

PPR

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Thank you for picking up the latest edition of Pitt Political Review.

This has been a year of rebuilding for our organization, and the pages that follow were written and edited completely by first-time staff, many of whom are just beginning their Pitt careers. I am immensely proud of their efforts to maintain the quality of prose that PPR has produced over the past decade and-a-half.

The students who chose to lend their talents to this issue of PPR are not just political science majors looking to air their grievances. PPR's staff is composed of students of all stripes – some of us spend our nights at Hillman pondering the moral underpinnings of Locke's Empiricism, while others stay up late annotating diagrams of the the gut microbiome. However, driven by curiosity and intent, our writers and editors are all committed to sharing what they feel is important and discussing it both respectfully and responsibly.

Regardless of where our intellectual curiosities lie, PPR is first and foremost dedicated to producing sincere, balanced content. Our writers and editors have spent months perfecting their stories, reflecting on their choices, and ensuring that what they have produced is undisputedly based in fact. What you should find

in the pages to come is a serious, unconfined political discourse that demonstrates the highly intellectual depth of Pitt's campus.

This issue does not restrict itself simply to policy analysis. Our writers cast a wide net, and their work covers issues that range from the efficacy of safe injection sites to millennial mob mentality, to a nonpartisan approach to plastic consumption. I hope that in reading this edition of PPR you not only encounter new and interesting perspectives, but that you also learn something truly valuable.

Thank you to our advisors, Kristin Kanthak and Cindy Skrzycki, for helping us create a venue for political discussion that can realize itself in print. Thank you to Dean Primack and Chris Chirdon at the University Honors College for believing in us and being there every step of the way. And thank you to the gracious faculty members who lent their expertise as peer reviewers for this issue.

Don't be scared to join the conversation. If what you read in this issue sparks inside of you a conspicuous desire to speak your mind, come help us sculpt a dialogue at Pitt that you would be proud to be a part of. If not, or until then, keep reading, keep listening, and keep thinking.

-Noelle Eghbali
editor in chief

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SAFE INJECTION SITES: SOCIAL NECESSITY Or WHITE FLAG OF SURRENDER?

by Samuel Steinmetz

A subject of much of moral, legal, and political debate, safe injection sites, as defined by the Drug Policy Alliance are “legally sanctioned facilities where people who use intravenous drugs can inject pre-obtained drugs under medical supervision.”¹

Proponents of safe injection sites argue that it is necessary for communities to have designated spaces for addicts to safely use narcotics under the care of trained professionals. They claim these sites prevent drug overdoses and disease transmission, in addition to increasing public safety. Addicts are often times scared to enter

treatment and remain on the streets, where they can face physical and sexual violence from other addicts searching

for drugs. Advocates say that for people addicted to drugs such as opioids, the option to go somewhere safe, have their drugs tested, and use a clean

Opponents of safe injection sites often argue that these sites just offer a safe place to use drugs. They say that a safe place to use does little to aid addicts

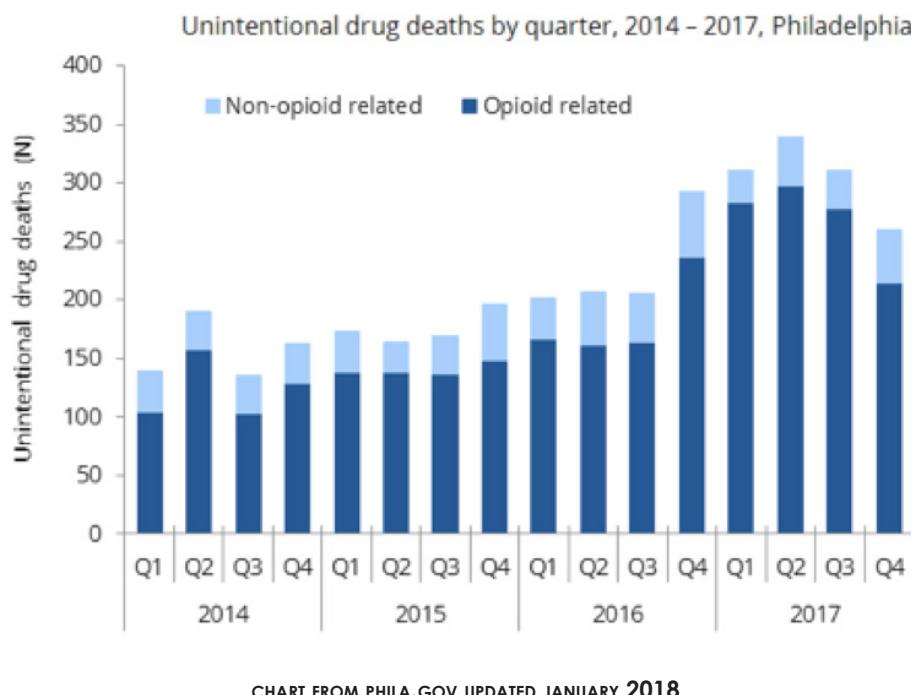


CHART FROM PHILA.GOV UPDATED JANUARY 2018

needle to do something that they would be doing anyway is a valuable and potentially life-saving resource.

in the recovery process, which is what they believe should be the main focus of the government's response to the opioid

crisis that has ravaged America over the last few years. An interesting argument to explore is that if there is a safe place to use drugs in a designated area, more drugs will appear there, as people who might otherwise resist drugs would take the opportunity to use safely. This argument must be balanced against any reduction in overdoses a safe injection site may bring to an area.

No state has been affected by the opioid crisis quite like Pennsylvania. In a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center, researchers found that among the 44 counties in the United States with more than one million residents, Allegheny and Philadelphia counties have the

first and second highest drug overdose rate per 100,000 residents.² In 2017, there were 1,217 unintentional drug overdose deaths in Philadelphia county, a 34 percent increase from 2016. The last two quarters of 2017 saw a decrease in overdoses, which could plausibly be attributed to large-scale drug seizures, transportation disruptions, and naloxone distribution in the area. But

even with this decrease, 2017's numbers remained significantly higher than anything seen in 2014 or 2015.³

In January 2018, among other initiatives, Philadelphia announced its intentions to become the first city in America to allow safe injection sites.⁵ This was already a controversial issue locally, and the

If someone you knew was battling addiction, would you want them to be able to use safely? Would you consider safe injection sites beneficial, lawful, and moral? Would you advocate for one in your neighborhood? These are the questions we all must ask ourselves.

announcement was met with fierce debate. In preparation for this backlash the city commissioned a study, titled "Supervised Consumption Facilities – Review of the Evidence". Conducted by Researchers from Thomas Jefferson University and Main Line Health, its goal was to observe other safe injection sites with a focus on the Insite Supervised Injection Facility in Vancouver, Canada.

In studying this site, we can draw several conclusions about how a similar facility could work in Philadelphia.

This study's findings were nothing short of incredible. Within the first three years of opening the facility in Vancouver, the rate of fatal overdose within 500 meters of the facility fell by an astonishing 35 percent. This was followed by a substantial 9 percent decrease in other Vancouver areas over the same time period. Over the same three years, 46 percent of people who utilized the facility entered treatment, implying that safe injection sites offer a pathway to treatment for addicts. Researchers also found that the facility prevented more than 80 HIV

infections annually, translating to a reduction of \$13.7 million in related medical care costs each year. Based on these results, researchers believe that operating a safe injection site in Philadelphia could save 76 lives, prevent 18 HIV transmissions, and save taxpayers millions of dollars per year.⁶

So, why isn't there a safe injection site in Philadelphia right now? There are a few

laws on the books that may make these sites illegal. Federal law, through the Federal Controlled Substances Act Section 856, states that: *"Except as authorized by this subchapter, it shall be unlawful to— (1) knowingly open, lease, rent, use, or maintain any place, whether permanently or temporarily, for the purpose of manufacturing, distributing, or using any controlled substance; (2) manage or control any place, whether permanently or temporarily, either as an owner, lessee, agent, employee, occupant, or mortgagee, and knowingly and intentionally rent, lease, profit from, or make available for use, with or without compensation, the place for the purpose of unlawfully manufacturing, storing, distributing, or using a controlled substance."*⁷ Simply put, the operation of any location that allows people to use drugs that are illegal under federal law is also illegal.

As for state law, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro has been quoted as saying, "... changes in state and federal law would need to occur for these sites to operate legally."⁸

He was referring to both the Federal Controlled Substances Act Section 856 and Pennsylvania Title 18 Crimes and Offenses Section 903: Criminal Conspiracy. This state law affirms that: *"A person is guilty of conspiracy with another person or persons to commit a crime if with the intent of promoting or facilitating its commission he: (1) agrees with such other per-*

larly damning for safe injection sites. Safe injection sites technically aid people in committing a crime, so employees and administrators may be liable for criminal conspiracy. This law would have to be amended if safe injection laws were to be considered legal in Pennsylvania.

However, it is possible that all of these legal problems don't need to be problems at all. According to Alex Kreit, a law professor at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law, there may be a loophole in the Federal Controlled Substances Act that would allow states or municipalities to operate safe injection sites.¹⁰ According to section 885 of the law: *"No civil or criminal liability shall be imposed by virtue of this sub-*

If not safe injection sites, how can we best combat the opioid crisis? Are tougher drug laws necessary? More advanced training for first responders? We may not have the answers yet, but one thing is for certain: in the time that we spend debating, tens of thousands will die.

*son or persons that they or one or more of them will engage in conduct which constitutes such crime or an attempt or solicitation to commit such crime; or (2) agrees to aid such other person or persons in the planning or commission of such crime or of an attempt or solicitation to commit such crime."*⁹ The second part of this definition is particu-

chapter upon any duly authorized Federal officer lawfully engaged in the enforcement of this subchapter, or upon any duly authorized officer of any State, territory, political subdivision thereof, the District of Columbia, or any possession of the United States, who shall be lawfully engaged in the enforcement of any law or municipal

ordinance relating to controlled substances.”¹¹ This may mean that anyone abiding by a state or local government drug law but breaking a federal one can avoid a federal charge. This is a legal grey area that is still under debate. Scott Burris, a law professor at Temple University, claims that local government may have the legal authority to set up a safe injection site following this logic. He says in his paper, *Federalism, Policy Learning, and Local Innovation in Public Health: The Case of The Supervised Injection Facility*, “It is ... within the authority of many municipal legislatures to authorize an SIF. City and county governments bear the brunt of the burden of service delivery and emergency response to drug abuse and may be best able to judge the necessity and effectiveness of locally implemented interventions.”¹²

These workarounds seem far-fetched, but they have been utilized before. According to the Pennsylvania Controlled Substance, Drug, Device and Cosmetic Act: “*Drug paraphernalia’ means all equipment, products and materials of any kind which are used, intended for use or designed for use in planting, propagating, cultivating, growing, harvesting, manufacturing, compounding, converting, producing, processing, preparing, testing, analyzing*

packaging, repackaging, storing, containing, concealing, injecting, ingesting, inhaling or otherwise introducing into the human body a controlled substance in violation of this act.”¹³ This clearly criminalizes the possession and use of needles intended for illicit drug use. However, in 1992, then-Mayor of Philadelphia Ed Rendell issued executive order 4-92, which authorized “the institution of a city-wide sterile syringe exchange program.”¹⁴ In 2002, Pittsburgh followed suit and opened a needle exchange of their own.¹⁵

The function and practicalities of safe injection sites have been considered, but the morality of them is a different question entirely. Andrew Lelling, U.S. Attorney for the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, has been a vocal member of the opposition, saying, “Supervised injection sites take a big step toward normalization of a horrible addiction.”¹⁶ Lelling would consider prosecuting the operators of a Massachusetts safe injection site because he believes that they run contrary to the goal of lowering supply and demand of potentially lethal drugs. On the flipside, Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner asserted that it is a “moral obligation” to open a safe injection site in Philadelphia, calling safe in-

jection sites “just one tactic in combating an addiction crisis that must be treated as a medical issue.”¹⁷

If someone you knew was battling addiction, would you want them to be able to use safely? Would you consider safe injection sites beneficial, lawful, and moral? Would you advocate for one in your neighborhood? These are the questions we all must ask ourselves. Any normalization of illegal drug use must be measured against the number of lives that could be saved. While we debate the value of these sites, legal battle continues to rage on in San Francisco, where the opening of a safe injection site was halted in July for fear of federal prosecution. Philadelphia, New York, and Seattle are still fighting in an attempt alleviate addiction. Politicians at every level of government are positioning themselves on this issue as it gains more importance and relevance with each passing year. If not safe injection sites, how can we best combat the opioid crisis? Are tougher drug laws necessary? More advanced training for first responders? We may not have the answers yet, but one thing is for certain: in the time that we spend debating, tens of thousands will die. ●

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THE FIGHT FOR A FREE INTERNET :

WEIGHING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS TO POLITICAL CENSORSHIP IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

by Garin Martik

Introduction

In 1997, Andrew Weinreich manifested the idea of social networking through an innovative website named SixDegrees.¹ The website allowed its users to create profiles and compile friend lists, all in an effort to connect individuals who would not have otherwise done so. Such an idea was groundbreaking for the time, a fact reflected in the three million

Facebook and YouTube cultivate an immense amount of interaction; they allow users from all over the world to connect in a matter of seconds, a once unimaginable feat. The number of individuals utilizing these sites has also grown tremendously in recent years. In the United States alone, it is estimated that seventy-three percent of adults are active on YouTube, while sixty-eight percent of adults

and monetary resources on such networks to reach constituents. The motivation for such efforts is obvious, as thirty-five percent of eligible voters choose to follow elected officials and candidates on social media.³ This enables a reciprocal relationship between political figures and a large number of constituents, encouraging users to become more active in the democratic process, especially tech-savvy generations who can be reluctant to engage in politics.

Social media has become a primary platform for political commentary. It is now commonplace for individuals to express and embrace their political views on social media. Ben Shapiro, a political commentator and host of “The Ben Shapiro Show,” is a prevalent example of someone who utilizes social media to share his views, utilizing Twitter to reach almost two million people. The Young Turks, an online news organization, delivers content daily to four million subscribers through YouTube, a popular video streaming service. Even individuals and groups who previously refrained from/were unable to disseminate their political

Maintaining an online presence allows these diverse parties to disperse political messages to vast audiences, creating a politically-educated populace.

people who used the site. However, the Internet could not sustain the company's innovative platforms, and it subsequently shut down in 2000.

It would be disingenuous to dismiss SixDegrees due to a lack of name recognition, for the company effectively laid the groundwork for one of the most significant developments of the modern era with social media. Today, networks such as

utilize Facebook, respectively.² Such an overwhelming majority is indicative of the fact that social media will soon be the main facilitator of human interaction.

With its nature of facilitating communication, it is no surprise that social media has become important in different domains, namely politics. Campaigns and interest groups spend exorbitant amounts of human

views to wide audiences now use social media platforms to support and reject political ideas and figures. Chrissy Teigen, an American model, has used social media platforms to make political statements against the President of the United States.⁴ In the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, victims took to social media to become activists, using social media platforms to advertise a demonstration against gun violence.⁵ Maintaining an online presence allows these diverse parties to disperse political messages to vast audiences, creating a politically-educated populace. Social media has undoubtedly established a prominent role in political education.

As this phenomenon grows, a major issue has emerged: that of online censorship. Large social media companies do not explicitly enact policies that target the political content of different groups of people. However, instances where harmless viewpoints that slightly deviate from the acceptable standpoints of large tech companies have been blatantly removed from their platforms, void of any justifiable reason.

Take PragerU, for example. The conservative, non-profit organization utilizes YouTube to share educational content, featuring a broad range of political commentators in order to spread conservatism, especially among younger populations. Its videos cover controversial topics, but none operate outside of the organization's mission to educate. Over the past couple years,

PragerU has made headlines when its videos have been constantly demonetized and/or censored by YouTube. Asserting that this censorship was not merely in error, the group's leaders accused the platform for purposely targeting them for "relative ideological differences." They also claimed that such actions were "unlawful censorship and discrimination."⁶ This had major negative impacts, not just on PragerU (as it suffered from a loss of revenue), but also its audiences, who lost the ability to view the content. Even-

major social media company.⁸ Media censorship does not limit itself to the right side of the political spectrum either. Dave Rubin, a left-wing personality on YouTube, released a video titled "Socialism Isn't Cool," which YouTube immediately demonetized. He later released the same video under the guise, "Capitalism Isn't Cool," and was met with no restrictions.

Unsurprisingly, considering the large amount of social media users and the potential impact it can have on political participation,

Providing the number of content-related post removals and account suspensions, along with an explanation for both, better allows users to understand the circumstances that led to their removal.

tually, PragerU initiated a lawsuit against Google for this very reason; the initial lawsuit was dismissed by a federal judge, yet the group plans to continue legal action against the tech company.⁷

More and more instances have since emerged. Diamond and Silk, a conservative voice on Facebook, was reportedly kicked off of the platform in April 2018 after being deemed "unsafe to the community," without any detailed explanation. Most recently, Alex Jones, an online conspiracy theorist, has been de-platformed by nearly every ma-

many people have crafted solutions to combat online censorship. Some have posed the idea of government regulation, effectively allowing for control over content suppression, while others favor self-regulation, which would call for tech companies to provide more transparency in their decisions to take individuals or content off of their platforms. No action has also been suggested. Proponents support the usage of free market forces in curing the issue of censorship. Each of the aforementioned solutions bear a certain level of pros and cons. Thus, the

main purpose of this essay will be to compare and contrast each of them, in order to find the most practical solution for both for social media companies and their users.

Government Regulation: High Risk, Low Reward

In the previous year, the thought of having stronger government influence over the Internet has gained momentum. Congress held a hearing in April 2018 over perceived biases of Facebook, with several of its members calling for more regulations on the matter.⁹ Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) both called for Facebook to lose its right to regulate their users' content, based on the perceived lack of neutrality of these platforms. Support for this solution is not limited to the government, either. A Pew Research Center study conducted in 2018 on public attitude towards large tech companies found that fifty-one percent of adults in the United States would back stricter regulations on tech companies.¹⁰ Even though support for this solution exists in both the government and the general public, more consideration is needed before implementation can occur.

Regulation of media content through legislation was attempted in 1949 with the Fairness Doctrine, which required all news outlets to spend time on controversial issues, but with an important caveat: opposing viewpoints needed to be delegated an equal amount of time. At first, this policy appeared rea-

sonable, as it was meant to bolster further discussion of such topics and provide audiences with a wider range of viewpoints. However, “FCC regulators would arbitrarily determine what ‘fair access’ is, and who is entitled to it, through selective enforcement. This, of course, puts immense power into the hands of federal regulators.”¹¹ The legislation soon became problematic, when the government utilized it to induce new challenges on political opposition. Former CBS president Fred Friendly reported the words of Bill Ruder, an official in the Johnson administration, in his book “The Good Guys, The Bad Guys, and the First Amendment.” The book reads: “Our massive strategy was to use the Fairness Doctrine to challenge and harass right-wing broadcasters and hope that the challenges would be so costly to them that they would be inhibited and decide it was too expensive to continue.”¹² Exploitation of the Fairness Doctrine detracted from its original purpose of equality, and as seen above, it was done so knowingly. The constitutionality of the doctrine was soon called into question, mainly due to its conflict with the First Amendment. By 1987, it was repealed by the Federal Communications Commission in a unanimous decision.

If the government were to regulate social media companies, such an undertaking would most likely resemble the Fairness Doctrine, insofar that it would allow the government to intervene and determine

what content can and cannot be pushed on social media platforms. The basic premise of this solution offers a slim chance for reward, on the basis that it would ensure true equality on the Internet.

However, the substantial risk this solution poses cannot be ignored, especially when considering the exploitation of its predecessor. While promising, it would be naïve to assume the government would not take advantage of this power and silence opposition, much in the same manner as the Johnson administration. Moreover, users operating under this doctrine would most likely be impacted by some form of “self-censorship.” The Heritage Foundation studied the Fairness Doctrine and concluded that “most broadcasters would be more reluctant to air their own opinions because it might require them to air alternative perspectives that their audience does not want to hear.”¹³ This logic makes sense when applied to the social media age; many audiences do not consider those whose content they do not agree with. Publishers then would most likely refrain from pushing even their own point of view.

Government should not be granted the power to regulate the Internet. History has shown that administrations often mishandle regulatory power, which can exacerbate the same problem they were meant to address.

No Regulation: Medium Risk and Medium Reward

Whereas some favor government action to ensure equality on the internet, others wish that no action be taken. The logic is straightforward: the Internet allots equal opportunity to everybody. Those who are not welcome on one platform could simply utilize another.

Proponents of this solution feel that any publisher experiencing unequal treatment by a large tech company could use another platform to push their content. Primarily, this would protect large tech companies, as government regulation would violate their rights as sovereign entities. Users would not be impacted either; free market principles would enable those affected to seek an alternative and accepting platform.

For popular publishers such as PragerU, the idea of moving poses little to no risk. With an established following, the group could easily move to another platform without a substantial loss of traffic or ad revenue. The same cannot be said for lesser-known content publishers, who could not transition as smoothly. Alternatives platforms exist, such as BitChute and DTube, yet they do not attract nearly the same amount of traffic as YouTube, which attracts nearly one billion unique users every month.¹⁴ Having fewer viewers presents a problem in and of itself, as viewpoints would not reach as many people. Moreover, less traffic hinders the profitability of publishing content.

This solution offers mixed results. Taking no action would be

beneficial to social media companies; they would be able to enjoy their status as private companies, devoid of government regulation. It would provide very little detriment to popular content providers, considering that a move to a fairer platform would not significantly impact their established following or their revenue. However, the solution would have more crucial implications for smaller content publishers. While free to move to another platform if their content was treated unfairly, this subset of providers could not enjoy the same opportunity that exists with larger sites, which boast heavy Internet traffic. The number of people to which they could disseminate their viewpoint would decrease. Thus, attempting to remedy online censorship through free market principles would not solve the issue for a large amount of people.

Self-Regulation: No Risk, High Reward

The most promising solution to the issue of internet censorship hails from the Content Moderation and Removal at Scale Conference, a small meeting of organizations and academic experts that crafted the Santa Clara Principles.¹⁵ These principles feature three main steps that social media platforms can take to ensure transparent content-regulation practices. First, the principles would require social media companies to publicly reveal the number of posts removed and accounts temporarily or permanently

suspended due to policy violations. Second, the principles advocate for better communications with affected content publishers. Essentially, it would allow for users to view affected content and understand why the content violated company policy. Lastly, they would allot meaningful appeal opportunities to any user whose content is removed or whose account is suspended.¹⁶

Kevin Bankston, director of New America's Open Technology Institute, issued a statement regarding the principles, explaining that "users deserve to know exactly when, why, how, and how much of their content is taken down, and have an opportunity to appeal those decisions."¹⁷ While this solution does not explicitly solve the issue of censorship, it provides the general public with a better insight into the censorship policies of large tech companies.

These principles could benefit all involved parties, especially users. Providing the number of content-related post removals and account suspensions, along with an explanation for both, allows users to better understand the circumstances that led to their removal. For those who are adversely affected, appeal offers the ability to challenge unwarranted and unfair decisions. Moreover, transparency allows the public to judge content-removal policies and treatment of specific users for practicality and legality. Social media companies would not be forced

to change their content policies or their enforcement, unless they act against the interests of their stockholders and consumers. Overall, the Santa Clara Principles would be the most practical and impactful method to solve the issue of online censorship.

Conclusion

Instances of unfair content treatment have become increasingly common in recent history. Entities across the political spectrum have experienced censorship, including content removal, account suspension, and/or de-platforming. It is increasingly important for platforms to encourage a wider range of viewpoints, considering the increasing number of individuals who become involved in the political process through social media. Diverse viewpoints aid the political process, as they allow for debate on public issues and lead to more informed opinions and constructive solutions.

Many have recognized this problem and prescribed different methods to solve it. Some favor government regulation, arguing that the 1949 Fairness Doctrine offers the framework for more equality on social media platforms. This solution offers promise, as it would remove the ability of social media companies to treat content unfairly. However, history has shown that government officials are willing to use such a policy to silence political opposition,

essentially recreating the original issue. There is no reason to doubt the recurrence of this issue. Therefore, this is the least promising solution to online censorship.

Other individuals have operated from a completely different perspective, offering that no action be taken. They feel that existing free market forces allow affected users to move to another platform to push their ideas, should they face unfair treatment. This course of action yields mixed results; it allows social media companies to retain their rights as private entities and does little harm to established users, who can take their established following to another source. However, smaller users can be adversely affected, as they may not be able to enjoy the same amount of heavy traffic they could otherwise get utilizing large social media websites.

The last solution, known as the Santa Clara principles, arose from a meeting of tech experts and does not directly address censorship. Rather, it provides a three-step process that allows users to challenge content removal and the public to better judge it. Companies would voluntarily agree to the principles and would still be respected as private corporations, eliminating the risks associated with other solutions.

After examining each of the individual solutions, the clear way forward is to enact the Santa Clara principles. Government regulation threatens a free and balanced

Internet, while no regulation puts an impassable obstacle in front of smaller-content publishers. The Santa Clara principles do neither of these things, as they involve no regulation from an outside authority and do not require users to move to different platforms; essentially, they would benefit all involved parties.

The Internet could theoretically continue down its current path, as the number of instances where users have been unfairly treated have been minimal. However, while some can recover from content removal or loss of ad revenue, some cannot recover from having their accounts temporarily or permanently removed from platforms. The latter part of the statement has been relatively limited; in fact, the only main instance of this in the past year has been Alex Jones, whose viewpoints are often deemed too controversial for the public sphere. However, his case sets a dangerous precedent. If accusations of hate can lead to de-platforming, then social media companies can arbitrarily determine which content is acceptable on their platforms. So while some people will be kicked off the Internet for controversial and offensive content, what is stopping social media companies from removing individuals with mainstream, yet unfavorable viewpoints? Users may not be concerned with this issue, but it bears significant importance for the future of a free and open Internet, as well as the political process. ●

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UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE AND POLITICS: THE POLITICIZATION OF FACTS

by Karyn Bartosic

All information herein about the office of Attorney General of the United States was up to date when this magazine went to press on December 7. Due to this, any changes since, which are likely, are not discussed.

The United States' intelligence community has a good deal of independence from the president and political sway, but that is not to say it goes unchecked; there are several ways by which the intelligence community can be held accountable for its actions. Issues can arise when the intelligence community becomes politicized, the truth becoming warped as it is brought into partisanship and policy fights. Intelligence communities are first and foremost devoted to gathering facts and must be treated as such; the intelligence community should not be used to pander to one party or the other in support of a certain policy, and agencies should not be shamed for supplying facts that don't fall in line with what politicians would like to hear. Intelligence must already strive to balance providing facts and analysis as accurately as

possible, yet also as quickly as possible before the subject becomes irrelevant; it does not need the added obstacle of politicization in its endeavors to protect the country.

Firstly, it is important to dispel the notion that any portion of the intelligence community has free access to any surveillance method they choose; public complaints claiming the government and its various intelligence organizations can do whatever it wants are blatantly false. Institutions have been put in place to ensure that agencies

Intelligence is first and foremost devoted to gathering facts and must be treated as such.

are not overstepping their bounds into citizens' privacy and are adapting to protect citizens as technology advances. The directors of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), for example, have a ten-year term, which helps insulate agency leaders from electoral politics. Although former FBI Director James Comey's tenure was cut short, which is discussed below, Comey

provides an example thereof; he was appointed in 2013 by President Obama, and at the time of his firing had six more years left in office. That tenure would have outlasted President Trump's first term, keeping the directorship from the political fray. Along with that, there are many legal protections when it comes to the firing of an FBI director and other senior political appointees, mostly necessitating a legitimate reasoning and proof for their firing.¹ These protections help to distance FBI directors from politics in an institutional sense.

This is not to say that there is no operational accountability for the Bureau. The FBI is accountable to several people and institutions: the Attorney General—the head of the Department of Justice—, the president, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), Congressional Intelligence committees, press' leaks to the public, and, the most powerful check, Inspectors General.² These actors work in tandem to monitor intelligence actions taken; for example, all intelligence surveillance activities by the

FBI must be approved by the FISC, while the Attorney General acts as the main oversight for the FBI. Although the Attorney General is an extension of executive power, the multiagency process affords the FBI a good deal of independence from Executive politics. Attorneys General have, throughout the history of the position, upheld a precedent that although appointed by the President, they work for the people, going against the President's wishes if they think it to be necessary. Present day you need not but to look at Jeff Sessions' recusal from the Russia Investigation, an action which incited President Trump's ire, yet upheld Department norms in his office's independence from presidential sway.

In terms of individual independence, the distance each official has from presidential and political influence varies greatly. Appointees who do not require a Senate confirmation, for instance, are far more beholden to the president's wishes and the sways of politics. The general precedent is that the FBI is as apolitical an institution as possible, the president and the FBI director keeping their distance so as to not seem too meddlesome from either view. The staggered appointment of officials like the FBI director and the protections from the firing thereof help to keep separation of powers in place; up until the firing of James

Comey there had only ever been one FBI director fired by the president: William Sessions in 1993, due to an ethics scandal. Sessions had reportedly used an FBI plane and limo for personal use and installed a security fence around his home on the government's dime. Sessions denied wrongdoing and newly inaugurated President Clinton fired him.³ This obvious legal infraction is in stark contrast with the muddy reasons for Comey's dismissal.

The Inspector General (IG), currently Michael Horowitz, is an important internal, impartial audi-

It is a singularly American outlook which demands such a high level of public accountability for its espionage and intelligence agencies.

tor of the Intelligence community. The IG's semiannual reports, and any others which he publishes, are of paramount significance to the monitoring of intelligence agencies. A recent example is Horowitz's report on James Comey regarding his decision to release details pertaining to the Clinton email investigation just before the 2016 presidential election. His impressively thorough report concluded that although Comey's decision to release the October 28 letter was not politically influenced, it failed to recognize years of Bureau norms and policies. The decision was

done in favor of Comey's self-stated mission of "maximum transparency" between the agency and the public. The largest norm breaches were Comey's departure from the 60-day norm—that information that has the potential to influence electoral politics not be released to the public within 60 days of the election—and the lack of communication between himself and then AG, Loretta Lynch, about the letter.⁴ Although his choice came from a place of apparent good intention—when he took the office he stated his intention for as much transparency with the public as was secure and possible, which from the start was against the Department's "stay silent" and "take no action" principles⁵—it was not ideal for the image of the neutral Bureau; the possible effects the letter may or may not have had on the 2016 election only add to the mayhem created by a number of other extraordinary factors, especially Russian involvement.

One of the most powerful checks on the Department of Justice (DOJ) power is the legislation outlining the role of a Special Counsel. We have heard a lot about this position since it came to light that there was possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia during the 2016 election cycle and Robert Mueller was appointed Special Counsel of an

investigation thereof. A Special Counsel is appointed following a recusal of the United States Attorney General, in this case Jeff Sessions, and is granted all the powers of an Attorney General; Mueller cannot therefore create rights or laws.⁶ He is there to carry out the investigation at hand. There is consultation with the Attorney General about the jurisdiction and authority of the Special Counsel, but Mueller has a great deal of independence from the president, which gives him the ability to be impartial, especially in a case sensitive to the president, as with the current situation. Previous to the recent resignation of Sessions per Trump's request⁷, Mueller could only be fired by Rod Rosenstein, the Deputy Attorney General; that firing power is highly regulated by the

grounds on which a Special Counsel can be removed. Matthew G. Whitaker, the Chief of Staff to Sessions, is now the Acting Attorney General⁸, and therefore now has direct oversight of the Mueller investigation.

Sessions, during his time as Attorney General, while following through on many of Trump's policy wishes, did defend the Mueller investigation several times against Trump's wishes. This was highly suggestive that Sessions was not beholden to Trump, and quite possibly this lack of loyalty was a driv-

ing reason for Trump's want to urge him out of office. This is a great example of the dilution of a President's power; he functions through appointees who act of their own volition. There are more concerns now with the appointing of Whitaker and what he might possibly do to the Mueller investigation. As previously mentioned, firing Mueller would almost certainly lead to accusations of obstruction of justice, so it is highly unlikely that Whitaker will fire Mueller. There are, however, other ways in which Whitaker can curtail the investigation. The

Facts are the impartial truth, and the truth should not and cannot become beholden to partisan politics, warped into whatever is most useful to whomever is in power.

most likely options would be limiting what information is released both to Congress and the public in Mueller's final report, a power Whitaker now has as acting Attorney General. Whitaker could also strangle the investigation by cutting the budget. The latter scenario is one that Whitaker has previously proffered, which has led to many officials calling for his own recusal, including both Congressional Democratic leaders, Rep. Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Chuck Schumer.⁹ This seems less probable than Sessions' responsible recusal as Whita-

ker has proven himself a Trump loyalist. Trump and Whitaker must also tread lightly due to the now Democratic-controlled House, out of which more oversight is likely to emerge come the new Congressional session in January 2019.

The President cannot, therefore, accomplish whatever he wants unless he is willing to accept the consequences of firing the officials who are not doing his bidding. Because of this, generally the more politically savvy a president is, the more of his particular will he is able to accomplish; Trump has evidently not been as successful in this endeavor as have many of his predecessors, choosing instead to simply ignore political norms in favor of his own agenda. It is a general practice that these appointees eschew politics as much as they can,

especially those in the intelligence community, whether for self-serving reasons or for upholding their department and its power¹⁰; for better or for worse, the independence of these appointees serves as an important buffer between presidential will and the policies actually implemented. A Trumpian example of this is Christopher Wray, the former DOJ lawyer who Trump chose to succeed Comey.

Wray's appointment was a surprise to many, as he was not on the shortlist of candidates Trump released shortly before choosing the

new FBI director.¹¹ In 2004 Wray was the top criminal prosecutor for the government and has had a long and distinguished career, often described as understated and principled.¹² Amidst the current turmoil, many at the time of his nomination feared Wray would not be strong in standing up for justice in the face of Trump, but thus far Wray has proven these skeptics wrong. Since being in office Wray has stood up for the Bureau and well as Mueller, stating a belief in Russian electoral meddling, much to Trump's ire.¹³ Officials like Wray who take their position and duty seriously are prime examples of the built-in checks on the president's personal ambitions and power.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), particularly recently, has faced a lot of criticism for having too much power and freedom; it does have power, but the agency is still accountable. The CIA exists by statute, as does the FBI, and is beholden mostly to Congress. In its earlier days, notably under the leadership of Allen Dulles, the CIA did have more independence than it maybe should have, but the relationship gave Dulles the power he wanted, and to the president, plausible deniability should anything go wrong. That status quo ended abruptly after the Bay of Pigs invasion. Dulles' successor gathered what is commonly referred to as the "family jewels"—all the CIA's secrets it did not, and does not, want the world to know, though

some jewels have escaped their lock and key. This led to a thorough investigation of the CIA's activities, including the jewels, leading to increased oversight of their actions. Restrictions have only increased since the '70s; today any proposed covert action must pass through a heavy vetting process; most proposals do not even make it through to proposal to the Congressional Intelligence Committees. There is more legal involvement with US covert operations than in any other country by a wide margin.¹⁴ It is not the case that the CIA is unchecked; it is by nature, and understandably reticent with sharing its knowledge and actions with the public. It is a singularly American outlook which demands such a high level of public accountability for espionage and intelligence agencies. Americans do not like to blindly accept any actions taken by the government, the result of a deep-seated distrust of big government power which harkens back to the United States' very founding. This cultural norm, while understandable given history, can be detrimental to the efficacy of the intelligence community.

Recent expansion of surveillance powers has come in response to 9/11, arguably the greatest failure of US intelligence to date, though the intelligence community is not entirely to blame. Regardless of fault, 9/11 spurred the USA PATRIOT Act ('01) and the creation of the Department

of Homeland Security ('02), both immediate responses necessary to strengthen domestic intelligence action. On September 18, 2001, in Public Law 107-40, Congress authorized the president to use "all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided" the 9/11 attacks.¹⁵ This authorization is the basis for military detentions without trial, targeted killings, and the existence of Guantánamo Bay, among other actions taken by the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11. On the campaign trail, Obama expressed heavy criticism of Bush's actions, though once he was in office, was not as harsh in reversing Bush-era policies as many expected him to be. Although Obama did close CIA black sites and severely limited approved interrogation tactics, he expanded domestic government surveillance further with the construction of Cyber Command, a 1 million square foot NSA data center at Camp Williams in Utah and left many military black sites active.¹⁶ This provides evidence of the inescapable truth of intelligence: it is often necessary to take unsavory actions in order to best protect the country. This is at odds with the ideals our nation was founded upon, and this paradoxical tension has existed from Washington's spy ring to the formation of the OSS to the current-day CIA.

If these institutions have been

designed with as many organizational proximity buffers between intelligence and presidential powers as possible, why is it that they are increasingly mentioned and pulled into the political circus? The answer to that lies in the personal proximity between some politicians and intelligence officials and, more importantly, in the power policymakers hold over the intelligence community. Dulles would likely be appalled by how beholden his beloved CIA now is to Congressional authority; during the Vietnam War, even with the lax CIA governing policies of the time, Dulles said he and the agency were put under a lot of pressure to produce analysis reports which fell in line with military goals, rather than a truthfully balanced account of the situation. There is a history of closeness between intelligence leaders and presidents, as was the case with Dulles and all three presidents who were in power during his career in the CIA; this is also seen in the FBI with Hoover during his forty-year tenure as Director of the FBI. Much of this intimacy stemmed from the dynastic nature of politics which was especially a factor in Dulles and his brother's rise to power—their grandfather and uncle both served as Secretary of State—and the prevalent “old boys’ network”; these tendencies have not completely disappeared but have been significantly less prominent in recent years. The close ties have

diminished on a personal level, with the power balance has shifting more and more to Congress. Flaws in intelligence are not the sole reason for failures of the intelligence community, though politicians often allude that this is the case. This is not to say that intelligence is perfect—that is arguably impossible; however, the urge to assume bad intelligence if there is no evidence of direct political manipulation is wrong. Intelligence reports are not created in a political vacuum. The larger issue, quite prevalent today, is the use of intelligence by politicians as a public relations tool, recently shown by the Nunes memo.¹⁷

On February 2, 2018, Rep. Devin Nunes, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, and his office released a four-page memorandum about early actions taken in the Russia investigation to the public. The report contained misleading information about how the FBI attained warrants used to investigate Trump and his allies. In July 2018 the FBI itself released heavily redacted proof of the completely above-board process through which the Bureau attained the FISA warrant on Trump adviser Carter Page, but the damage had already been done. The Nunes memo is proof of the power Congressional oversight has over the intelligence community; highly classified information is shared with the Congressio-

nal committees, but, as proved by Nunes, that does not guarantee the information is kept secret. This memo in particular hurt the credibility of the FBI, adding to the maelstrom of controversy which persists around the Russia investigation.¹⁸ It is proof of how susceptible intelligence is to its watchers, which begs more oversight of the watchers themselves, possible through the voters and others in power who have influence over these watchers.

Nunes’ actions continued the unsavory trend of leaking partisanship and politics into intelligence institutions. With the massive polarization of politics today, the importance of keeping intelligence apolitical cannot be overstated. Decisions on intelligence operations and policies alike are dependent on the analysis that comes from all sectors of the intelligence community and have the capability to affect millions of people. At its core, intelligence is, and always has been, about gathering facts; facts are the impartial truth, and the truth should not and cannot become beholden to partisan politics, warped into whatever is most useful to whomever is in power, else we will be left in a vulnerable state, the side who happens to be in power unwilling to accept truths which do not fit their particular world view. That would be truly devastating. ●

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ELEVEN SILENCED, MILLIONS UNHEARD:

Disappointing voter turnout in the wake of the Tree of Life shooting

by Noelle Eghbali

“We are not together. And that’s a problem.”

The words of Wasiullah Mohamed, a Pitt alum, clung to the midday mist for a little longer than just a moment. He was right.

It was November 5, 2018, nine days after the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in United States history. Eleven worshippers had been killed, and seven more were injured at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill – hardly two miles away from the Cathedral of Learning, where a seemingly endless crowd of Pitt students had gathered at noon to mourn the loss of eleven innocent lives.

Mohamed, the Executive Director of the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, was making a call to action. He commended his audience for showing up on this characteristically foggy Pittsburgh Monday, but he implored, “Are you going to show up tomorrow?”

It was a question well worth asking. Too often, when faced with loss, we seem able only to respond

with our words, our thoughts, and sometimes our prayers. Too often, we fail to respond with action. We make demands to our representatives, ultimatums on social media, cries for help. Many ask, “What more can I do?”

This past year, it has been made especially clear: vote.

On November 5, just one day before what many considered to be the most important midterm elections in our nation’s history, many speakers at the University-organized vigil used their time to express just how desperately us students needed to vote. Their messages were clear and important, and they were messages that the large majority of us probably felt like we had been bombarded with over the past couple of months. There was only one massive problem: many of us didn’t actually vote.

Record turnout?

Not just at the University of Pittsburgh, but also at college campuses across the United States, college students have continued to

prove themselves unreliable voters, regardless of ideological alliance. Many of us celebrated spikes in voter turnout from the 2014 midterm elections to the 2018 midterm elections, but numbers



There was only one massive problem: many of us didn't actually vote.

were still shockingly low. According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University Tisch College, about 31 percent of youth (ages 18-29) came out to vote in this year’s midterm elections, making it the

highest rate of turnout in at least 25 years.¹ In 2014, CIRCLE estimated a turnout of merely 21 percent.² While this increase in such a short amount of time is dramatic and deserves recognition, it's hard to resist asking: what about the other sixty-nine percent of America's youth? Were they registered? Why didn't they vote?

With specific regard to college students, at Penn State University, NextGen reported 1 in 4 registered voters to have casted ballots by 6 pm, up from about 1 in 20 registered voters in 2014.³ But what about the other seventy-five percent of registered voters? NextGen also reported that at the University of Florida, students cast 1,000 more votes than they did in 2014 by 6 pm. Undergraduate enrollment at the University of Florida totalled 39,565 in 2017. Is a two-and-a-half percent increase in students casting ballots really something worth celebrating?

These are questions without definite answers, but a general conclusion that we can do better is indisputable. It goes without saying that there are plenty of factors to consider when attempting to uncover the reasons as to why more young people aren't making it to the polls.

A closer look

If enormous campuses like Penn State and the University of Florida can only convince a frac-



Across three polling locations on the University of Pittsburgh's campus – Posvar Hall, the William Pitt Union, and the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial – only 3,000 students voted, making up about a quarter of Pitt's population.

tion of their vast student populations to head to the polls given that these students are registered in the first place, there exists a clear need to convince a still large majority of students to get out and vote.

One university that has found huge success in both registering and mobilizing its students is Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. Northwestern recently piloted a one-of-a-kind outreach program that mediated one-on-one peer conversations between incoming students at every "welcome station" on student move-in day.⁴ These conversations aimed to ensure that every incoming student was registered and planning to vote, and as a result, 95 percent

of eligible students registered to vote either at Northwestern or as absentees in their hometowns.⁵ In 2012, before the program's launch, Northwestern saw turnout rates hovering around 50 percent. After the program's institution in 2016, turnout skyrocketed to a staggering 64 percent, which exceeded the national youth average by 31 percent.⁶

Northwestern's revolutionary program has shown us that college students can and will vote. But what holds them back? What keeps so many of us from casting that ballot?

College students are certainly not the first population that comes to mind when considering the victims of voter suppression throughout the United States. Many speculate that low turnout rates among college students could be due to voter apathy or non-attitudes. People may simply not care about politics; others may enjoy what some call "rational ignorance", or the ability to free-ride off of people who happen to like politics or have reason to be well-educated in politics. However, college students face a host of unique challenges when it comes to casting their votes.

Suppressing the young, educated vote

First and foremost, an overwhelming amount of states still do not permit absentee voting, which often prevents students studying outside of their birth states from

casting a ballot. On top of that, following the Supreme Court's overturning of Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in 2013, dozens of states have notably implemented strict voter identification requirements, some of which reject student identification as a valid form of ID.⁷ Five years after the ruling, nearly a thousand polling places have closed throughout the United States, many of which used to exist in predominantly African-American counties.⁸ Other voter ID laws require proof of residency with forms that college students are far less likely to have, such as bills, insurance cards, or tax records.⁹ A 2016 study published by the University of Michigan found a recent decline in driver's license ownership among college students, which conversely displayed a decline in a form of identification frequently needed to vote in states with relatively strict voter ID laws.¹⁰

Perhaps one of the most shocking pieces of new legislation on the ballot during this year's elections was the state of New Hampshire's proposed equivalent to something of a poll tax on out-of-state students, not to go into effect until 2019 if ratified. Proposed by Republican Gov. Chris Sununu, the bill would require students and other part-time residents to become permanent residents of New Hampshire in order to vote. This would potentially require registering one's vehicle with the

state and obtaining a New Hampshire driver's license, which can cost several hundred dollars.¹¹

Another newly refurbished voter ID law was back on the ballot this November in North Carolina, with no mention of whether student IDs would be a valid form of identification. The same issue was back on the ballot in Arkansas, too, while restrictive election laws already on the books have seriously weakened electoral integrity and continue to threaten the disenfranchisement of voters across the United States. Although a number voter ID laws in discussion today are merely prospective, they are a telling portrayal of the lengths local and state governments are willing to go to in order to suppress the young, educated vote.

In this year's election cycle in North Carolina, GOP officials not only attempted to prevent stu-

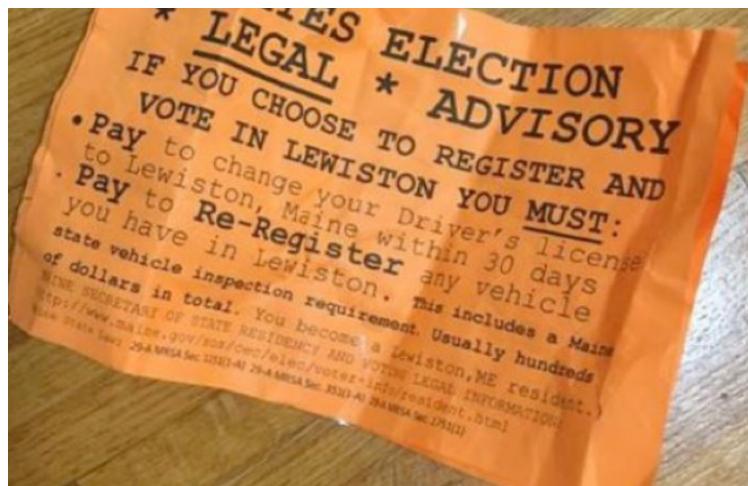


The mishaps at the library, just down the road from the Tree of Life synagogue, were “like a slap in the face” to some voters.

dents from voting, but they also barred students from running for office. The GOP-controlled board of elections in Pasquotank County voted to disqualify Montravias King, a senior at Elizabeth City State University – a historically black college – from running for city council, based on claims that King couldn't use his student address to establish residency. King has been registered to vote there since 2009.¹² The Republican chair of Forsyth County's board of elections moved to shut down an early voting site because students at another historically black college, Winston-Salem University, supposedly received extra credit for voting.¹³ He offered no proof of this. In Watauga County, the GOP-controlled board of elections voted along party lines to close both an early and general voting location at Appalachian State University. Early voting in the county was thus limited to one site in Boone, creating the state's third-largest voting precinct that exceeded the location's capacity more than six times over.¹⁴ What's more, the precinct had only thirty-five parking spaces. Over a mile from campus and inaccessible by public transportation, it saw hardly any students willing to walk along the highway to cast their ballots. In North Carolina alone, at least sixteen early voting sites on college campuses were closed ahead of the 2012 election. Keep in mind that this list of roadblocks

to the young vote arose in one state alone. It's no mystery that both younger and educated Americans tend to vote in favor of Democrats, and it's hardly surprise that legislatures attempting to silence their votes are mainly controlled by Republicans. That's why it's crucial that those of us who still can vote exercise our right to fix this awfully broken system.

Unfortunately, direct, intentional targeting of students is not uniquely the province of legislatures. In 2016, a number of campuses in Maine were littered with flyers providing false information about voting and registration requirements, similar to the controversy broadcasted nationally concerning Facebook's permission of Russian propaganda to perfuse to its millions of users. At Bates College in Bangor, Maine, orange fliers distributed around dorms and dining halls falsely told students that "to register and vote in Lewiston, you must pay to change your driver's license to Lewiston, Maine, within 30 days" and "pay to re-register any vehicle you have in Lewiston."¹⁵ Those of us whose entrances into adulthood were largely sculpted by technol-



ORANGE FLYERS DISTRIBUTED AHEAD OF THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION THROUGHOUT BATES COLLEGE IN BANGOR, MAINE (IN "SUPPRESSING THE YOUNG, EDUCATED VOTE")
COURTESY OF BANGOR DAILY NEWS (2016)

ogy are uniquely unequipped to navigate the dangers of misinformation; we're also impressively uninformed about the process of voting in general. It's no shock that college students are so vulnerable to schemes like these.

The takeaway from the frequency of the instances mentioned above should not simply be that voter suppression is real. It is absolutely crucial for us to understand that voter suppression has been and will always be intentional. It doesn't need to be that way, and it shouldn't be that way. The crowd on the Cathedral lawn roared every time a speaker urged us to vote, as if doing so would be an act of defiance. The prevalence of voter suppression here in the United States has conditioned us to think that voting is something we can do when we want to retaliate, when we want to go against the grain. Voting is our civic duty,

and it should be as routine as getting our oil changed or our cholesterol checked. While it's great to see citizens and students rally in support of a cause, the question of whether or not we are going to vote for what we believe in should never have to be asked.

What happened in Pittsburgh?

We simply cannot return to the idea that many college students refrain from voting because of apathy or non-attitudes in this case. A little over a week after the deadliest attack ever on the Jewish community, here in the city of steel, could apathy really have kept us from voting?

Wasiullah Mohamed's words did not seem like they would leave us on Monday, but apparently, they did.

Across three polling locations on the University of Pittsburgh's campus – Posvar Hall, the William Pitt Union, and the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial – only 3,000 students voted, making up about a quarter of Pitt's population.¹⁶ Unfortunately, absentee ballot submission among students was not reported, although absentee votes across Allegheny County just about doubled from

2014. Even up eighteen percent from an embarrassing seven percent turnout in 2014, voter turnout at Pitt – after a mass shooting, to boot – falls shockingly short of the national average, which came to about forty-five percent.¹⁷ How did this happen? Why did this happen?

Let's consider a scenario in which a student previously held back from voting due to apathy or non-attitudes was so moved by the vigil on November 5 that he or she decided it was time to finally vote. Could they have done so? Absolutely not.

Pennsylvania is not one of the fifteen states that permits same-day voter registration; voters must be registered 30 days prior to Election Day.¹⁸ So, if a student wanted to register even on the day of the tragedy in Squirrel Hill, it would have been too late if to vote in this November's elections.

If a student already registered back home was motivated by the shooting to actually vote this year, it would be too late to change registration, so their only option would be to vote through absentee ballot. The process of doing so is absurdly inconvenient. First, you must request to vote with an absentee ballot by mail. Then, you must wait to receive the ballot in the mail. Once you've received it and marked it, you must send it back to your County Election Office and hope that your form arrives before Election Day. This

year in Pennsylvania, absentee ballots were due on November 2, four days early. Would an absentee ballot, initially sought out on October 27, have made it in time? Chances aren't high.

For students registered to vote here in Pittsburgh, casting a ballot was still no easy feat. Stronger turnout this year shed light on a number of polling location mishaps. Not only did ACLU at-

even unable to open voting machines and were forced to request emergency ballots, although only three voters could fill one out at a time. The mishaps at the library, just down the road from the Tree of Life synagogue, were "like a slap in the face" to some voters.²¹ Multiple incidences of vote switching in several Pittsburgh districts were reported throughout the day, too. Vote switching, likely due to



TRIBUTES TO THE ELEVEN VICTIMS OF THE MASS SHOOTING AT THE TREE OF LIFE SYNAGOGUE IN SQUIRREL HILL.

orneys at the Allegheny County election court argue that there were unprecedented problems this election with absentee ballots not arriving to voters on time, voters throughout the day were struck with long lines, broken machines, and unprepared poll workers.¹⁹ Some students were forced to travel nearly an hour from campus to cast their ballots, while others waited in lines at closer sites like the Carnegie Library, a major location that did not open on time due to a judge of elections' medical emergency.²⁰ Some sites were

faulty and outdated machinery, occurs when a voter selects one candidate, but the other is chosen. How frequently does this happen to voters who are unaware that it happened? And how much do instances like these discourage new voters from actually getting out to the polls? Even if the perception of errors in voting machines is more serious than the actual effects or frequency of these errors, such perceptions alone could still drive down turnout and effectively have the same impact that faulty machinery would have had in

the first place. In the country that was the first to put a man on the moon, in the country that boasts the world's largest economy, in the country home to one of the most elite higher education systems in the world, why is our voting system so unabashedly – and so intentionally – broken?

Are we going to show up tomorrow? If you let us.

It's evident that students in Pittsburgh and throughout the United States faced a host of issues casting their ballots this electoral cycle – possibly the most important electoral cycle in our nation's history. How many ballots must go uncast, how many students must be turned down, how many voices must go unheard before we finally allow students and young people to achieve the representation they are entitled to by our Constitution? Whether our reasons for voting are products of socialization and mass media, based on material interests or group attachments, or simply borne out of our own personal motivation to do what is right, it is undeniable that human beings can be motivated to cast a ballot for something they believe in and that they deserve to do so, too. The question is: When are we going to let them? ●

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The Influence of Globalization on Today's Protests

by Anushay Chaudhry

Mass protests are becoming more prevalent in developing nations as certain policies and leaders are exposed for disregarding the demands of the public. But with a growing and visible collective voice comes heightened brutality in the backlash carried out by police and militias, especially in third world nations given their growing political vulnerabilities. Because the ramifications of these mass demonstrations carry a lot of force in the international arena, globalization needs to continue to function as a catalyst for protests by strengthening and enhancing the political and economic interactions between sovereign states.

Globalization is a multifaceted mechanism. However, focusing more on its process of deregulating economies, laws, and domestic affairs will better help explain one way that it attempts to integrate the nations and societies of the world through protests.¹ That is to say that the process of globalization catalyzes mass movements by allowing them to mobilize on

a global scale, bringing nations closer together economically and politically, and consequently strengthening them. This development is partially a result of economic interdependence, or the belief that economic reliance between states generates peace and prosperity in the international arena when it comes to policy implementation. However, since 1999, a series of demonstrations commonly known as the anti-globalization movement has

been addressing institutional inequalities that are created because of economic interdependence.² By condemning the practices of neoliberalism, also known as corporate globalization, the anti-globalization movement aims

to increase the public's control of policy while denouncing the influence of powerful corporations in legislation. Neoliberalism supports privatization by decreasing taxes and other regulations so public services can be privately controlled with less interference

When the voting power of a particular country is determined by its capital and contribution to a global institution like the IMF, what is stopping neoliberal institutions and corporations from suggesting policies to national governments?

coming from the state. This is detrimental to developing countries because principles such as higher minimum wage are seen as an obstacle to business, rather than necessary for the advancement of people in third world countries.³

The tenets of corporate globalism have everything to do with profit and exploitation, with little regard for labor rights. When corporations have a monopoly over worker's wages, employers can hold down wages for many reasons and in many underdeveloped areas the best jobs are usually offered by big corporations that dominate local economies, leading to uncompetitive markets. One example is non-compete agreements, or documents that prohibit workers from working for a competitor of their former employer if they

Political freedom without economic freedom is impossible, and economic freedom without political freedom is pointless.

decide to leave their current job.⁴ These agreements help corporations control wages by preventing workers from quitting if wages begin to fall.

Movement constituents such as trade unionists, environmentalists, and anarchists are bringing attention to these issues by mobilizing efforts against the spread of neoliberalism specifically, and not globalization as a whole. The belief that globalization is a rip-off that only favors major corporations and the upper class could not be more wrong. According to the United Nations' Department of

Economic and Social Affairs, globalization helped the world GDP increase from 50 trillion USD in 2000 to 75 trillion USD in 2016.⁵ At this rate, it would do more harm than good for countries to turn their backs on globalization. However, it is important to note that the phrase "anti-globalization movement" is more commonly used by critics of the initiative and not its actual supporters. Many activists disagree with the label because it implies isolationism, rather than solidarity. By advocating to dismantle the influence of multi-

national corporations, the movement actually reflects principles of internationalism and member

prefer to self-identify with terms like "global justice movement" or "globalization activists."⁶ Simply put, members of the global justice movement explicitly state their opposition to neoliberalism and the movement itself as a part of globalization.

Mass demonstrations are more commonly aided nowadays by globalization's capacity to provide a systemic and prevalent platform of legitimacy to highlight particular movements.

However, certain tenets of globalization are seen as a threat to those in poverty due to the pos-

sible endangerment of social welfare programs. As wages become lower and social benefits are reduced due to the government's desire to cut programs financed through taxation, those in poverty are forgotten about since they are the ones most dependent on these programs. Additionally, the lack of social protection coming from the state results in a greater political vulnerability among these workers. Simply put, if they protest these injustices they might lose their livelihoods should the state decide to denounce their revolts. Developed countries, on the other hand, have social safety nets in place that are available to assist displaced workers. One example is the Trade Adjustment Assistance program in the United States, a policy that provides unemployed workers with aid.⁷

However, globalization itself is not at fault here (neoliberalism is), and the large decline in poverty in China and India between 1981 and 2001 is a great example of the advantages of global economic integration. It is estimated that the percentage of individuals earning \$1.08 a day, or living below the international poverty line, declined from 64% to 17% in China and from 54% to 35% in India within that time frame.⁸ There is substantial evidence to prove that these changes can be attributed to globalization. For example, in 1978, China opened its economy to foreign technology and

international markets. Consequently, in thirty years, its share in global exports of manufactured goods has risen considerably.⁹ Additionally, both China and India have benefited from globalization by gaining access to new technologies and export markets. This has led to both nations' development of new specializations that have allowed them to expand their positions in the global arena. Generally speaking, globalization merely functions as a directed missile, pursuing those living in poverty. Yet, instead of targeting them, it provides them with opportunity and employment, an initiative that is crucial for the advancement of developing nations.

Globalization at its core promotes the demand for international institutions –like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) –that advocate on behalf of financial security. But these organizations themselves are not properly taking on the responsibility of cultivating economic assistance in third world countries due to their endorsements of neoliberal practices. For example, the IMF was created in 1944 to help preserve the advantages of global integration by calling for international economic interdependence. Although a seemingly neutral institution, the IMF always ends up catering to the interests of powerful western countries. In fact, at the IMF, the voting power of a particular country is measured by

the amount of money the country contributes to the institution, rather than the size of its population.¹⁰ When the voting power of a country is determined by its capital and contribution to a global institution like the IMF, what is stopping neoliberal institutions and corporations from suggesting policies to national governments? In other words, the consequences of neoliberalism and corporate globalization are exemplified through the practices implemented by governments that act as companies. It's important to note that a significant principle of globalization is its dependence and reliance on international trade and investments in order to improve the interactions and integration between sovereign states. Yet, many who oppose globalization claim that when it is systematically instituted into policy and daily practices, the procedures carried out begin to align more closely with the norms and models implemented by large corporations. Establishments like the World Bank and the IMF lend more monetary support to advanced countries because funds that are distributed to third-world countries are not being compensated quickly enough, widening the financial gap and destabilizing the economic markets in developing nations.

It is also important to note that globalization is distinct from internationalization, or a mechanism that allows states to ad-

vance in areas that they could not do on their own before. A simple example of internationalization would be one country taking in another country's business venture. Internationalization supports collaboration between sovereign states, while globalization refers to a movement that intends to make states *closer* together.¹¹ The importance of international co-operation, an idea introduced by internationalism, calls for the need for international law in the global arena. As an illustration, indigenous people's mass movements throughout Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia have been a considerable veneer for the global justice movement and internationalization's initiatives to function under.¹² The rise of these movements can be attributed to the downfall of traditional governing models, or political systems where traditional principles were used as a basis to develop effective governance. This style of leadership collapsed due to the neoliberal elites who took control of policy and further increased the social, political, and economic disparities between indigenous people and elite groups of people. Additionally, in Bolivia, economic reforms backed by a U.S. enterprise to eliminate coca farming privatized state programs the 1990s.¹³ The corporate operation caused thousands of coca farmers to lose their jobs, and a protest was started by the leader of the coca farmers,

Eva Morales. In 2003, Morales extended the movement to the indigenous groups of Ecuador and Honduras to foster an alliance between the global justice groups in Latin America.¹⁴ The result was groups of indigenous people from across the Andean region collaborating to protest against the influx of neoliberal practices in policy, a hallmark of internationalism and a fortunate impact of globalization. While neoliberalism is considered an unfortunate side effect of globalization, the multinational alliance in South America showed that globalization can also do a world of good.

With the growing and visible public voice that comes with a mass protest, there are many notable instances where governments have tried to silence those protesting. One example is the demonstrations that occurred in Bangladesh this past summer. On July 29th in Dhaka, Bangladesh, two students were run over by a speeding bus on their way to school. A little earlier that same week, another student was run over by a taxi. The driver stepped out, but instead of taking the severely injured pedestrian straight to the hospital, he smashed the young boy's head with a brick and tossed him over a bridge. However, instead of these tragedies being overlooked as everyday occurrences, a wave of student demonstrators started demanding that the government improve road

safety. Anger erupted over the capital city's poor infrastructure and panic over dangerous conditions sparked protests that were unprecedented in the nation's history.

Last year, around 4,200 pedestrians died as a result of poor road conditions in Bangladesh.¹⁵ High school and college students took to the streets to show their outrage by blocking roads, intersections, and checkpoints. These students tried to maintain order by stopping vehicles without proper and legal reason to drive, controlling traffic patterns in the heat, and ensuring that anybody who was operating a vehicle had a valid license to do so. To ensure their protests weren't compromising anyone else's safety, the students even managed to create a special lane for emergency vehicles to pass through. After just four days, however, the protests turned violent when the police interfered. The government began to attack these demonstrators using tear gas and metal batons to disperse the protesters. The police were chasing students with knives, beating them with bats, and molesting young girls. The violence towards women in particular was so severe that the male students were forced to construct a human wall around the female students in order to protect them from any perpetrators. It's important to note that the political significance of protest movements is embedded in the fact that they cannot be controlled or regulated by any

institution, expanding the possibilities for change that were otherwise maybe not present in the legal and political framework of the state itself.

These student protests are so significant because they suggest that Bangladesh's political climate is being remodeled. The growing demand for the government to recognize human rights indicates that the current norms of the country are being challenged. The violations of humanitarian law and human rights can be a measurement for how globalized a nation is because globalization protects human rights through international law, highlighting the legitimacy of a state in the global arena. Additionally, international law orders states to be responsible for implementing legislative and judicial measures to ensure that human rights within its territory are being defended. The United Nations – an institution active in promoting humanitarian law and strengthening its implementation – expressed deep concern as the backlash continued to worsen. More specifically, the United Nations' Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, Mia Seppo, stated that the concerns expressed by the youth are valid, and the UN called upon all parties involved to keep the children and young people safe from any kind of violence.¹⁶ More examples of international responses from the global community include the US Embassy

in Dhaka's issued statement denouncing the violence towards the student protesters and the New York based organization, Human Rights Watch, condemning Bangladesh's government for "unlawfully attacking" student demonstrators for "peaceful criticism." The High Commission of Canada also announced Canada's concern for the student's safety and called for an effort against the government's violation of these democratic rights. Additionally, the European Union and Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister, Margot Wallström, both criticized Bangladesh's government for enabling the violence in Dhaka and demanded that the student's right to protest be recognized. The protests and brutality finally came to an end on August 6th when the government enacted a traffic act that punished accidental killing with a motor vehicle with a five-year prison sentence.¹⁷ All in all, because the students continued to advocate for globalization by protesting for the recognition of humanitarian law, they further expanded Bangladesh's political interactions in the global arena, proving that when globalization brings countries closer together, the response can solve humanitarian crises.

The violent backlash coming from police and militias is representative of the exploitation—or disregard for human rights and labor rights—that is associated

with neoliberal-like governance.¹⁸ Not only can neoliberal-like governance arise out of corporate globalization, but it can also be a product of a government's complete unwillingness to globalize. Without political globalization, many underdeveloped nations subject their citizens to human rights violations, and they continue to suppress their people by withholding many of the benefits of globalization, such as access to the internet. At the time of the protests in Bangladesh, the authorities had shut down the internet in hopes of ensuring news of the incidents did not make international headlines, and these attacks were not being properly recognized by the local media; only a handful of publications in Bangladesh were posting updates on the condition of the student protesters. Bangladesh's government tried to mitigate growing public concern when they stated that it's nothing more than a few teenagers with idle time and even urged protesters to return home. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated that she believed the protests were a political strategy that was manipulated to undermine the December 2018 general election. Censoring the internet effectively limited the protestor's access to the rest of the world, and consequently their access to social globalization. The demonstrations themselves, however, collectively showcased

the brutality of the police and their use of deadly force in response to the students' peaceful demonstrations. Bangladesh's student protests have verified the government's initiative to control the country through the destabilization and the downfall of democracy. The destruction of people and public resources for the advantage of those holding more power or higher authority is a trademark of neoliberalism. More specifically, in this case, the student protesters were extinguished and silenced to avoid further global criticism of Bangladesh's legislation and politicians. Simply put, the corruption of the government, exploitative legislation, and police interference is emblematic of the consequences of neoliberalism and the absence of healthy globalization.

The outbreak of revolutions that surfaced in a number of Arab countries nine years ago has also had a significant impact on political interactions between the sovereign states in the entire Arab region. The Arab Spring protests began in Tunisia when a 26-year-old lit himself on fire after facing public humiliation for not handing over his wooden fruit cart to the police. This incident provoked a series of protests all across Tunisia, ultimately forcing President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his regime to step down. A month later, he left the country and a series of uprisings

against strict regimes emerged all over the Middle East.¹⁹ States like Saudi Arabia—a country that revels in greater economic wealth than most other Arab countries—were not exempt from the impact of the revolutionary intensity of these mass demonstrations. In fact, the uprisings that occurred in Saudi Arabia enabled the citizens unite through these protests with other parts of the Arab world as they sought to collectively dismantle the political and social dynamics within their respective authoritarian regimes. For the ruling Saudi elites, political globalization is defined as less optimal hierarchy and more inconvenient democracy, and as a leading and growing force in the Arab region, Saudi Arabia is divided between its inherent intolerance for an open society and its economic position in an integrating world economy.²⁰ Saudi Arabia is a clear example of how economic and political globalization are distinct and often not achieved in tandem. However, in order for globalization to be successful both need to be present in a particular country.

Political freedom without economic freedom is impossible, and economic freedom without political freedom is pointless. The freedom and sovereignty of a state is invoked into existence when the people of the state, rather than actors inspired by neoliberal and corporate practices, exercise their

right to obtain their political and economic fates through protests and mass movements. The current international, political, and economic arrangement has many vulnerabilities—growing poverty, corruption, abuse of political and economic power, et cetera. However, when presented with these injustices, the best possible choice is to simply continue with globalization. In general, globalization can generate many impediments for those in poverty, however, it also conjures a realm of opportunity that countries can employ. The loose and ill-defined remarks made to explain the negative impacts of globalization on poverty are virtually those of correlation, and correlation does not equal causation. The urgency for globalization conveys the impression that it is a hub for solidarity and integration on an international level, economically and politically. Recognizing and engaging with policy initiatives is crucial for protests to efficiently implement change, a method that is often assisted by the process of globalization. Moreover, globalization is seen as an apparatus by protestors that allows them to efficiently organize a movement under the legitimacy that it provides through highlighting the political and economic relationships between sovereign states by bringing these nations closer together. ●

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PUTTING A LID ON PLASTIC PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

by Mikaila Mannello

Single-use plastics are overwhelmingly prevalent in our society. As the name suggests, these products such as plastic water bottles, straws, bags, and wrappers are never used again. Some plastics are essential to sanitation or act as a means of accessibility to those with disabilities; these are necessary plastic products like syringes, IV bags, and straws for those with medical conditions. But, with necessary plastics also come unnecessary ones. Single-use plastic drink cups, straws, bottles, packaging, utensils, and labels are items that we do not need; they serve to only contribute to

convenience of service and marketing purposes while still creating a demand for more production. So many plastics have made their way into the natural environment that each year the amount of plastic entering our waterways is equivalent to the weight of 40 aircraft carriers.¹ Our society's plastic inundation not only affects the environment, but also our health. Various com-

ponents that make up common plastics are beginning to show negative effects on animal and human health. The good news is, there are solutions.

The issue with single-use plastics is multifaceted. An especially important aspect of the issue is to reduce plastic consumption and, therefore, reducing the detrimental effects that marine animals are later faced with. Fish and

plastics are often the sources of plastic pollution released into the environment. There exist garbage patches in every major ocean and the fact that fish are actually ingesting plastic that resembles their food sources should not come as a surprise.³ Plastic pollution is such a pervasive issue that National Geographic reported "some 700 species of marine animals have been reported—so far—to have eaten

or become entangled in plastic" showcasing one of the far-reaching impacts of plastic.⁴ While this is the most common argument against the use of plastic, there are also other important

aspects of the issue to consider.

Before many plastics are shaped into water bottles, caps, and cups, they begin as small resin pellets. Besides the fact that the pellets are eventually made into the products that pollute our land and waterways, often the pellets themselves accidentally end up in the waters surrounding many industrial areas.⁵ The pellets have a

The silver lining is that, in the case of plastic, what is human-caused has the potential to be human-resolved.

birds getting caught in plastic soda rings, turtles impaled by plastic straws, whales consuming plastic bags, and autopsies on marine animals revealing stomachs full of plastic are just a few of many heartbreakingly true narratives. A study predicted that by 2050, plastic is expected to outweigh all the fish in the sea.² Improper disposal and processing of post-consum-

unique affinity for Persistent Organic Pollutants, or POPs,—man-made chemicals that remain in the environment for a long time.⁶ The pellets naturally attract and transport dangerous concentrations of POPs and their affinity for POPs also allows them to “concentrate POPs by a million-fold” dangerous for any animal mistaking it for food.⁷ If these pellets are ingested by marine animals or other wildlife, the chemicals accumulate in their tissues and have the “potential to cause many adverse effects in wildlife and humans [such as] cancer, malformation, decrease in the immune response, impaired reproductive ability.”⁸ The United States Environmental Protection Agency classifies POPs including DDT—a once widely used insecticide—as “toxic chemicals that adversely affect human health and the environment.”⁹ The good news is that many countries already or have just begun to put restrictions and regulations on POPs through institutions like the Stockholm Convention—to which the U.S. is not a signatory—and the Virtual Elimination of Persistent Toxic Substances in the Great Lakes Agreement between the U.S. and Canada.¹⁰ Unfortunately, POPs persist in the environment for many years after they are produced and have a unique ability to “accumulate in the fatty tissue of marine animals” due to their lipophilic nature.¹¹ Even after they cease in production, the chemicals remain

potent especially in close contact with resin pellets.¹² From the beginning of its creation, plastic adversely affects the environment. To mitigate the issues associated with it, more regulatory action, decreasing production of the resin pellets and POPs, and increasing caution as to how much of these pollutants end up in the environment should be encouraged.

Once plastic is created, it does not easily go away. It does not biodegrade; it only breaks down into smaller microplastics. These microplastics are a doubly dangerous: on one hand, microplastics are small and pervasive enough that they have been found in a range of marine animals’ stomachs from species as small as plankton to as massive as whales while they also attract contaminants in the water serving to increase the chance of animals coming into contact with toxins.¹³ Marine life often comes into direct contact with microplastics through ingestion and filtration putting filter feeders such as whales and mussels at high risk of inadvertently consuming plastic.¹⁴ Contaminants from and within plastics such as phthalates and BPA picked up by microplastics have been shown to detrimentally affect marine life.¹⁵

Consuming seafood assumes the risk of plastic ingestion and the potential harms this causes the body. While this area of research is relatively new, and causation is difficult to establish, there is “some

evidence to suggest that microplastics enter the food chain and [the] transfer of microplastics between trophic levels implies bioaccumulation and biomagnification” will occur—meaning that predators higher up in the food chain accumulate higher concentrations of toxicity.¹⁶ This is similar to the warnings made on mercury contamination: fish from higher trophic levels such as tuna often have a higher concentration of mercury as a result of consuming many smaller organisms with minimal mercury ingestion. Therefore, as top predators, humans run the risk of consuming mercury by eating tuna. In this vein, there should be concern about bioaccumulation and magnification with microplastics as well. And, if consuming seafood increases our risk of ingesting microplastics, it means that we also run the risk of consuming POP-contaminated seafood.

A health concern commonly known to humans, BPA, is evident when shopping for a reusable plastic water bottle that usually includes a label that the item is BPA-free. BPA, or bisphenol A, was once considered safe, but was found to have adverse health effects.¹⁷ As a result of “monomers [remaining] unbound, BPA molecules can be released from beverage and food containers” and leech into our foods and drinks exposing us directly to the chemical.¹⁸ This exposure represents a majority of the human contamination, but

humans are also exposed to BPA through inhalation resulting from the synthesis of BPA, such as its release from plastic into the air or water.¹⁹ A 2005 CDC study found that of 394 American adults tested, “ninety-five percent of urine samples showed detectable levels of BPA.”²⁰ This is concerning because BPA was initially classified as a “weak estrogen and endocrine disruptor,” and further studies reported “binding of BPA to several membrane steroid receptors” and its ability “to affect vertebrate development *in vivo*.”²¹ On top of this, a 2018 Orb Media study tested eleven major bottled water brands and found that “93% of all bottles tested contained some sort of microplastic.”²² Considering the abundance of bottled water even only in the United States, there is the chance that we all have already ingested potentially harmful microplastics. Additionally, phthalates are another component of plastic materials that have raised health concerns. These are “man-made chemicals with a wide spectrum of industrial applications” and can be found in common items such as PVCs, food packaging, varnishes, floorings, and medical devices.²³ These potentially toxic chemicals can be exposed to your body through inhalation, ingestion, and direct contact.²⁴

Although human studies are limited and there is not yet enough evidence to prove causation for humans, high levels of exposure to

types of these chemicals in other animal species “causes reproductive and developmental toxicities in both males and females.”²⁵ In all of the animal groups studied in 2009, exposures to phthalates and BPA “affect reproduction. . . and impair development in crustaceans and amphibians” even at low concentrations.²⁶ The same study revealed that in higher concentrations, the contaminants “appear[ed] to act by interfering with hormone function.”²⁷ Although some public awareness exists about the potential dangers of plastic components, it still raises the concern what else is in our plastic that is currently considered safe that might not really be? There are many chemicals involved in the manufacturing of plastics and the plastic components themselves that may be considered safe today but not tomorrow.

Aside from the marine and human health aspects of using single-use plastics, there are other environmental effects. Plastic is a petroleum product, and producing it requires about 4% of world oil production as ‘feedstock’ and another 4% towards energy in manufacturing.²⁸ Petroleum is a fossil fuel and most energy usage in the United States comes from the burning of fossil fuels. Carbon dioxide, due to its prominent role in the greenhouse effect, is a major forcing agent with respect to the global climate ultimately contributing to climate change. Total carbon dioxide emissions for plastics

and resins in 2008 was 543.5 metric tons per million dollars of fuel consumption which is on par with truck transportation data.²⁹ Politically, climate change is an issue that is hard to strike a deal on, but there are ways to appease both sides of the aisle.

The silver lining is that, in the case of plastic, what is human-caused has the potential to be human-resolved. There are several governmental measures that would work towards mitigating the effects that plastic has on us and the environment. Instituting a carbon tax is one potential for a bipartisan solution. While there are disparities in the precise policies, “both the red and blue carbon tax proposals recognize that carbon is underpriced for the environmental and economic damage it causes.”³⁰ A carbon tax gives a ‘financial incentive’ to decrease carbon emissions by taxing a company based on a measure of carbon dioxide emissions they are responsible for.³¹ Without any additional subsidies, the price of plastic and resins would increase 2.56% making plastic a less competitive option against a reusable container.³² Carbon dividends—where the revenue made from carbon taxes is returned to U.S. citizens equally—would also be a viable solution. Finally, enacting stricter regulations on Persistent Organic Pollutants and plastic chemical components would serve to decrease the potential harm of the chemicals on the environment,

marine animals, and our health.

Along with governmental regulation, individual and business action is beneficial. Instead of single-use plastic water bottles, invest in a metal, reusable one. These even score a discount at many specialty drink vendors which offsets the cost of the initial purchase. That being said, vendors should offer a larger discount for bringing your own cup to increase the number of patrons who do so. The University of Pittsburgh's plastic bag tax is also a step in the right direction. Charging a fee to get a plastic bag, at the very least, makes the buyer think about whether the bag is actually a necessity or even is enough to encourage some to purchase a reusable bag. If you do not require the use of a disposable, single-use straw, do not use one or invest in a set of metal straws. That being said, it is understandable that these arguments are mostly options for those with the privileged economic ability to spend the extra money up-front and are not always universally applicable.

If purchasing plastic products is a must, then recycling is the next best bet. Recycling, as opposed to tossing the product into the garbage, gives the plastic a new life and even reduces associated carbon dioxide emissions by 27% if bottles are made entirely from recycled PET plastics.³³ Plant-based plastics, or bioplastics, are another cheaper alternative to single-use plastics. They are not made from oil, but

from renewable biomasses.³⁴ These alternative 'plastics' can replace regular plastic options including plastic bags, utensils, and even phone cases. This method gives the benefits of traditional plastic but reduces the net carbon dioxide emissions, though not to zero.³⁵ Some bioplastics are degradable but the successes of the degradation—success implying that its decomposition does not release methane, a more potent greenhouse gas, and that the product actually degrades—relies heavily on utilizing the proper disposal method: industrial composting or in ideal composting conditions, not landfills.³⁶ Recycling and bioplastics are not a complete solution to the problem, but proper usage functions to reduce the plastic burden on the environment and, in effect, our health.

Plastic has proven to be harmful to the environment and marine animals, with the added component of the potential to affect human health. There are options for all of us to reduce our plastic dependency. Without sufficient reductions in single-use plastic product consumption, we will only see more incidents of marine life disruption and incur potential harm ourselves from consuming seafood and using plastic products. We need to push for policy change, recycle as much as possible, and vote with our dollar to solve this plastic epidemic because the future health of our environment and our bodies depend on it. ◆

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21st Century America: Democracy *or* Mobocracy?

by Tao Sheng

Like many others in my generation, I went to the polls for the first time in November of 2018. My assigned polling location, the Soldiers and Sailors memorial in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania served as a trek back in time for me for many reasons. Walking to the end of the building from its historical entrance, I felt the privilege of living in the 21st century United States of America. Ever since the founding of this nation, the power to vote has been the power to change, as it bestows upon the American people the power to elect the elite as well as the ability to remove them. My voting ID

time, I felt responsible and powerful; responsible as to have finally become a member of the American society, and powerful as to have contributed to our election. The young American voter block had achieved a record high voter turnout, and I could not

myself I would research candidates individually to develop my own voting decisions. However, in this day and age, I had fooled myself into thinking that I went into researching candidates and incumbents without bias. Social media, news outlets, and the peo-



MANY BELIEVE AMERICAN MOBOCRACY TO BE BOTH A SYMPTOM AND A CAUSE OF DONALD TRUMP'S ELECTION AND PRESIDENCY.
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served as a concrete reminder of the opportunity I have to wield this enormous power, and of the civic responsibility I have to fulfill. As I traced my finger back and forth over the candidates' names on the polling screen, for the first

be more ecstatic to be a part of that group. My ballot selections were perhaps the most important decision I have made in my efforts to sculpt this nation, but my decision was not without outside influences. As for myself, I told

people around you can influence your perception of candidates almost subconsciously. Political socialization has been a vital aspect to our country, but an issue arises with the birth of the voter conformity norm. The voter conformity

norm, being the phenomenon that young voters vote consistently with others from their own group. There are many reasons as to why this exists in our day and age and will be explored further. Today, there are real and present dangers of having a lack of political diversity which contributes to the mobocracy mentality of young Americans and discredits what it means to vote for yourself. In a time of increasing tensions, it is vital that the new age of voters finally respects the revolutionary power of diverse thought. What it means to obtain voter individuality and resist voter conformity, what it means to contribute to a discussion of the future of America, and what this entails for the next generation of American leaders are the major questions at stake.

To further examine the concept of democracy, one must look at the motivation behind voting. It appears that now there are two primary factors. Party identification, without a doubt, is the main influence in voting. Not only does it increase voter registration for a certain ideology, but also aligns their voting block towards their candidates. There is another factor that is heavily intertwined with party identification. Candidate

likeability comes as a surprise to some, but it is increasingly likely that we will identify with a candidate that we like more than we dislike.¹ While the democratic party shares similar values on abortion, government services, and social change, the republican party shares similar views on traditional values, economics, and foreign policy. However, as we enter the so-called Trump-age of campaigning, we see evidence of grand candidates who rather than being qualified by their party, actually define their party instead. Ironically, neither reason relates back to the policy proposed by said candidates.

This exemplifies the mob mentality of a polarized America. Psychologists often refer to a term known as “group think.”² By definition, “group think” is the loss of individuality and creativity due to a large social setting. Take rallies, protests, and online boycotting for example: the mobocracy that is forming on both sides of the political spectrum is only exacerbated by presence of more like-minded people. In the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting (Feb 14, 2017), social media transformed into a platform for young Americans and teens to express their disdain for

politicians who had supposedly “allowed” this massacre to happen. A prominent voice in the March for Our Lives movement, David Hogg, utilized Twitter with great success to rally together a national movement that included millions of students across the United States. With national movements as described in combination with a nationwide movement to increase teen voter turnout, it makes sense that this year’s midterms saw the largest voter turnout in American history.³ On one hand, voter mobilization was remarkable, and voting enthusiasts’ efforts showed with the voter turnout in November of 2018. However, voter conformity is an ever-present issue in that young voters are inspired to vote for “the sake of students’ lives,” and that those who choose not to vote are supposedly against protecting the lives of children in public schools. It appears almost ironic; under Jim Crow, African Americans were barred from voting, 2018, students are shamed from choosing not to vote. The new “peer pressure” seems to be telling teenagers to get out and vote. Politicians and their followers from both sides of the spectrum make convenient use of tragic events, namely the Marjory Stoneman Douglas

High School shooting and the immigration caravan to spin their agendas and push specific narratives to the masses. Some liberals utilized the Parkland shooting as a platform to preach their anti-gun or pro-gun control agenda on constituents still reeling from the attack. Some conservatives utilized the caravan traveling to the southern border of the U.S. to appeal to many about the dangers of illegal immigration to preach an anti-illegal immigration agenda. It is

that those who have a preexisting view of society, policy, and certain political parties tune out opposing views in favor of consuming media that supports their own opinions. This lack of diverse political thought in everyday lives combined with the play on pathos and ethos by these politicians and activists are very persuasive in nature. Perhaps it was at the birth of this nation, that the threat of one-sided beliefs and mobocracy began.

try. That the people are not in charge of their own destinies challenges their connotation of true democracy.

"In a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly be said to reign as in a state of nature, where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger; and as, in the latter state, even the stronger individuals are prompted, by the uncertainty of their condition, to submit to a government which may protect the weak as well as themselves; so, in the former state, will the more powerful factions or parties be grandly induced, by a like motive, to wish for a government which will protect all parties, the weaker as well as the more powerful."⁴

Hamilton claims that the existence of many factions is not the danger, but the lack thereof is. That being said, even over two hundred years ago, the founding fathers had worries about a lack of diversity, and now more than ever, the American democracy is one generation away from becoming a mobocracy. Hamilton acknowledges the risk of factions but is in clear support of them. He sees factions as a way to include everyone in the political process, and even

As we enter the new Trump-age of campaigning, we see evidence of bigger-than-life candidates who define their party rather than their party defining the candidates.

both despicable and immortal to turn a tragedy or human rights issue into a means of garnering votes for upcoming elections.

Political socialization is the phenomenon in which we receive our political opinions from those who we associate most closely with. These would be family members, close friends, acquaintances, professors and teachers, or colleagues. The dangers of political socialization exist in what follows: selective perception. This concept states

21st Century America: Democracy or Mobocracy?

The United States of America is by definition, a republic. Citizens vote for qualified lawmakers who will then implement policy change on or against their behalf. A republic is not a direct democracy; the latter would require the people to vote on every bill, law, and decision made in regard to governing of the United States. To the misguided, this fact poses a threat to their perception of our coun-

exclaims that “it is equally evident, that the members of each department should be as little dependent as possible on those of the others, for the emoluments annexed to their offices,” suggesting that a thorough system of checks and balances should keep a single branch of government from becoming too powerful. It is through these checks and balances, of not only the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, but of the local and federal government, citizens and politicians that run the political system in the United States. This sharing of power between different classes of people is what facilitates the national discussion on topics at large. The ebb and flow of debate in the capital city which leads to the laws that affect all constituents is what the American republic was created to be.

A question to be asked is whether this republic style of government is healthy for the United States and whether beneath the surface, the United States is governed through democracy or mobocracy. Madison, in his Federalist Papers No. 10, wrote that “democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security, or the rights of property;

and have in general been as short in their lives as they are violent in their deaths.”⁵ The Federalist Papers, in their attempt to convince people to approve of the Constitution, used the word “democracy,” yet the Constitution has not one instance where it uses that word. Perhaps the founding fathers, in a time period of insurmountable stress and blazing heat from the Philadelphia summer, feared misusing the word, or that their intent was

“Authority is derived through election by the people of public officials best fitted to represent them. Attitude toward property is respect for laws and individual rights, and a sensible economic procedure. Attitude toward law is the administration of justice in accord with fixed principles, and established evidence, with a strict regard to consequences. A greater number of citizens and extent of territory may be brought

What it means to obtain voter individuality and resist voter conformity, what it means to contribute to a discussion of the future of America, and what this entails for the next generation of American leaders are the major questions at stake.

never to create a democracy in the first place. An account of the definition of “democracy” can be found in U.S. War Department document from 1928 named “Training Manual No. 2000-25.” This document was more of a how-to guide for soldiers and citizens alike and included definitions of various terms ranging from republic to democracy. Its formal definition of democracy is in stark contrast with its definition of republic, which follows:

within its compass. Avoids the dangerous extreme of either tyranny or mobocracy. Results in statesmanship, liberty, reason, justice, contentment, and progress.”⁶

Its definition of democracy is almost identical in wording, but opposite in meaning. It reads:

“A government of the masses. Authority is derived through mass meeting or any other form of direct expression. Results in mobocracy. Attitude toward property is

communistic, negating property rights. Attitude toward law is that the will of the people shall regulate, whether it be based upon deliberation, or governed by passion, prejudice, and impulse, without restraint or regard to consequences. Results in demagoguery, license, agitation, discontent, and anarch.”⁴

It seems that this booklet assigns democracy the same definition as mobocracy, or rather that democracy inevitably leads to mobocracy. However true this outdated definition holds, it is one that provokes much thought over how the U.S. is governed today.

The Power of Twitter Trumps That of the Pen

Walking out of the polls, I felt empowered and for a brief moment, courageous. That I was able to vote on the basis of my own feelings and opinions was a moment of pride for me. However, I know that this is not the case for thousands of other students who rely heavily on social media as a news source, rather than the news outlets themselves. Social media has no obligation to stay true to fact, and if sites contend that “fake news” does not exist on their platforms, it is likely that wording carries an almost unnoticeable bias

that influences its audience’s thoughts. The power of social media, especially Twitter, is unbeknownst to some of the public and can be wielded for many different agendas.

“H&M, a notable fashion brand, was boycotted on Twitter promptly after being accused of racism following a series of controversial advertisements.” What is interesting is not the advertisements themselves, but rather the actions that followed the initial outrage by Twitter users from across the globe. Twitter users took to their phones to condemn the actions of H&M back in early 2017 for posting an African-American child wearing their new hoodie, the front of which adorned the slogan “coolest monkey in the jungle.” Following the Twitter backlash, H&M was forced to issue a public apology.

Popular Canadian singer The Weeknd, stated on Twitter the morning after the outrage, “I’m deeply offended and will not be working with @hm anymore...” The official Twitter apology did not sit well with critics that say the advertisement was insincere and “apologized for being caught, not for their racist intents.”⁷ Those indifferent to the H&M advertisement, including those

loyal to the brand and those who passively appreciated what H&M had offered to them in the past, changed their minds about the brand in a matter of days. A number of people who had never heard of H&M now have a preconceived notion that this company, at large, is a racist organization that is also anti-African American. Other celebrities that were sponsored by H&M also dropped sponsorship deals because of the consequences of what was implied through staying with the brand. After The Weeknd dropped H&M, celebrities were almost forced to follow suit in fear of a backlash against those who did not drop the clothing brand, as they would be likened to the supposedly racist company H&M. This begins a cascade on Twitter that leads to an inevitable decline of the company’s sales and public reputation. The dangers in this scenario are not that the boycott was successful in showing the company that many people did not receive their advertisement well, but that it also affected those who were initially indifferent to H&M. It is exactly this scenario, that, if applied to the government, would have been disastrous in the Founding

Father's eyes. That those who have not developed their own opinions on certain policies will follow suit with what a majority thinks because of prevalent peer pressure to do so is a true danger to American society.

The events that unfolded during these periods of online boycotting teach us the dangers of groupthink and the psychology of modern American mob mentality. However much its citizens believe they are living in a democracy, they live in what is institutionally defined as a republic. Yet, time and time again, as shown through the masses, large change can be effected. The dangers and unforeseen consequences that result from a mob mentality and lack of diverse thought become dangerous if they eventually apply to violence inciting riots, and perhaps armed takeovers in the future. A present-day lack of diverse thought is largely to blame for the polarization of this country. In seeing other perspectives, the ebb and flow of debate that created this nation can be recreated in our everyday lives. It is in promoting a debate that will ultimately lead to successful conversation about the topics at large that will keep the American democracy alive for generations to come. ●

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IN MEMORY OF . . .

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This issue of PPR is dedicated to those affected by the tragedy at the Tree of Life – Or L'Simcha Congregation in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. May you continue to heal and honor the eleven who left us too soon. We at PPR and the University of Pittsburgh will always be thinking of you.