Gary C. Jacobson offers an alternative explanation. In his paper, *The 1994 House Elections in Perspective*, he makes a compelling case that the election results were mainly determined by partisanship, not guns. Leading up to the midterms, the Republicans managed to nationalize local races to an unprecedented degree, mainly by linking Democratic incumbents to Bill Clinton, as well as to widespread disgust with corrupt and inefficient Washington governance. As a result, more than ever before, a greater percentage of districts that voted Republican in the previous presidential

¹¹⁹ "President Bill Clinton Reacts to 1994 Midterm Loss." C-SPAN, National Cable Satellite Corporation, 9 Nov. 1994.

election voted Republican in the midterms.¹²⁰ Hence, Democratic incumbents from red or pink districts were most likely to be ousted, especially if they had voted with Clinton on a whole host of issues (not merely guns): healthcare, tax reform, and Don't Ask, Don't Tell.¹²¹

All of this suggests that the electoral power of the gun lobby is not as strong as elite consensus would have us believe. First, the NRA's power to persuade voters is limited; in recent elections, party loyalty has been a far better determinant of people's votes than their concern about particular issues (such as guns). Second, the group's power to mobilize is also constrained; polls indicate that its members are largely politically-active, single-issue voters who would show up to vote with or without a push from the NRA.¹²²

Nonetheless, the gun lobby has successfully convinced many Washington elites that it does indeed have the power to swing elections. The mere *perception* of influence has given pro-gun groups significant sway over the legislative process. Consider, for instance, the failure of the (first) Manchin-Toomey gun control bill in 2013. Democrat Joe Manchin, knowing that he needed the NRA's support (or at least non-resistance) to get enough Republican votes, met with the group's lobbyists on numerous occasions. In exchange for universal background checks, he made numerous concessions, many of which were policy changes that the NRA had long lobbied for; weapons dealers would be allowed to sell handguns in other states, military members could buy guns in the state in which they were stationed, the legal definition of "gun show" would be

¹²⁰ Jacobson, Gary C. "The 1994 House Elections in Perspective." *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 111, no. 2, 1996, pp. 210–215., doi:10.2307/2152319.

¹²¹ Waldman, Paul. "The Myth Of NRA Dominance Part III: Two Elections The NRA Did Not Win." *ThinkProgress*, ThinkProgress, 22 Feb. 2012.

¹²² Page, Susan. "Pew Poll: An Activism Gap behind the Gun-Control Debate." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 15 Jan. 2013.

rewritten, specific types of firearms would be exempt from background checks, and creating a federal gun registry would be designated as a criminal act. Just as the watered-down legislation was about to gain the NRA's (unenthusiastic) approval, there was an outcry among more extreme pro-gun interest groups, as well as among the organization's most hard-right members, that NRA lobbyists were selling away the Second Amendment to Democrats behind closed doors. Shortly thereafter, the NRA caved to this pressure and came out against the bill; Manchin-Toomey was now dead on arrival.¹²³

The takeaway here is that the need for the gun lobby's approval forces (even Democratic) Congressmen to make significant legislative concessions. That approval is necessary because members of Congress from conservative districts, cherishing their NRA scorecards and fearing electoral repercussions, almost never vote for a bill that crosses the NRA.

Indeed, the NRA's ability to issue seemingly plausible electoral threats has helped shift both major parties toward a more pro-Second Amendment vision. In fact, progressives have often criticized various Congressional Democrats, especially those hailing from rural, conservative districts, for being "Republican-lite" on the gun issue. These complaints likely have some merit. Joe Manchin, a centrist Democrat from gun-friendly West Virginia, has almost never voted for a bill opposed by the NRA.¹²⁴ Additionally, during the drafting of Manchin-Toomey, he readily embraced numerous revisions and amendments proposed by the group's lobbyists (detailed earlier). Four Democrats, three of whom originally supported the bill, ended up voting

¹²³ Draper, Robert. "Inside the Power of the N.R.A." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 12 Dec. 2013.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

against it once the NRA declared its opposition. Not surprisingly, all of them represented Republican states with high rates of gun ownership: Arkansas, Alaska, North Dakota, and Montana.¹²⁵ However, red state Democrats fearing electoral repercussions are not the only ones that have shifted right. Democratic Party leaders, knowing that firearm regulations have no chance of passing without the support of gun groups, have projected some pro-gun stances to appear less threatening. Accordingly, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have both reiterated on numerous occasions that they support the individual rights interpretation of the Second Amendment established in *Heller*.¹²⁶ Unfortunately, the Democrats' toothless centrism on the gun issue, instead of courting pro-gun interest groups and fostering bipartisan compromise (as intended), has only caused the party to become politically impotent. After all, as seen in the Manchin-Toomey debacle, the NRA is effectively held hostage by its most radical members. No amount of Democrat pandering will convince the organization to support even the most modest gun reforms, for it is now institutionally incapable of compromise. Likewise, most Republican politicians, who would not dare cross the NRA, are by extension also subservient to the radical right on the gun issue. In short, Second Amendment interest groups controlled by passionate minorities have made both parties utterly incapable of enacting any substantial firearm regulation in recent years.

If the American political system responds to passionate minorities more than it does to dispassionate majorities, gun control supporters will have to increase their passion. This is far

¹²⁵ United States, Congress, Cong. Senate, "ProPublica." ProPublica, Pro Publica Inc, 12 Aug. 2015. 113th Congress, bill S.649.

¹²⁶ Rosenfeld, Everett. "Obama Announces Gun Control Plans: 'I Believe in the Second Amendment'." CNBC, CNBC, 5 Jan. 2016.

easier said than done, but ultimately, there is no other practical change that will make the system work. Constitutional amendments or laws that somehow limit the influence of special interests like the NRA are highly unlikely to pass. Likewise, somehow persuading fearful Republican or red-state Democrat legislators that the NRA's electoral power is exaggerated seems like another road to nowhere, especially when elite consensus on this point is so deeply entrenched. The truth is that people get the government that they demand. 92% of Americans - including 87% of *Republicans* - support universal background checks for all gun sales.¹²⁷ But if Americans want their politicians to enact gun reform, they will need to do more than say so in polls; they will need to engage in the political process with the same passion as the NRA and its most radical members. This may seem unrealistic, but gun control advocates already have extraordinary numbers. If they manage to ignite intensity in even a small fraction of their supporters, the result is inevitable: they will win.

¹²⁷ Dutton, Sarah, et al. "CBS/NYT Poll: GOP Voters Have Deep Concerns about Government." CBS News, CBS Interactive, 27 Oct. 2015.

Tackling Urban Sprawl and Climate Change Through Affordable Housing

By Harry Zehner

America energy diet is bloated and gluttonous. We are overstuffed with fatty fossil fuels, high carb modes of transportation and greasy, inefficient urban planning. It is long past time to start eating our vegetables. Public transit needs to be clean, affordable and accessible for all. Cities need to be walkable and bikeable. Supply chains must be shortened and simplified. And cars must be discarded en masse like the sugary dessert they are. But how? One key is density.

Americans needs to cozy up and start living close. Dense cities have a number of advantages over sprawling metropolises. Most importantly, when people live closer together, it is easier to link them to mass transit or incentivize them to walk or bike to work. Supply chains look less like tangled, overburdened webs. The suburban, sprawled model, on the other hand, encourages constant personal vehicle travel and inane, cumbersome supply chains. Density is proven to decrease emissions, from both transportation¹²⁸ and from buildings¹²⁹. And dense cities

¹²⁸Jinhyun Hong and Qing Shen, "Residential Density and Transportation Emissions," *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 22, (July 2013): 75–79.

¹²⁹Burak Güneralp, Et. al, "Global Scenarios of Urban Density and Its Impacts on Building Energy Use through 2050." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 34 (January 09, 2017): 8945-950.

are not just good for the environment—they are closely linked¹³⁰ to decreased¹³¹ public spending, economic growth and innovation.

But let's not condemn the suburbanites just yet. Yes, some of America's insatiable energy appetite comes from individual inclinations towards sprawl. Certain people choose to pursue the suburban dream. Certain communities organize to ward off low-income housing and multi-family buildings. But sprawl is largely a result of poor planning and design which has incentivized endless suburbia. Emmanuel Macron followed the logic that personal choice is the main contributor to consumption—and the French rioted. No, consumption is not always equal to choice.

It follows that if sprawl is not an amalgam of individual choices, America's legislators and city planners need to pick up the slack and embrace smart public policy which incentivizes density. The first hurdle they must clear is America's affordable housing crisis. There are other factors which can increase density, like building inclusive, welcoming communities or focusing on public transit-oriented development. But if people cannot afford to live in these inclusive communities or transit hubs, those efforts are non-starters. Affordable housing is the bedrock of dense, efficient city planning—and therefore, finding a solution to our affordable housing crisis is paramount to any holistic climate change strategy.

How bad is the affordable housing crisis? From San Francisco to Miami to New York, low- and middle-income households are battling higher rent and stagnating wages. According to a 2018 report from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, in Connecticut, a minimum

¹³⁰ Richard Florida, "Cities With Denser Cores Do Better," CityLab, November 28, 2012.

¹³¹ "The Cost of Sprawl," Smart Prosperity Institute (Formerly Sustainable Prosperity), October 2013.

wage earner needs to work almost 80 hours a week to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment¹³².

It gets worse. “Affordable” housing is not just unaffordable—there is less of it than ever. According to a study conducted by Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, since 1990, more than 2.5 million low-income homes have been destroyed or converted to luxury apartments¹³³. Prices in poor urban neighborhoods have rocketed upwards 50% faster than prices in rich neighborhoods.

This leads poor families to look elsewhere. Affordable housing has an inverse relationship with sprawl: If housing is more expensive in cities, people sprawl into low-density suburbia. Although suburbs are often conceptualized in the American popular imagination as rich, white oases, they are increasingly becoming more racially and socioeconomically diverse. A lack of affordable housing is not the only factor contributing to these new demographics, but it’s an important one.

High density affordable housing has many positive, related effects for residents¹³⁴. Reducing the distance between home and work saves residents travel costs and grants them more free time to live their lives. In the new-age, knowledge and innovation-based economy, density begets productivity. Building dense, central affordable housing will allow low-income residents to access the thriving, local economies which now offer the highest wages and best opportunities for social advancement. Again, we must remember that climate change is a deeply intersectional

¹³² “Out of Reach 2018,” *National Low Income Housing Coalition*, 2018.

¹³³ “State of the Nation’s Housing 2018,” Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, 2018.

¹³⁴ Daniel Shoag, “Removing Barriers to accessing high-productivity places,” Brookings Institution, January 31, 2019

problem. If done right, attacking social strife and inequality is part and parcel with attacking climate change.

Currently, the major policy tool to increase affordable housing stock—and thus decrease prices—is the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), which embraces the private sector by rewarding developers who build affordable housing with tax credits. But this program is woefully inadequate in scale and has become less efficient over the years¹³⁵. In addition, political resistance and aversion to integration leads most housing developments to be built in segregated clusters, leading to concentrated poverty and its associated effects, such as high crime, poor schools and racial segregation.

Inclusionary zoning (IZ)—the practice of forcing developers to include certain amounts of affordable housing in each new development—may be part of the solution. Across the country, well-run IZ programs have improved affordable housing stock and helped desegregate communities¹³⁶. Some IZ policies include density bonuses, which let developers skirt zoning laws and build more units in exchange for proportionally more affordable housing units.

But IZ is nowhere near a holistic solution. While it does provide a small number of affordable units, this stock is usually well below market demand. In San Francisco, one of the nation’s hottest housing markets, one building which was built under IZ received 6,580 applicants for its 95 units¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Stephen Malpezzi & Kerry Vandell, “Does the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Increase the Supply of Housing,” *Journal of Housing Economics*, 11, (2002): 360-380.

¹³⁶ Emily Thaden and Ruoniu Wang, “Inclusionary Housing in the United States,” *Lincoln Institute of Land Policy*, September 2017.

¹³⁷ Emily Badger, “These 95 Apartments Promised Affordable Rent in San Francisco. Then 6,580 People Applied.” *The New York Times*, May 12, 2018.

Radically expanded mass transit could drive down housing costs. Much of the land used for parking in cities could be freed to build new housing. Whether or not that housing is affordable is another question altogether, but with strong IZ laws and expanded social housing (more on that in a moment), the affordable housing stock could increase by a good amount. Getting cars off the road and getting people onto mass transit is thus a good, adjacent goal. Programs like New York City’s congestion pricing model—which will charge car drivers who drive in the busiest parts of the city in order to fund public transit—should help accomplish this. Congestion pricing shows promise, as it has been implemented successfully in cities like Singapore and London¹³⁸.

Some voices are calling for more direct intervention in the housing market, rather than a series of policy tweaks. The People’s Policy Project, a left-wing think tank, believes US cities should build one million municipally owned homes a year for the next ten years¹³⁹. According to the authors of the study; “Assuming an average cost per unit of between \$150,000– \$220,000, the government could finance and build ten million houses directly in a revenue-neutral fashion—simply by repealing the Republican tax plan.”

This, I think, is where we must land. Municipal social housing has the potential to add a significant amount of affordable housing stock and depress private market rental rates by offering stiff competition. Additionally, most social housing projects would be built and maintained as mixed-income developments. Mixed income developments help fight the effects of concentrated poverty and allow the municipality to charge rich renters more in order to

¹³⁸ “Lessons Learned From International Experience in Congestion Pricing” *US Department of Transportation*, February 1, 2017.

¹³⁹ Ryan Cooper and Peter Gowan, “Social Housing in the United States,” *People’s Policy Project*,

subsidize the low-income renters. With this model, most municipalities should be able to design cost-neutral developments. Crucially, as a municipality—not a profit-driven private developer—cost-neutral is good place to be. Factor in the positive externalities of increased affordable housing stock, and social housing is a no-brainer.

The city of Vancouver has fully committed to density and transit-oriented development as pillars of its climate strategy¹⁴⁰. But they have made mistakes which demonstrate why cities must expand public housing. In an attempt to decrease prices, Vancouver has bolstered the housing stock through the profit-driven private sector, meaning the new housing is generally comprised of upscale homes and condos. Simultaneously, federal funding for social housing has been slashed, destroying any hope of government run, affordable housing. Housing prices have skyrocketed because, despite a building boom, the housing being built does not match the housing which is being demanded. Low-income residents are being pushed out of the city center, or out of the city entirely. What is the natural conclusion to draw from this case study? Expanded social housing must be at the foundation of any plan to increase density *and* affordability.

One other lesson from Vancouver's affordability crisis: Cities must take steps to prevent foreign capital from "investing" in their city by buying properties. Cities should punish vacant tenants and rampant real estate speculation with taxes, which then help fund social housing.

¹⁴⁰ Corina McKendry, "Climate governance and social equity in Chicago, Birmingham, and Vancouver," *The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 21, no. 11, (October 2015): 1354-1371

Their “investments” reduce housing stock and push residents further from the city center, where the most valuable real estate is often concentrated.

As the world rapidly urbanizes, reducing emissions in cities will be the defining challenge of the 21st century. But the populous nature of cities also presents an enormous opportunity for efficiency. In order to achieve maximum efficiency, cities need to increase the affordable housing stock, which will, in turn, incentivize density. Thus, strategies like social housing, inclusionary zoning and expanded mass transit should be foundational elements of every city’s climate change mitigation plan. These strategies can help build dense, efficiently planned cities and reduce emissions from transport and cumbersome supply chains, all while tackling the social inequity caused by a lack of affordable housing. It’s just smart policy.