DEAR READER,

We believe that responsible leaders should question and improve what no longer works.

From the first wave of the Industrial Revolution to the third wave of the Internet Revolution, progress was made because the old-fashioned ways that we were comfortable with and had grown used to were not serving us anymore, if at all. Along with these economic and technological advancements, social movements have also made strides to advance equality for the right to vote, the right to access higher education, and the right to live free of discrimination.

But we now find ourselves in a time of great uncertainty. Political and economic settings in the United States and around the world have become turbulent. Climate change is visibly peaking and new laws have to be made. Women, LGBTQ+ communities, people of color, ethnic and religious minorities are at risk of getting their hard-fought rights (if any) reversed.

That is where we hope innovation comes in. Innovation means novel transformation based on new findings. When we are dealing with the unexpected, innovation is what our attained progress needs to continue to advance.

The Columbia Public Policy Review’s 2019 Print Edition showcases ten selected pieces covering an innovative approach to a policy issue that stemmed from changes in the global environment, the political climate, the state of national security, a system of outdated laws, and the uses of emerging technology and big data. They all illustrate that the ones who make themselves conscious of the changes and innovate accordingly are the ones who will ultimately hold the winning hand.

We hope you will enjoy the exemplary works by current and future leaders.

Sincerely,

Amna, Anuradha, Asha, Dan, Elle, Mariel and Mia
The 2019 Columbia Public Policy Board
Founded in 2015, the Columbia Public Policy Review (CPPR) is the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs’ (SIPA) nonpartisan student publication that features critical and evidence-based policy analysis on today’s most pressing global and domestic policy challenges.

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THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S PUBLIC POLICY STANCE AGAINST AFFIRMATIVE ACTION HAS NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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CAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION HELP CHANGE THE WORLD?

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Across the globe, women perform a disproportionate amount of care work, whether paid or unpaid. Care work is work that is traditionally done in the home or in a place of residence, including cleaning, meal prep and cooking, childcare, and elderly care—among other tasks. Care work within one’s own home is the subject of this paper, for the expectation that women should provide this work in their homes, free of charge, generates two particular disadvantages. First, as Kathi Weeks explains in The Problem with Work, unpaid labor done in the home obscures “the wage system” by allowing the labor to be devalued, unrecognized, and fall squarely on the shoulders of women within this space. The second disadvantage is that women receive lower salaries, job opportunities, and leadership positions because of the assumption that they will be too engaged with work done in their homes. These disadvantages are at the heart of persistent gender inequality.

To address these issues, Sweden has implemented gender-equitable parental leave, or equal parental time off for both parents, and in doing so, has begun to unravel these elements of the gender division of work. Evaluating the parental leave policies in Sweden reveals that these types of policies could have a meaningful positive spillover effect on gender equity in the United States, which still has no paid leave policy at the federal level. This analysis of maternity and paternity leave outcomes in the two countries shows that greater gender equality in the US can best be achieved through a gender-equitable paid leave policy at the federal level.

Background
Wage and opportunity discrimination are still prevalent in the United States. Women, on average, make 20 percent less than their male counterparts. Additionally, women struggle to move into managerial or senior roles despite higher levels of education. In 2015, while women made up 46.8 percent of the labor force, they only occupied 39.2 percent of managerial positions, and, in 2016, women set a record by making up just 23 percent of senior roles, the highest since 2007.

This contrast becomes starker when disaggregated by women with children versus women without them. According to a Government Accountability Report, childless women earn 0.94 dollars to a man’s one dollar and mothers earn 0.6 dollars to a

father’s one dollar.[4] Ironically, a recent report by Thirdway, a research group which advocates for moderate policies, found that men with children see a 6 percent increase in earnings, when they live with them. [5] Known colloquially as the “Mommy Tax,” the rate at which women’s wages are garnished for having children varies. Some studies indicate a 3 percent reduction of pay after accounting for reduced hours, shifts to more family-friendly jobs, and lost experiences due to time off. [6] Others note that the cut in wages increases based on the number of children a woman choose to have, with a 7.8 percent penalty per child.[7] Although some research has indicated that this wage gap can be entirely explained if job benefits were taken into account in the documentation of wages, the fact that women must choose between a salary and perks—which may make raising children more possible—simply does not appear to be something men are equally forced to do.

The reality of this stems from the fact that men do not do an equal share of housework. Since the 1950s, women have made great strides into the labor market, from a 33.9 percent participation in 1950 to a peak of 60 percent in 1999.[8] However, this movement, especially in the United States, has not been supported with an equal understanding that men should do more of the care work for families that women had long been doing for free. A recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report finds: 83 percent of women versus 65 percent of men spend time on housework each day women do 2.6 hours per day versus men’s 2.1; on a given day, 49 percent of women versus 19 percent of men do cleaning and laundry; and, 68 percent of women versus 42 percent of men do food prep or cleanup. [9] These extra hours have been coined by Arlie Hochschild as the “second shift.”[10] Compound by the lack of childcare and services for families in the United States, women are often forced out of waged labor to conduct this work at home.

However, there are policies that could help mitigate this. Research on parental leave shows that there is a positive correlation with men taking leave or time off to spend time with newborns and later more gender equitable housework outcomes.[11] Astoundingly, the United States is still one of the only developed nations that does not mandate paid maternity leave at the federal level. The Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) does permit up to 12 unpaid weeks, but employees are left to the whims of employers for paid benefits or paternity leave. These benefits often fluctuate with the economy. Estimates show that only 11 percent of civilian workers and 3 percent of low-income workers have access to paid leave.[12]

Although California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have each recently passed paid maternity leave laws, research has shown that these policies may actually increase pay inequity between women and
men and create further gender unequal distributions of care work.[13] If these policies are going to be enacted to support families in the United States, there must also be a careful consideration of how they are constructed to promote a better division of housework through a more equitable division of leave.

**Analysis of Swedish Leave Policy**

Paternity leave is not uncommon among the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries. At least 50 countries provide paternity leave worldwide, and most members of OECD offer some form of paternity leave.[14] In the European Union, paternity leave averages 12.5 days with a range of one day in Italy to 64 in Slovenia.[15] This analysis centers on Swedish parental leave due to its specific focus on providing gender-neutral policies, which, at the same time, advocate for a gender equitable distribution of leave.[16]

Starting with their first iteration in 1974, a long history of Swedish policies on paid parental leave provides a rich space for analysis on women's job opportunities and pay equality. Initially, the policy allowed for a six-month paid parental leave at 90 percent of previous earnings, though this amount dropped to 80 percent in the 1990s due to the recession.[17] In the 1980s, the timeline was expanded to 12 months at 80 percent pay and three additional months at a flat rate for everyone. Most notably, in 1995, reforms required each parent to receive one month of the leave each. Parents forfeited that month of leave if the allotted parent chose not to use it, exceptions being made for parents not living together or in the case of sole custody.[18] Additionally, written consent was required if one parent chose to use more than half of the leave.[19] In 2002, a second reserve month was assigned to each parent, and in 2008, the government passed certain bonuses for families that equitably distributed their leave.[20] Currently, the policy allows for 60 days as part of the “mother’s quota,” 60 days as part of the “father’s quota,” and 360 days to be divided equally if not deliberately transferred from one spouse to another.[21] The leave can be used up until the child's eighth birthday.

Outcomes for the policy have showed an overall positive relationship between leave quotas and men's participation in parental leave. Since its introduction, Swedish men have increasingly taken on a larger share of the parental leave.[23] Between the first and second reserved months, men's average days off increased from 26 to 36 days, and the percentage of men taking leave before the first quota increased from 46 percent to 82 percent just two weeks after the quota enactment.[24]

Research on Swedish child- and homecare outcomes is slightly more mixed. In a study of 4,000 children born in 1993, Ann-Zofie Duvander and Ann Christin Jans found that men who took parental leave, on average, worked fewer hours outside of the home afterwards. There was also a negative correlation between the length of the leave and the hours worked outside the home later in life.[25] This seems to indicate that men who took more leave time with their children may have shifted their focus from paid work to care work. Hwang Haas' research confirmed that parental leave promoted a positive participation in childcare, and numerous qualitative studies have

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.


[24] Ibid.

also replicated this finding.[26] Although research done by Ekberg et al. (2008) did not find a positive long-term correlation between parental leave sick days taken to care for children with maternity leave, there still seems to be a preponderance of evidence that paternity leave has had a positive influence in the work men continued to provide within the home. In other words, there is most likely a positive correlation between a father taking parental leave and a long-term increase of men's participation in childcare. Interestingly, the impact on income indicates that men also may suffer from the same wage discrimination as women for taking time off. In her work “Parental Leave Ad Careers: Women's and Men's Wages After Parental Leave,” Marie Evertsson found that men's and women's wages both suffer as a result of taking leave, and this wage decrease is negatively correlated with the number of leave days one takes. However, women's wages are more linearly related to leave whereas men's appear more as a sudden drop.[27] This sharp drop-off indicates a signaling to employers about men's priorities. That is, unlike women, who are assumed to care for housework, taking extended paternity leave could be seen as a sign that these men will be more invested in care work, thus less dedicated to paid labor, and therefore less deserving of the same pay.

Women in Sweden who take a greater amount of the leave still suffer disproportionately despite the gender equal policies. Some research has even found that Swedish women are siloed into lower paying work where there are fewer full-time positions and lower mobility, whereas men work in areas with more career possibilities and higher pay.[28] However, the effects on pay vary from study to study and often find an increase in income for low-income women.[29] Interestingly, some research has found that wage reduction only happens after they take at least three and a half months of leave.[30]

In the end, while the leave policy does have varying effects, there seems to be consensus that there is an overall positive effect on men's participation and overall assistance in the home. At the same time, the body of work on wages shows that a reduction in salary is seen across genders based on the signals to employers that a worker will be more invested in unpaid care work.

Context and Limitations for the United States
The findings of these studies provide a clear picture that gender equitable paid leave could have both positive effects on men's participation in childcare as well as reduce discrimination that women exclusively face with paid and unpaid maternity leave. Although this push for policy change can seem utopian on some level, there have already been shifts in American men's desire to spend more time with their kids. A survey conducted in 2010 of registered voters found that 76 percent supported policies, which would provide paid leave for families and childbirth.[31]

Among millennial men, some 13 percent expect to “interrupt their careers for children” which contrasts with 4 percent of Generation X and 3 percent of baby boomers.[32] Many companies have recognized this and have already started making policies to meet the growing expectation among mostly high-income men. IBM recently announced that it would double its paternity leave to 12 weeks, and many other tech firms are following suit by offering between 6 and 17 weeks of paid paternity leave.[33]

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However, male workers still face stigma when taking time off. Even when offered, 36 percent of men in one Deloitte survey said they did not take paid parental leave because “they’re afraid it may jeopardize their position at work.”[34] At the same time, simply offering the option of paternity leave has dramatically increased the number of men spending time with their children. Just five years after the changes to California paid parental leave policy, the likelihood men would take the leave more than doubled and claims for time to be with children increased from 17 percent to 26 percent. [35] This indicates that even before a mandate, men are becoming increasingly interested in participating in childcare if they are given the opportunity. That is not to say that there are not cultural issues with implementing gender neutral and pro-men childcare Swedish policies in the United States. First off, there is a very clear cultural relationship with the United States and the expectations of the government. Eileen McDonagh lays out in The Motherless State how the government in the US is mostly seen as a protectorate that should stay out of social issues and provisions. On the other hand, the Swedish government, as a social democracy, is much more associated with these types of social welfare provisions.

Sweden also has a long history of promoting gender equitable housework not just through policies like paternal care but also through ad campaigns, posters, and classes for authorities on antenatal and postnatal practices.[36] One politician claimed the objective as “getting mom a job and making dad pregnant.”[37] Additionally, there are clear logistical and funding issues at the heart of paid parental leave in particular. Businesses have long fought against these laws as too expensive and detrimental to productivity.

Anecdotal evidence from California and New Jersey paid leave plans have showed just the opposite or at least neutral effects on business “productivity, profitability, turnover, and employee morale” with small businesses showing an even smaller likelihood of negative effects.[38] While the reality of governmental cost is important, the soaring childcare prices and numerous reports on disruption and stress of having a child in the United States suggests that parental leave might be becoming too costly not to fund.[39]

**Conclusion**

Swedish parental leave policy thus provides a helpful model for eventual parental leave policy in the United States. It shows that for this policy to be helpful, and not harmful, to further gender equality, it must be both gender neutral and promote equitable distribution of leave. This means the leave should be provided to the family as a unit, allotting a specific and equal amount of time per spouse, along with some flexibility in how the rest is used. In doing so, this parental leave would not only alleviate the burden of providing for a family in the US, but it also would also help promote women and men as equal partners inside and outside the home.

While at this current political juncture it is very difficult to conceive of a concrete plan for pushing for paid paternity leave, let alone a gender neutral policy, this analysis provides a platform from which to build a broad base of support among companies, pro-labor forces, and gender equality activists. That is, “Be realistic, demand the impossible.”[40]

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Since the Green New Deal resolution has been introduced to the American public, it has captured the support of a majority of the American public despite being vilified by a swath of powerful interests. As the window to take action on climate change quickly narrows, with the most recent report indicating that we have twelve years to keep temperature rises to a manageable 1.5°C, the Green New Deal represents a final opportunity to act.[1]

Based on the reality that climate change is an existential threat to our way of life, the Green New Deal aims to marshal the nation’s collective energies in a full-scale mobilization to meet the moment. The plan addresses five main goals: (1) achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, (2) creating millions of jobs, (3) investing in infrastructure, (4) securing clean air and water, and (5) promoting equity and justice.[2] While the resolution stays away from endorsing specific policy prescriptions, it offers various projects to address the crisis – such as upgrading existing buildings, developing energy-efficient power grids, and investing in renewable energy technologies, among others.[3]

More than any specific goals and projects, perhaps what is most notable about the Green New Deal from past climate plans is the clear-eyed, unapologetic vision behind the plan. On an issue where hopelessness and defeatism towards the challenge can seem all too easy, the plan’s proponents strike an overarching and fundamentally hopeful note: we can do this because we have done it before. The creators of the Green New Deal studied how federal industrial policy helped transform the American economy during World War II. They have said that they drew inspiration from U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Arsenal of Democracy” speech in 1940, which laid out how the United States would confront the existential threat posed by Nazi
It is worth revisiting that speech, for that critical moment in American history provides several lessons for this moment today. Almost eighty years later, the speech shows us why the Green New Deal is in the best spirit of American dynamism and reminds us why “we have every good reason for hope.”[5]

There have always been those that want us to hide from our problems
At the close of 1940, facing a divided nation still smarting from the pain of the Great Depression, Roosevelt set out to earn public support for ramping up production of military equipment to aid Britain in its war effort. With France’s collapse only six months prior, Great Britain remained the only major Allied power still standing as Hitler’s Germany rapidly seized land with impunity.[6] Despite the impending threat, Roosevelt addressed a country that was largely isolationist in its mood, and he knew it. He spoke of a telegram that he received, which “expressed the attitude of the small minority who want to see no evil and hear no evil, even though they know in their hearts that evil exists.”[7]

Facing those that believed Nazi Germany wasn’t a threat to the United States, he addressed this point head-on: “Frankly and definitely there is danger ahead – danger against which we must prepare. But we well know that we cannot escape danger, or the fear of danger, by crawling into bed and pulling the covers over our heads.”[8] Among his detractors was none other than Charles Lindbergh, the famous aviator-turned-prominent non-interventionist. Lindbergh argued in a 1941 speech that “no foreign army will ever attempt to land on American shores” due to our physical distance from them, and thus the United States should “turn our eyes and our faith back to our own country.” The title of that speech? ‘America First.’[9]

Today’s most prominent ‘America Firster,’ President Donald Trump, doesn’t just deny that the threat from climate change won’t reach America’s shores – he denies the existence of the very idea of climate change.[10] That’s why he appointed a Presidential Committee on Climate Security led by an individual who argues that up is down and down is up. The chair, William Happer, has said “We’re doing our best to try and counter this myth that [carbon dioxide or CO2] is a dangerous pollutant. It’s not a pollutant at all... We should be telling the scientific truth, that more CO2 is actually a benefit to the earth.”[11]

The Green New Deal is different from past plans, as it rejects the politics of fear. Rather than worrying about attacks from those that have been operating in bad faith for decades, the deal reframes the discussion around action. Just as Roosevelt dismissed naysayers and stressed the need for preparation, the Green New Deal also rejects the premise that there are “both sides” to the climate discussion and instead focuses on tangible actions that we can take now.

Cost should not be the primary policy consideration when addressing existential national security threats
As the trauma of the Great Depression was still widely felt, Roosevelt knew that he would need to justify why massive mobilization to aid Great Britain was needed when growth at home was still lethargic. Barring the economic considerations, he explained why assisting Britain would benefit all Americans: “It is a matter of realistic, practical military policy, based on the advice of our military experts who are in close touch with existing warfare. These military and naval experts and the

members of the Congress and the Administration have a single-minded purpose: the defense of the United States.”[12]

Members of his cabinet were more blunt. Secretary of War Henry Stimson, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, affirmed that through preparing munitions for Britain, “…we are buying our own security while we prepare.”[13] Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox further noted that if British sea power failed and the Germans were not kept at bay, they would “…almost certainly move into South America” first and build “an aggressive military power” on America’s doorstep.[14] Failure to prepare now, he warned, would ultimately result in the need to “build a wall around the United States” as we stand “…armed to the teeth, completely surrounded by totalitarian powers intent upon our final subjugation.”[15]

Our military leaders know all too well that no such wall can stop the national security threat posed by climate change – an issue which knows no borders. A 2015 report by the Department of Defense highlighted the effects of frequent, extreme weather events around the world: increased refugee flows, conflicts over basic resources like food and water, and damage to critical infrastructure and U.S. military bases, among others.[16] According to former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, climate change essentially acts as a threat multiplier that “drive[s] instability ... [and] requires a broader, whole-of-government response.”[17]

The Green New Deal offers such a response. Recognizing that the costs of climate change would be incalculable to our way of life if left unaccounted for, the plan places feasibility of addressing the crisis as the primary policy consideration ahead of cost. Cost is an important factor; advisors for the Green New Deal are determining potential ways to finance it and keep it sustainable.[18] However, the first consideration is whether the proposed solution addresses the scope of the challenge, for anything short of that would be disastrous. Roosevelt understood that the financial status of the United States mattered little if the United States as we knew it ceased to exist. The Green New Deal adopts that same sense of urgency.

“Socialism” has always been the tattered cry of those opposed to any cooperation between the market and government.

When laying out how he believed the country could significantly increase its production of munitions, Roosevelt called for a “splendid cooperation between the government and industry and labor.”[19] Praising American industrial genius, he challenged American industry to “…discard the notion of ‘business as usual’” in pursuit of “…more ships, more guns, more planes – more of everything.”[20] Despite not calling for any changes in ownership of resources as socialism demands, Roosevelt was met almost immediately with accusations that he was using the war as a pretext to enact socialism. Media mogul Henry Luce warned: “We are all acquainted with the fearful forecast... that in the process of war and its aftermath our economy will be largely socialized, that the politicians now in office will seize complete power and never yield it up.”[21] Luce warned that “…we shall end up in such a total national socialism that any faint semblances of our constitutional American democracy will be totally unrecognizable.”[22]
This prognosis could not have been further from reality. Roosevelt sought to spur businesses’ entrepreneurial energies toward the war effort, not stifle it or seize its resources. Under his watch, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, a government corporation that was the largest lending institution in the world, invested $33 billion (over $1.2 trillion today) into American business, particularly into the aircraft and machine-tool-design sectors.[23] With an economic incentive provided to industries if they aided the war mobilization effort, the country’s entrepreneurial spirit was unleashed towards that end. Entirely new commodities such as aluminum, magnesium, and synthetic rubber were created.[24] Rather than have an antagonistic relationship with business, Roosevelt enlisted the help of hundreds of corporate executives, such as General Motors CEO William Knudsen, to help run the government commissions as equal partners.[25]

Contrary to the fantasy spun by the plan’s detractors, the Green New Deal is not a government-run takeover of the private sector but an endeavor to work with the market. New Consensus, the think tank working to flesh out the proposal, readily declares that “...mobilizations of this kind cannot be led simply by bureaucrats. Rather, great national projects, including development and redevelopment projects, have always been orchestrated by ... all sectors: labor, industry, government, nonprofits, community organizations, and others.”[26] When pressed on how to achieve the Green New Deal’s goals, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has cited public-private partnerships and government contracting as potential ways.[27] Other key advisors have discussed the role that private capital can play in financing the deal’s projects.[28] While the details continue to be discussed and debated, it is clear that the plan’s creators envision a robust role for the private sector.

All of which makes repeatedly raising the specter of socialism all the more absurd. The Green New Deal recognizes, as Roosevelt did during his World War II mobilization, that markets respond to incentives. If federal industrial policy can create those incentives, whether through research and development grants or government contracts, and give the private sector a nudge towards the green economy, then businesses will compete amongst each other for those incentives. Far from leading to the socialist future of hysterics’ dreams, such a shift would allow the public and private sectors to work together in pursuit of solutions – the only realistic way a problem of this magnitude can be addressed.

**An investment in the American worker pays for itself**

Realizing the scale of the challenges ahead, Roosevelt was straightforward with the country: “If we are to be completely honest with ourselves, we must admit that there is risk in any course we may take ... So I appeal to the owners of plants, to the managers, to the workers, to our own government employees to put every ounce of effort into producing these munitions swiftly.”[29] At a time when Germany was rapidly outproducing the United States and with Japan’s entry into the conflict imminent, Roosevelt understood the need to speak hard truths.[30] Each day spent not mobilizing was a day wasted. “We must be the great arsenal of democracy,” he concluded, for “…this is an emergency as serious as war itself.”[31]

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[24] Ibid.
[28] Hockett, R. “Green New Deal Funding: Remember Finance Is a Public-Private Franchise, Not a Big Broker in the Sky.”
The American people did not disappoint. In four years, American industrial production doubled in size as the country turned its energies to outproducing the Axis powers.[32] Although output was less than 6,000 planes in 1939, Roosevelt challenged the nation to produce 50,000 planes annually; the country responded by producing 300,000 planes over the next five years.[33] The numbers were equally impressive across other industries: the country went from producing 3,300 tanks in 1940 to 88,000 over the rest of the war. [34] The production time of some types of ships was reduced from 365 days to one day.[35] As a result, unemployment in the United States fell from 8.1 million in 1940 to 670,000 by 1944.[36] The investment in the American worker paid off. Roosevelt’s decision brought not only peace abroad but also prosperity at home.

As the defining challenge of our time, climate change requires an equally bold investment in the American worker. We already have early signs that this would yield a tremendous payoff. In 2009, President Obama’s stimulus package invested $90 billion into increasing U.S. clean energy, researching new ways to capture carbon, and funding research and development of advanced energy technologies. [37] In the ensuing years, we have seen the early fruits of that investment: U.S. wind capacity has tripled, solar capacity has increased more than six fold, and more than a million electric vehicles are already on the road – up from nearly zero in 2008. [38] While the clean energy investment in the 2009 stimulus reflected progress, it was not enough. The Green New Deal, in calling for a massive mobilization that involves a universal employment guarantee, would direct the nation’s energies towards the next generation of American industry. Roosevelt, understanding that the war would be won or lost on the back of U.S. production, went all in on the American worker. Learning from his example, the Green New Deal makes a bet that we still have the ability to reverse the worst effects of climate change if we remain unified. It seeks to double down on the United States’ best asset: its people.

For all of the similarities between World War II mobilization and now, there is one crucial difference: we know that we can win. Speaking to the nation that dark December day, Roosevelt had no such assurances. As city after city succumbed to Nazi aggression, as the German Luftwaffe rained down bombs upon civilians in London, and as Mussolini’s Italian Royal Army invaded sovereign nations in the Balkans, Roosevelt did not know if the nation could overcome the overwhelming might of the Axis powers.[39] Some at home, such as the Wall Street Journal editorial board, were already urging the President to surrender to “realism,” arguing that Hitler had “…already determined the broad lines of our national life for at least another generation.”[40] There was real doubt whether Hitler could be defeated at all.

There is no doubt that the United States can still defeat the worst impacts of climate change if we act now. As the last Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report made clear, we have not yet hit the tipping point of 2°C where several hundred million humans will be exposed to climate-related risks, global economic growth is halted and entire

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[38] Ibid.
Ecosystems are wiped out.[41] There is still time to adapt, and the economy has already begun to move in that direction. Solar and wind costs have plummeted by 88 and 69 percent respectively, making renewable technologies cheaper than existing energy sources, just as the last coal plants are expected to be phased out in the next fifteen years.[42] Meanwhile, new technologies designed to remove carbon out of the atmosphere are becoming more viable.[43] The only thing we are missing is the political will to act, which is where the Green New Deal comes in.

The Green New Deal injects into the climate change discussion what has so desperately been lacking for decades: hope. For too long, we have been inundated by report after report showing increasing damage to the climate, only to be met with silence from too many of our elected leaders. The Green New Deal breaks that cycle of paralysis and offers an actionable path forward that we can believe in. More than belief, however, it gives direction to where we should focus the nation’s energies and taps into the greatest aspects of American dynamism by centering that action around our nation’s workers. We are at our best when we work towards a common purpose, a higher purpose, and the Green New Deal reminds us of those roots. It reminds us that Americans do not cower in the face of defining moments; we meet the challenge and redefine the moment. Roosevelt’s words further remind us that “We have every good reason for hope—hope for peace, hope for the defense of our civilization and for the building of a better civilization in the future.”[44] It is up to us to turn that hope into action.


In a recent conversation with the Columbia Public Policy Review, Professor André Corrêa d’Almeida discusses the case studies and lessons learned featured in his book Smarter New York City: How City Agencies Innovate. With the growing call for city administrations to use more technology and data to enable smart cities, we take a step back to explore the real drivers and constraints behind urban innovation in New York and around the world.

Q: What inspired your research in New York City government innovation?

A: The inspiration was actually two stories. [The first one] was when I was at a Smart Cities Council conference in Silicon Valley in May 2017. And during lunchtime, there were two gentlemen [at my table] who were representing mid-sized cities who [believed] that they were not smart yet. This made me realize that the challenge behind becoming a “smart” city is that this idea is being imposed on city administrations that may be bankrupt. They are too small to even engage in this futuristic ideal of “smart cities” highly driven by the industry. We need to build narratives that help mayors from smaller cities build innovation agendas. Second, unless local governments come up with new platforms to address today’s development issues, the quality of life in these cities will not get better. All indicators show that even though, on average, cities may sound robust. If you stratify by different income levels, the inequality is expanding.

From the beginning, I wanted it to be a citywide research group. The book brought together about
30 researchers from 10 universities and associated research centers studying systems and realities that we all share. The motivation of the book is to understand how city administrations actually work and innovate without debt.

Q: Could you elaborate more on the connection between smart cities and sustainable development? I know they are putting it at the municipal level when it comes to more innovative platforms, but what does that look like in terms of having a smarter city also be a more sustainable and resilient city?

A: One of the main ideas behind the idea of becoming smarter is the idea of learning. If we focus on learning, we can tell cities with less resources that you can build with what you have. At the end of the book, the conclusion offers 13 main lessons and one of the lessons is “build on what exists”.

If the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are about global partnerships and if city administrations and local governments themselves do not feel empowered to build those innovative platforms, I think we are missing something on how to fulfill the SDGs. That is the reason why the first chapter [of the book] focuses on the SDGs and how New York City was the first city in the world to develop an SDG framework at the local level.

Q: Based off of your experience as a former advisor to UNDP, how do you perceive - similar to smaller cities in the United States - emerging economies in the developing world adopting these innovation agendas? Would there be any other challenges specific to them that they may need to overcome when practicing innovation?

A: As the inequality within and between cities is expanding, my prediction is that if we do not find smarter ways of using artificial intelligence or think of ways of managing abundant data that can help with mobility, resilience, and economic growth, honestly I do not know how we are going to address the development gap.

Q: With innovation being a buzzword in industry and in government, do you think innovation has to involve technology?

A: Not at all. The book talks about seven types of innovation drivers - tech and data being just two of them. And that is exactly the problem with this “smart city” conversation. One of the visuals in the book’s introduction proposes that we shift the conversation from a tech-centric approach to an agency-centric approach. Then around the agency, you can start having different types of conversations on tech, data, regulation, leadership, decision-making, and networks. Even smaller cities have talent and leadership that can set agendas and prioritize goals, have a legislative body that can be reviewed and improved, and have networks already in place that can be leveraged even before we think about tech and data. The book gives a more inclusive and holistic perspective on what innovation is.

If we talk about tech and data, there is a financial issue and a capacity issue because most city governments do not have the in-house talent to understand the industry. One of the things that frustrates the industry a lot is that when they talk about tech and data, they do not find the right partners to have the tech and data dialogue with. The other frustrating thing is the amount of money it costs to have tech and data. We need to have a realistic perspective on how our city can innovate. But we should be careful not to dismiss the strengths that municipalities already have. Imagine a situation where a city has a limited to zero tech and data capacity. If the conversation is about how limited they are, why would a mayor even dare to build that innovation agenda?

Q: The current Bill de Blasio administration in New York City has been advancing this equity agenda. How would you say government innovation increases social and economic equity for all New Yorkers?

A: In Chapter One, the One NYC plan featured in
the book includes a very large set of social, economic, and environmental indicators and ways of measuring those indicators. The City went through a consultative process to have citizens’ perspectives incorporated when building the range of parameters to monitor issues of inclusiveness. Then in Chapter Three, LinkNYC is making broadband, high-speed internet more accessible to all New Yorkers in the five boroughs. Chapter Four talks about Business Atlas - an initiative led by the NYC Mayor’s Office of Data Analytics to help entrepreneurs and small businesses access consumer demographic and behavior data that typically only large firms would have access to.

Q: Are there any agencies that you wish would have adopted more innovative practices?

A: The book covers twelve case studies in total. We interacted with 30 different agencies. The goal for the “becoming smarter” framework was never to impose the New York City model to other cities. In that sense, the book is very humble and explains that what we’ve tried to do is document how city agencies in New York are doing in terms of trial and error and in terms of finding the problem, designing a solution, and implementing that solution. It is not about how successful a specific program individually; it is about how much more effective a city administration can become if they learn about themselves through innovation mapping.

Q: The book touches on the focus on analytical excellence and the need to strive towards that goal. Could you elaborate more on the importance of that when it comes to an age where big data is driving decision-making and how technologies are better utilized?

A: With the case of the NYC Department of Planning, their team’s work in open data is so under the radar. When you map innovation that is happening within the City, you are creating a very powerful narrative that mayors can use to talk about their cities and to talk about new innovation roadmaps or platforms without even spending a dime. When a mayoral candidate runs for office and gets elected, he/she usually has 2 or 3 flagship priorities, policy areas that they know really well. But when you do not know 50-80% of what is going on, you cannot think about new ways to leverage and connect talent or new ways to go about cutting costs.

Q: What role do you think government leadership can play in fostering this innovation ecosystem?

A: I think that's where partnerships with academia could play a huge role. Let's just use the very specific example of the Chief Technology Officer case in New York. We have the [fourth] CTO in four years, and I think one of the difficulties is that someone had the idea that just because you throw someone to an organization to be empowered and capable of building a whole smart city strategy for New York. A city like New York will never have a single strategy for anything because more likely than not there are many well-resourced groups with strong political power. Help first map what is already happening instead of coming to impose the next new, great thing.

In that case, the example of the NYC Mayor’s Office of Data Analytics (MODA) is fascinating. We’ve learned again and again to “build and they will come”, but they will not come. Therefore, MODA decided to become a consultancy unit for other city agencies where they as the agency what it is looking for and then help them to the extent that they want. This new vision of MODA to help agencies make the most of their data also has [them dealing with] issues of how to best standardize the data, how to publish data, and how to address data privacy. Instead of looking forward first, get to know yourself.

Q: Is there anything you think the private sector can learn from public sector innovation or anything the private sector may have missed when it comes to working with government?

A: The book was also prepared with a private sector
Services (DCAS) and the third-party vendor NuEnergen was incredible. We hope that example can give city agencies a set of benchmarks that they can use in terms of how the problem is specified and the type of assistance that you would expect. We are no longer in an era where city agencies are the clients who [simply] hand out the RFPs. More and more, procurement is organized around determining which the best vendor to co-develop [a solution] with is.

Q: Say I were a city agency with a fully capable tech team when it comes to adopting a whole new innovation lab as you have outlined in the book. What would your advice be for my agency to ensure we do not miss the mark when addressing a community’s actual needs? In other words, where should we begin when it comes to creating a conscious strategy that aligns with the needs of the local community?

A: A good example of that in the book is the chapter on Neighborhood Innovation Labs - Chapter 9 - that was contributed by the City of New York’s former Director of Innovation Jeff Merritt and the NYC Economic Development Corporation. The Neighborhood Innovation Labs aimed to study neighborhood-level initiatives that needed to be scaled up, so they institutionalized these collaborative platforms between stakeholder associations, commerce, academia, city agencies to collect data and make recommendations on how that community can better benefit. It is a good attempt to bring concerns at the local level to the mayoral level.

Other examples of successful initiatives that a group of citizens put together were Vision Zero and the first Circular City program that we ran in downtown Brooklyn with startups and city agencies to build a new data pool. There is huge power in informed communities. There is a very strong tradition of [New York City] neighborhoods being very well-organized and socially engaged. That is not the same case in places like my hometown, Lisbon, Portugal. [There] it is much more politicized, so the communication only happens through the elected bodies. A lot more work needs to be done.

This book is a contribution to help build trust between city agencies, citizens, and the private sector.
In 2018, the Venta Maersk became the first container ship to navigate an Arctic route, sailing from Vladivostok in eastern Russia to St. Petersburg.[1] A year later, the first shipment of liquefied natural gas left the Yamal Peninsula in northern Russia, bound for Asian markets.[2] Despite abundant natural resources, the cost of extraction and transport had largely stymied development in the Arctic until recently. The recent navigability of the Arctic Ocean has led to international investment in Arctic military bases, infrastructure, scientific expeditions and other projections of power (the reader may recall Russia planting a flag on the Arctic seabed).[3] Against this backdrop, Canada's recently released Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (“The Arctic Framework”) is a large-scale experiment in radical democracy that challenges classical geopolitical framing of the Arctic region.

The Arctic Framework, released in August 2019, outlines Canada’s priorities regarding the Northern provinces and Arctic claims.[4] The government attempted to move beyond consultation and towards co-development between stakeholders during the policy-making process.[5] The working group included multiple levels of government and twenty-five indigenous organizations.[6] The group failed to reach consensus on many issues.

The Arctic Framework has been criticized for frequent contradictions: is it possible to “support investments in cold climate resource extraction” whilst “ensuring conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of ecosystems”? [7] As a governing document, it lacks deliverable outcomes and has been derided as “confusing” and “nothing new” in the press.[8] And yet, the process of constructing the Arctic Framework – convening stakeholders with opposing viewpoints to draft a policy document that includes multiple contradictory statements – was an experiment in radical democracy. The result of this experiment is still to come, but the Canadian government’s openness to dissension signals commitment to the deepest ideals of democracy at a time when democracy is losing ground to authoritarianism worldwide.

Radical democracy was first theorized in the 1980s by scholars Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, who argued that radical democracy is “true” democracy because it allows space for difference, in addition to prioritizing equality and freedom.[9] In contrast to liberal democracy, radical democracy “emphasizes conflict and dissension as themselves constitutive of democracy, as necessary to maintain its openness.”[10] By building a democracy around dissent, not cohesion, participants make visible existing power structures and open the status quo to challenges.

At first blush, the Arctic Framework appears to be a large-scale federal experiment in deliberative democracy, which is generally considered part of liberal (not radical) democracy. Deliberative democracy holds that for a decision to be legitimate, it must be preceded by authentic stakeholder debate.

However, critics of deliberative and liberal democracy disagree with the embedded assumption that it is possible, or even desirable, for groups and individuals to coalesce around a single viewpoint. Rather, radical democratic theorists acknowledge the role of power in discourse – that, for example, the Canadian government and the indigenous groups are working from uneven positions of power and this imbalance will manifest in the process and the outcome.[11] In the context of such a hierarchy, consensus is only possible by suppressing or excluding dissension, and therefore should not be a desired outcome.[12]

In line with radical democracy, the Arctic Framework does not proclaim consensus, and even includes “Partner Chapters” from Indigenous groups that directly proclaim consensus, and even includes “Partner Chapters” from Indigenous groups that directly challenge the main body of the text. Radical democracy depends on struggle and disagreement, but both sides must respect each other: in this context, the purpose of conflict is to air multiple perspectives, not to destroy the other. The Canadian government’s inclusion of “adversarial” content within the broader Arctic Framework demonstrates this respect and acknowledges the legitimacy of the Indigenous perspective.

Democracy is both a process and an outcome, and its form is always changing. Lately, democracy is on the run: in 2019, Freedom House reported the 13th consecutive year of democratic decline.[13] If we believe, as Mouffe and Laclau would argue, that radical democracy is “true” democracy, with the potential to create a more inclusive and just society, then the Arctic Framework represents progression.

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in the refinement of the democratic process. Though the Arctic Framework is just one set of policies governing Canada’s North, it is a significant procedural and ideological template for governance and for democracies worldwide.

Since the Cold War, the Arctic has been framed as an “apolitical space of regional governance, functional co-operation, and peaceful co-existence.”[14] However, as sea-lanes clear, competition in the Arctic region is increasingly characterized as the “Great Game” of the twenty-first century.[15] This classical geopolitical framing serves, in turn, to justify international rivalries and aggressions. The radical democratic ideals embodied by the Arctic Framework process provide a contrasting narrative to hegemonic “Race for the Arctic” framing by presenting the Arctic as a complex natural and built environment composed of stakeholders with opposing viewpoints. The question still remains however, to what extent the Canadian government will go to resolve these differences.

[15] Ibid.
Christine Jordan knew well the experience of facing injustice. As the cousin of Martin Luther King, Jr., the struggle for civil rights was in her blood. She grew up in a Georgia suffocated by the brutal tyranny of Jim Crow laws. From Atlanta, Georgia to Selma, Alabama, segregationists ensured that African Americans and other minority groups were denied their constitutional right to vote, no matter how spurious their justifications for denial. The segregationists might demand that the registrant recite by heart, every word of the U.S. Constitution or guess the number of jelly beans in a jar just to get their voter registration approved.

At the age of 92, Mrs. Jordan had every reason to believe that things had changed. She had voted in every election since 1968, and no one had interfered with her right to vote. She arrived at her polling place in November 2018 with the help of her walker, dressed in her Sunday best, for she was celebrating her fiftieth year of casting her vote. But this year was different. In 2018, Mrs. Jordan was once again denied the right to vote. Like over a million other Georgians – most of which were African American – she had been purged from Georgia’s voting rolls by Secretary of State Brian Kemp in his quest to win the Georgia governorship.

Remembering Those Before Us
Today, despite it being fifty-four years after the March at Selma, we continue to witness a rise of voter suppression. A dark contrast exists between the spirit of those who suppressed votes and the spirit of the compassionate Americans who marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in a non-violent demand for African Americans’ constitutional right to vote. Six blocks into their 54-mile march to Alabama’s capital in Montgomery, the marchers were confronted by then-Governor of Alabama George Wallace’s state troopers and local lawmen, armed with billy clubs and tear gas.

These brave men and women knew the stakes. Prior activists had been murdered all over the South, no matter how peaceful their protests. But they marched on, for their cause was just and some things were worth dying for. As the protestors approached the crest of the bridge, the troopers raced forward, horses charging with their clubs held high. The troopers opened their tear gas canisters as they slammed men and women, young and old, to the ground while dozens of white spectators waving Confederate flags jeered and cheered on the brutal beating of innocents from nearby. Fortunately none of the protestors died that day, but many feared they would not would make it out alive.

Witnessing the attack on the Selma Marchers, reporters and photographers called in to their newspapers and stations to describe the horrors, sending in photos to record and memorialize what
would be remembered as Bloody Sunday. Millions of Americans had their TV programming interrupted by breaking news of the Selma March. In this moment, America could no longer look away. They were forced to side with either the brutality of bigotry and hate, or their fellow Americans sacrificing their lives for the goal of self-determination. The Marchers shined a light so bright on the scourge of racism that it awoke the conscience of a nation, 100 years after the abolition of slavery and the end of the Civil War. Their triumph finally ended the political oppression used to deny African Americans the right to vote in the South.

Acknowledging the Present
The story should have ended there. While we all may know that racism is still alive and well in so many of our political institutions, some things are beyond the pale. Forty-seven years after Selma, the Supreme Court effectively struck down the heart of the Voting Rights Act, clearing the way for a Pandora’s box of new state laws designed to deny minorities their constitutional right to vote. States around the country imposed the greatest voting restrictions since the Jim Crow era.

Nowhere was the attack on voting rights more egregious than in Georgia where Secretary of State Brian Kemp introduced a sweeping set of crackdowns, every single one of which disproportionately affected African Americans. In one night, he executed what The Atlanta Journal-Constitution has called the “largest mass disenfranchisement in US history,” purging 500,000 voters from the Georgia voter registration list, allegedly because these voters didn’t vote in consecutive elections.[1] Those purged represented a total of eight percent of Georgia’s voting population, and none of them were warned that their voter registration was canceled.[2] During his tenure as Secretary of State, Kemp purged 1.4 million voters from the Georgia voter registration list.[3] In addition, Kemp closed 214 polling locations throughout the state of Georgia, most of which were in largely African American communities all while attributing the closures to his efforts of reducing Georgia’s election expenses.

When his eventual opponent, Stacey Abrams, began registering African American voters in historic numbers, Kemp claimed that her organization must be fraudulent. Abrams was not intimidated by Kemp; his investigation found no evidence of fraud

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to justify its existence. Kemp took another route to slow the new voters by suspending 53,000 voter registration applications, almost seventy percent of which were from African American men and women.[4]

Despite Kemp’s actions, African American turnout surged to historic levels during early voting. Hence Kemp ramped his efforts into overdrive. Forty African American senior citizens were riding a group bus to their poll to cast their early votes, but they were forced off their bus by zealous county clerks, under the guise of protecting the sanctity of a little-known law that prevented “political activities” during county-sponsored events. The bus was a non-partisan, non-political ride for members of a senior center to vote.

Facing the Consequences
On election day, precincts in majority African American communities of Georgia had significantly fewer voting machines than normal, many of which were not functioning because election officials “forgot” to include the required power cords necessary to power the machines. In these and other polling locations, voters waited hours in the pouring rain to vote while Kemp kept thousands of voting machines locked up in storage. This caused African Americans in Georgia to wait forty percent longer to vote than their demographic did in any other state in the union. As a result, countless minority voters in Georgia abandoned their places in the voting lines to return to work or families waiting at home.

How could this happen in the United States of America in 2018? How could the ghost of Jim Crow resurface itself to haunt citizens once again? It was clear that there was much work to be done to fight the source of racism in this country, but the right to vote – the most sacred foundation of our democracy – was supposed to be unimpeachable.

Kemp received no denouncement from his party for dusting off the playbook of the segregation era as they resolutely supported Kemp’s candidacy for the governorship to the last moment. Kemp won his race against Democrat Stacey Abrams by 1.5 percent, or 56,000 votes.[5] Again, Kemp suspended 53,000 voter registrations, purged 1.4 million voters, and forced African Americans to wait hours to vote. Had it not been for Secretary of State Kemp’s assault on Georgia citizens’ voting rights during his candidacy for governor in that same state, it is likely that Georgia would have elected the first African American female governor in America’s history.

Kemp’s actions may be the most egregious, but he is not alone. Heidi Heitkamp shocked the U.S. political world in 2012 when she won a North Dakota senate seat in part due to high turnout by Native Americans. To insure against this reoccurrence, her opponent Kevin Cramer and his party introduced a state law preventing citizens from voting unless they had identification cards indicating a residential address. As the majority of Native Americans living on tribal reservations don’t have street addresses, this new election law was poised to systematically disenfranchise Native American voters. Its impact was particularly devastating because it went into effect just one month before the next election.

Practices of disenfranchisement have been implemented in different styles in twenty-four states; all of these practices were aimed at reducing voting rates of minority groups threatening political majorities. In 2019 alone, tens of thousands of voters were slashed from Texas voter rolls.[6]

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stepping Forward
It is our moral responsibility to act and to act decisively. By doing nothing, we dishonor the sacrifice of the heroic marchers in Selma, Alabama. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.”

It is clear that politicians who act to violate voter rights believe they can get away with this with no political consequence. If anything, their actions are increasingly more brazen. Therefore, let’s change their political calculus by making voter suppression our litmus test on election day. First, we must make it clear that if you interfere with anyone’s right to vote, you will never win another election. We will work to deny them the nomination, and if they win it anyway, we will vote for their opponent because the integrity of our democracy matters far more than four years of policies we may not favor.

Second, we need to make sure that our friends and family members know exactly what has been and still is occurring. If we can spread the message and make sure that every American knows how far these politicians have gone, then we can defeat it because most Americans of all political persuasions should know that messing with our democracy is wrong.

Third, we must be more engaged with our democracy. Register for voter suppression updates with sites such as Let America Vote.[7] When voter suppression is proposed in your state, they will let you know how to get involved, how to call your state representative, when protests are planned, and when efforts to pass a new national voting rights law are moving forward. Citizens can even learn the progress of their own state’s expansion or contraction of voting rights from places like the Brennan Center for Justice’s “Voting Laws Roundup.”[8]

Fourth, organizations working to protect voter rights need funds to function. If you have the means to contribute, you can donate to voting rights organizations like People for the American Way and Stacey Abrams’ Fair Fight Action. Finally, logistical successes of elections are based in part on contributions of volunteers working to protect our democracy. You can volunteer to serve as an election day poll watcher to help ensure voting rights for all.

The fight to ensure universal voting rights can feel daunting. But we must remember that we are not alone in this struggle. The task ahead of us may be great, but the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement faced far greater odds and evils then we do today, and they triumphed over the yoke of segregation. American history is littered with examples that prove that when we stand up against injustice, given enough time and perseverance, we will overcome. It is the job of our generation – and any others who will join us – to pick up the torch that ordinary and heroic Americans carried across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama fifty-four years ago and to carry it forward until we have guaranteed, once and for all, that the votes of our fellow citizens will never again be denied.


Since the repeal of New York’s Cabaret Law in 2017, discrete nightlife establishments have introduced progressive and inclusive policies to ensure consent and reduce sexual harassment. The success of these policies is influencing City Council to adopt a citywide nightlife consent policy.

Boundaries provide individuals the freedom to express themselves within specified constraints as opposed to prohibitions, which can be much more restrictive and therefore incentivize breaking the rules altogether. Living within boundaries feels akin to agreeing to paint within the lines while living with prohibitions feels akin to having your paint and brush taken away. The former leaves room for discretion and creativity whereas the latter shuts down this space completely. This dichotomy can be applied to the New York City dance club scene since the repeal of the New York Cabaret Law in 2017.

While the New York City Cabaret Law attempted in part to create a safer nightlife by completely prohibiting dancing in establishments without cabaret licenses, dance clubs in the post-Cabaret Law era are attempting to create safe, inclusive, and legal spaces by setting boundaries related to consent that all patrons must agree to prior to entering the space. Both the Cabaret Law and the consent-based programs are intended to police bodies and culture in New York City nightlife. However, while the restrictive Cabaret Law had the effect of pushing social dancing into spaces that were illegal and unregulated, the permissive consent-based programs create boundaries that make social dancing safer for everyone.

Enacted in 1926, the Cabaret Law made it illegal to host musical entertainment, sing, dance, or engage in other forms of amusement without a license. While the law persisted for ninety-one years, the enforcement of the law was at an all-time low leading up to the repeal. Still, by 2017 only ninety-seven out of roughly 25,000 eating and drinking establishments in New York City had a cabaret license.[1] These low numbers are the result of the costly and time-consuming obstacles of acquiring a cabaret license, which required the approval of several agencies in addition to operating in areas zoned for commercial manufacturing.

While the Cabaret Law sought to control behavior that it deemed unsafe—as well as to demonize dancing by portraying it as amoral—the result was that it pushed nightlife into underground, unregulated spaces. This was especially true for the dance music scene that started with disco in the 1970s and continues to the present. Given that these dance parties were happening illegally in abandoned warehouses or lofts, the safety and

security of the partygoers was severely compromised by spaces that were not compliant with fire codes and fell outside the radar of police and other emergency response teams. In effect, instead of protecting New Yorkers from “criminal activity” in nightlife establishments, the Cabaret Law pushed regular New Yorkers into even less safe environments.

Since the 2017 repeal of the law, the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens have seen a proliferation of spaces dedicated to dancing, including House of Yes in Brooklyn and Nowadays in Queens. What these two clubs have in common is their strict consent rules: every customer entering their establishment must abide by specific rules of conduct which include agreeing not to touch anyone, in any way, without clearly expressed verbal consent. Fascinatingly, these programs have had an impact on public policy.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city,” the repeal of the Cabaret Law has allowed New Yorkers to create legal spaces that protect their right to the city by allowing social dancing and recognizing spaces created for dancing as invaluable to city life. Inherent to Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city” is the idea that an urban environment is a space for creativity and expression with a resistance to capitalism and bureaucratic order. While social dancing fits strongly into this definition, the repeal of the Cabaret Law does not signify resistance to capitalism and bureaucrats. Instead, the repeal was made possible precisely because political actors as well as business owners saw the expansion of the nightlife scene in New York City as a market opportunity.

While the right to the city entails the protection to participate equally in urban spaces based on a diversity of activities available and accessible to all city dwellers, the concept of “urban rights” can be defined as a crucial right to be in a public space. This means that the “urban right” is characterized by the existence of public space that grants equal access to every member of an urban society regardless of an individual’s economic, racial, sexual, or other social/ascriptive identity. Given their emphasis on consent rules that forbid physical contact of any kind without explicit permission, House of Yes and Nowadays are creating environments where all individuals can feel safe and supported while expressing themselves through dance. Though these rules protect everyone, they are especially important in safeguarding the urban rights of women and LGBTQ+ individuals who typically encounter unwanted sexual harassment and experience frequent invasions of their personal space in nightlife environments.

These kinds of consent-based programs have existed within the context of illegal underground dance parties prior to the repeal of the Cabaret Law, especially in spaces created for sexual expression in the LGBTQ+ community. However, the legality of the new dance spaces afforded by the repeal of the Cabaret Law means that women and LGBTQ+ individuals don’t have to attend illegal dance parties in order to participate in events where their consent will be asked and upheld.

While both House of Yes and Nowadays have established programs aimed at creating safe spaces for all their patrons, they each have adopted their own brand of consent-based programs. Given that House of Yes describes itself as a “temple of expression” and hosts parties where costumes are mandatory, it is no surprise that its consent program is enforced by what it describes as “consentcorns.” While this term might make the role of enforcement seem frivolous, the program is taken very seriously. It consists of waivers, signage (“If you feel something, say something”), staff training, and a code of conduct policy posted on all event pages. When partygoers enter the venue, they are immediately greeted by a consentcorn and are asked to agree to the following statement:

“You are not going to touch anyone, in any way, without getting express verbal consent. This is true for all gender variations. Anything that is not a ‘Yes’ or a ‘Hell, yes’ is a ‘Hell, no.’ And should anyone, at any point, feel unsafe, look for one of us with a horn. We’re the consentcorns, and we’re here to help you.”[4]

Most of the consentcorns have been trained by Emma Kaywin, a sexual-health educator for hospitals and civic groups, who now co-directs House of Yes’s consent-based program. By February 2019, eighty people had been trained in de-escalation strategies, including how to talk about microaggressions, consent violations, “over-inbriation,” and violence. As House of Yes co-founder Kay Burke told The New Yorker: “It’s really about people looking out for each other and not feeling like there’s this nanny-state babysitter of a night club.”[5] The program is so successful that the waiting list for training is seventy people long and other party organizers have begun to hire the consentcorns for freelance gigs.[6]

Although Nowadays does not use a creative term like consenticorn to brand its consent-based program, its message is no less impactful. The venue has a “safer space crew” on and around the dance floor that wears red bracelets. Similar to House of Yes, prior to entering the main venue, patrons are greeted by a door manager and asked to explicitly agree to a set of rules. These include: no tolerance for violence; non-consensual touching; the use of racist, homophobic, transphobic, sexist or other discriminatory language; and leering.[7] If anyone feels unsafe in the space, they can reach out to the “safer space crew” to help resolve the problem.

While these consent-based programs still control bodies within their establishments in order to ensure safety, they do so in a way that protects the right to the city of all individuals who enter their doors with the goal of respectfully participating in a social dancing event. They create boundaries within which individuals have the freedom to be themselves and express their creativity through dance. This stands in stark opposition to the prohibition on dancing under the Cabaret Law, where individuals were not allowed to dance in public spaces in order to mitigate the risks that come from nightlife activity.

The success of the consent-based program at House of Yes inspired New York City Councilman Rafael Espinal to introduce legislation to codify consent and ensure safety from sexual harassment in nightlife establishments. In fact, Espinal partnered with the co-founders of House of Yes, Anya Sapozhnikova and Kae Burk, to launch an awareness campaign about consent.[8] On October 31, 2018, Espinal proposed a three-part bill that would require all nightlife venues to provide proper bystander training as part of their initial hiring process, display highly visible posters explaining the rules of consent in the venue, and require the Mayor’s Office of Nightlife to post information relating to consent and training on its website.[9] In his support for the bill, Espinal specifically stated: “Unfortunately, harassment is so common at some nightlife venues that many women see it as part of

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
the experience of going out.”[10] Clearly then, part of the impetus for proposing an increased awareness of sexual harassment in nightlife establishments is the protection of the urban rights of women, and this includes spaces for social dancing. Some of the concerns with the bill related to the hesitation on the part of the nightlife venues to assume responsibility and liability for harassment occurring in their spaces.

While the bill has yet to be enacted into law, if properly implemented, it would reinforce the protection of urban rights of all individuals. However, the mere fact that this is a conversation that is part of official political discourse is a major win for those who are frequent targets of sexual harassment in nightlife establishments. In accepting the need for social dancing spaces, New York City leaders are also faced with acknowledging the need to reinforce safety and respect in nightlife culture. New York City nightlife is being set on a path to self-improvement.

On July 3, 2018, the Trump administration announced that they were repealing pro-affirmative action policies put in place during the Obama administration.[1] In one particular pair of policy guidance documents issued in 2011, the Obama-era Education and Justice Departments informed schools at all levels of education across the country that the Supreme Court has established “the compelling interests” of the states in achieving diversity on the campuses of educational institutions.[2] They concluded that the court “has made clear such steps can include taking account of the race of individual students in a narrowly tailored manner.”[3] The Obama-era policy replaced the Bush administration-era view that discouraged affirmative action. The Bush-era guidance had been removed from the government website during the Obama administration, but has now reappeared on the US Department of Education website.

By rescinding the instruction that campus diversity is a “compelling interest,” the Trump administration has directly infringed on the human right to “equality in dignity and rights,” and access to education as set forth by the United Nations in Articles 1 and 26 of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[4] Educational institutions are now under increased pressure to abolish affirmative action measures aimed at increasing the number of minority students admitted.

Universities that use affirmative action policies to increase campus diversity are now highly vulnerable to civil litigation brought by rejected applicants and other special interest groups. In reviewing affirmative action cases, courts apply what is called a “strict scrutiny standard” to determine whether the use of racial classifications is necessary in order to satisfy a compelling state interest and whether those measures are narrowly tailored enough to do so. It is up to the courts to identify what interests the state finds compelling enough and determine whether the affirmative action plan under review is not overly broad. Grutter v. Bollinger (2003) [5] and Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1975) [6] are two often cited Supreme Court decisions that consider the use of race classifications in universities’ admissions process. Judicial precedent demonstrates that absent the ability to prove that there is a

compelling state interest in achieving diversity, the argument for using race as an admissions factor cannot survive the strict scrutiny test.

Before the principle that there was a compelling state interest involved in achieving diversity on school campuses was established, the Supreme Court held that the UC Davis Medical School’s use of racial quotas in their admission process could not withstand judicial review of constitutionality under a standard of strict scrutiny. Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, was brought by a White applicant who believed that he was not admitted to the school of his choice due to affirmative action measures aimed at increasing the number of minorities at the school. The university had set aside 16 out of 100 seats for minorities. The Supreme Court Justices were divided as to whether UC Davis Medical School’s use of race in determining who they would admit was enough to trigger strict scrutiny. Justice Brennan expressed the opinion that intermediate scrutiny should apply instead and that Bakke, the applicant, should not have won, but in siding with the majority, Justice Powell expressed the opinion that the standard of strict scrutiny should apply regardless of whether a historically disadvantaged race is being burdened or benefited. Although Black Americans in particular were not identified by the university as the intended recipients of all 16 of these seats, the racial group became the lightning rod of discussion in this and other affirmative action cases. Courts adopted the perspective that policies that appear to be aimed at benefiting historically disadvantaged minorities --, but Black Americans especially it seems ---, should be viewed as suspiciously by courts as policies that appear to advantage White Americans.

About three decades of political and social evolution later, the Supreme Court majority held in Grutter v. Bollinger that because student body diversity is a compelling state interest, the University of Michigan law school’s use of race in university admissions was justifiable. Writing for the majority, Justice O’Connor emphasized that the
compelling state interest arose from the fact that the educational institution was promoting “diversity,” not providing a remedy for chattel slavery, colonization, genocide or any other of the targeted harms that have occurred in the US. She also pointed to numerous expert studies and reports showing that in order to properly prepared students to be leaders in a globalized society, they must acquire skills that “can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.” Indeed, a more recent study conducted by business professors Cristian Deszó of the University of Maryland and David Ross of Columbia University affirms that increasing gender diversity at the top firms in Standard & Poor’s Composite 1500 list leads to increased revenue. [7] “Thus,” wrote O’Connor, “the Law School has a compelling interest in attaining a diverse student body.” With this opinion, the court established that strict scrutiny would not automatically prove fatal to a case in support of affirmative action if a compelling interest can be proven. [8]

Despite the accumulation of evidence in support of affirmative action, the current administration has chosen to pursue retrograde public policies that decrease U.S. minorities’ already limited access to higher education.[9] Unfortunately, the aim of affirmative action that the Supreme Court supported under the Obama administration was “diversity” within the context of today’s social environment, and so all students who identify as non-White are forced to compete for a limited number of spots at traditionally segregated educational institutions. With the repeal of the Obama-era guidelines, minority students face even more difficulties in gaining admission to these elite spaces and are even motivated to become litigious themselves.

By pitting marginalized racial groups against each other to compete for an even smaller number of seats, the Trump administration is appealing to its right-wing, White supremacist base of voters, rather than promoting access to education for all Americans. Take for example Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard, a case now on appeal, in which Asian-American students argue that Harvard University has systematically excluded some some Asian-American applicants to maintain slots for students of other races.[10] Again, disgruntled applicants and courts have become hyper-focused on arguing over whether Black Americans in particular ought to exist in academic spaces. However, a debate on affirmative action framed in this way has no merit because 1) racial minorities have not been, nor are they currently, the chief beneficiaries of affirmative action and 2) there is no evidence that minority applicants have an advantage over White applicants in the admissions process—and actually quite the opposite occurs. In reality, White women have historically benefitted the most from affirmative action. Furthermore, Harvard admits more White legacy students than the total number of Black students admitted each year.[11] Data shows that 29% of Harvard admits are legacies and that 93% of the legacy students are White. In contrast 14.6% of Harvard admits are Black. [12]

In addition, it is difficult to account for all the applicants whose parents just purchased their

In reality, White women have historically benefitted the most from affirmative action


admission by way of donation (a legal procedure in the US). It would be naive to assume that the Trump administration is unaware of how discouraging affirmative action in effect tightens the already limited window of opportunity through which minority students can access higher education. It is more likely that the effort to “make America great again” is a concerted effort on the part of the government to make institutions of higher learning predominately White again.

The Trump administration’s pivot back to Bush-era public policy signals its desire to perpetuate profound and distinct human inequality in the US. Taking a page from the Bush-era trickle-down economics playbook, the government has implicitly adopted the policy stance that the social and financial elite, predominately made up of White Americans, is the demographic that the U.S. should be the most invested in supporting. This attitude is maintained despite the data consistently showing the U.S. labor market excluding minorities. Minorities with the same qualifications as White Americans struggle to find employment, secure housing loans, and are incarcerated at far higher rates, contributing to the problem of wealth inequality along racial lines. In one study, “Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination,” University of Chicago economists Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan sent out thousands of fictitious resumes with names that are commonly perceived to be “African-American- or white-sounding” in response to help-wanted newspaper advertisements.[13] They found that resumes with White names received 50 percent more callbacks for interviews. The disparity in job opportunities is even greater for minorities less qualified than their peers. By limiting equal access to education, the Trump administration is also limiting minorities’ ability to exercise the right to work and live free from discrimination. This state of affairs perpetuates our current situation in which the wealth gap between the ultra-rich and the poor in the US is widening.[14]

Without affirmative action, there are few measures in place that check the ability of America’s most privileged citizens to monopolize the admissions system. In Preparing for Power, sociology professors Peter W. Cookson, Jr. of Georgetown University and Caroline Hodges Persell of New York University describe their study on private boarding school students, which shows that those at the top 16 boarding schools have a much higher likelihood of admission to educational institutions than those who do not come from such schools.[15] These elite students are taught to embrace expectations of entry while for the average American, admission to an ivy league institution is as likely as winning the lottery. Moreover, the college racketeering enterprise recently uncovered by the FBI, in which rich and famous parents bribed test administrators and sports coaches, cheated on admissions evaluations, and defrauded officials at several schools on behalf of their adult-children, lays bare the erasure of academic mediocrity among the American elite in favor of upvoting the myth of minority inferiority and a whole host of other pernicious ideologies about the role of minority in this country.[16] In this way as well, the government is supporting admissions processes that are racially, financially, and socially exclusive.

 Officials of the Trump administration argue that the Obama-era guidelines went beyond the requirements of the Constitution to “prematurely decide, or appear to decide, whether particular actions violate the Constitution or federal law.”[17] Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, a wealthy former

business chainwoman with no experience in the field of law or education previous to her appointment, told the Associated Press, "I think this has been a question before the courts and the courts have opined." DeVos’ statement implies that courts have held affirmative action to be unconstitutional, but that is not what the courts have held. She may have misspoken and meant to refer to the Supreme Court decision on Gratz v. Bollinger (2003).[18] In Gratz, the court held that the University of Michigan’s affirmative action measures were not narrowly tailored to achieve a compelling state interest. However, that holding merely indicated that the university had to adjust their affirmative action plan, not abolish it. The Supreme Court even upheld affirmative action as recently as in 2016 with its ruling on Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin (2016).[19] In Fisher, the court decided that UT-Austin’s admissions policy survived strict scrutiny in accordance with a previous ruling on the case, which ruled that strict scrutiny should be applied to determine the constitutionality of the University’s race-sensitive admissions policy.

In keeping with his administration’s public policy stance since the repeal in July, Trump has nominated people to the nation’s highest courts that oppose affirmative action. An example is Naomi Rao, who was recently confirmed by the Senate to take now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s vacant seat on the DC Circuit Court of Appeals.[20] During her time as an undergraduate at Yale, Rao published a book review in the Yale Free Press she titled “In Defense of Authentic Elitism,” where she complained that we live in “this age of affirmative action, women’s rights, special rights for the handicapped and welfare for the indigent and lazy…. In our new feel-good era, everybody is okay, and political and academic standards can adjust to accommodate anyone.” [21] This is an unabashedly ahistorical and unfactual account of what affirmative action purports to do and has accomplished. Rao’s muddy thinking on American history and affirmative action is a reflection of the Trump administration’s dehumanizing public policy views.

Altogether, a review of the Supreme Court’s rulings and peer-reviewed data demonstrate that the Trump administration has directly infringed on the human right to access education and equality in the US by revoking Obama-era public policy guidelines in support of affirmative action.[22] The concept of affirmative action is often framed as an emotional one that indicates what your instincts of fairness are, but as this article has demonstrated, such a framing of the debate is not only unfactual, but ahistorical as well. Rather, administrative policies on affirmative action indicate what ideas of economic and social logic we are willing or unwilling to endorse. With this in mind, we may ask if Native-Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, and many other ethnic groups considered to be minorities in the US have been under-served by affirmative action measures put in place during the Obama administration and further previous administrations. The answer would be that they absolutely have been under-served, and continue to be under-served. This article does not argue that the past affirmative action regime was ideal. This article instead points out that the Trump administration has chosen to take a step back from progress, rather than a step toward repairing human inequality and unequal access to education, both fundamental human rights set out by the United Nations. Thus, the Trump Administration’s repeal of pro-affirmative action policies is more consequential than many realize. Now, it is up to students, administrators, and faculty to signal their stance on this issue, and, as Trump’s term in office nears its end, it is up to voters to decide if they want more of the same under the next administration, or if they want change.

Renewed attacks by the Arakan Army, a Buddhist insurgent group, against police stations in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar have once again turned the eyes of the world towards the problems in the region, and inevitably the plight of the Rohingya.[1] Religion or ethnicity are often upheld as the key drivers of the Rohingya crisis. Over the past year, however, an alternative narrative explaining why many Rohingya were driven out of Rakhine State has begun to emerge. Bangladesh’s ex-President Hussain Muhammad Ershad has, for example, claimed that the forced exodus “has nothing to do with religion; it is political economy.” His claims are mirrored in some local [2] and international media. [3] These arguments share a key commonality – they emphasize the influential and destructive role of natural resources.

The President’s explanation is tempting and appears to be supported by social science literature. It also seems to fit neatly within the conflict patterns observed in Myanmar, and across the world. Yet, it is a gross and dangerous simplification and detrimental to solving the humanitarian catastrophe.

Paul Collier popularized the “resource curse” in the early 2000s.[4] His argument was that greed is a bigger driver of conflict than grievance, and that reliance on natural resources creates a rentier system devoid of government accountability.

To illustrate his point, Collier turned to Liberia. The brutal and ongoing civil war in the West African country was, he argued, motivated by the endless appetite for riches and lack of governmental accountability by Charles Taylor, warlord and president of the country. This conclusion ignored the historic marginalization of native Liberians at the hands of the dominant settler class. Natural resources provided the means and incentives for war, but they did not cause it.[5]

The resource curse runs into similar problems

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wherever it is applied by analysts and pundits. The concept simply fails to grasp the complex national histories and political realities of conflict.

Myanmar, like Liberia, is supposedly afflicted with the resource curse. The country is abundant in resources and plagued by a myriad of ethnic conflict. Like diamonds in the Congo, oil in Kurdistan, or timber in Liberia, jade is the paramount resource implicated in conflict in Myanmar.[6] The jade trade contributes an estimated $31 billion per year to Myanmar’s economy, a staggering 48 percent of GDP. The immense profits incentivize the military to keep strict control and ethnic groups to fight back for what they consider is their rightful slice of the pie. The Kachin Independence Army, the central player in Myanmar’s most prolific civil war, earns substantial revenues from taxation according to the activist NGO Global Witness.[7]

Moreover, the role of natural resources in the conflict is widely recognized within the country. A 2017 press statement by 139 local civil society organizations stated: “For decades, the resources for which the country is famed have helped incentivize and fuel fighting which has destroyed countless lives”. [8] The importance of natural resources within the Myanmar conflict system is undeniable. But that does not mean that the resources are responsible for the long and systematic persecution of the Rohingya that has now culminated in ethnic cleansing.

Atrocities against the group are not new. The Rohingya have suffered continuously from what Syed Serajul Islam, a Bangladeshi social scientist, terms “state terrorism,” including unfair trials, torture, extrajudicial execution, intimidation, and forced labour since Myanmar’s independence from Britain in 1948.[9] Why? The root causes lie in the country’s colonial history. The Rohingya fought with the British against the Japanese when they occupied Myanmar during the second World War, and then fought to join the new state of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, after independence. As such, one can imagine that the military junta, who took power in 1962, were not the biggest fans of the group. Under military rule, atrocities against the Rohingya escalated, in part due to a strict nationalization program. A powerful propaganda campaign by the military government also sought to convince the country that the Rohingya were illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

The current conflict must be seen within this historic legacy and the institutionalized marginalization it fostered. So why do some say that the conflict is caused by the competition over resources?

Saskia Sassen, a sociologist at Columbia, believes that the military might be clearing the Rohingya to gain unrestricted access to their land. She points to recent and massive land acquisitions and investments by Chinese companies in Rakhine.[10] Companies have pledged, for example, to develop a $7.3 billion deep-sea port and $3.2 billion industrial park spanning 1,737 hectares in southern Rakhine. Others note the recent gas and oil boom in southern Rakhine, including infrastructure investment by Gulf States, an array of oil deals between Myanmar, the Gulf States and China, and, most notably, a Chinese constructed natural gas pipeline.[11] These investments, it is argued, increase the value of land the Rohingya live on and

shows the increasing revenue potential of a long-forgotten province. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) has further pointed out that China’s investment in the state may partly explain its direct support to the Burmese government during the crisis.[12]

Amidst these land acquisitions and investments, the military is using even more extreme tactics against the Rohingya than ever before. During earlier attacks by local militias, the military encouraged and in some cases forced Rohingya to move into government-run camps.[13] They did not offer such options during the early days of the crisis.

Rohingya diaspora groups also point to the tension that natural resource extraction might cause.[14] They argue that local militias are motivated to exterminate th because doing so decreases the number of hands to fill with potential development money.

Such arguments are compelling, especially considering the military’s actions elsewhere in the country. Yet, they begin to unravel upon closer inspection.

Most Rohingya live in northern Rakhine, not southern where almost all investment is focused. [15] So, it is not clear what direct value the projects bring to traditional Rohingya lands. As such, the military’s incentives have not fundamentally changed, despite notions to the contrary. Mass killings and forced exodus also do not appear in relation to other groups living on valuable land in Rakhine.

Another Muslim group, the Kaman (recognized as an official minority by the Government), live by the large investments. They have, since the beginning of the project, been forcibly displaced, placed in camps, and limited in movement – tactics used against the Rohingya before the current crisis – but not been subject to the type of ethnic cleansing directed towards the Rohingya. The Kaman has, furthermore, clashed with the local Buddhists who themselves have been forcibly replaced. Yet, organized mass killings have not ensued.

Displacing Rohingya from their land has no clear economic advantage, and genocidal tendencies against other groups do not seem to exist. Explanations rooted in the resource curse, then, hold only limited explanatory power at best.

The resource curse has not struck another fatal blow in northern Rakhine. Rather, historical oppression has escalated into genocidal force due to a changing political, economic and security environment.

To think the escalating crimes against humanity can be explained by natural resources or religion alone is unsophisticated. To fully understand the travesty, one needs to understand the region’s history, the legacy of colonialism and military rule, the role of propaganda and popular opinion.

The Rohingya’s suffering does not fit into a neat box imposed from above. In attempting to make it fit, one not only misses the big picture, but also compounds the misunderstanding that has caused their plight.

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During the last century, society has experienced an acute decrease in several indicators of trust levels. Nobel Memorial Prize winner Kenneth Arrow (1974) called trust “a lubricant for social systems” and Francis Fukuyama (1995) argued vehemently that modern prosperous countries tend to be those where business relations between people can be conducted flexibly on the basis of trust.[1]

According to the General Social Survey from 2018, the percentage of respondents in the U.S. mentioning that most people can be trusted went from forty-eight percent in 1972 to thirty-one percent in 2016.

The UK shows a similar decline.[2] In the 1950s, sixty percent of the public said that most strangers can be trusted.[3] But in 2013, this same figure was thirty-eight percent.[4]

As might be expected, trust in institutions has also eroded. The percentage of the population in OECD countries reporting confidence in the national government went from forty-four percent in 2006 to thirty-eight percent in 2014.[5] However, some countries show a higher decline. France, the U.S., and Australia all show declines close to ten percentage points, whereas developing countries such as Mexico and Chile show much higher declines.

**Embedding Behavioral Science as a new approach to help restore trust**

One possible answer to regaining legitimacy and strengthening the government’s relationship with citizens is better understanding these institutions’ purpose. Luckily, advances in technology and data science and a deeper knowledge of decision-making processes can provide some useful insights.

Until very recently, many of our policies were built upon assumptions of human behavior that did not hold true on the ground.[6]

The UK’s Behavioral Insight Team (BIT) created in 2010 was one of the first offices around the world to integrate these principles into policy design. In the documentary “Dis(Honesty): The Truth About Lies”, BIT’s Director David Halpern said, “We’ve been kind of stumbling in the dark with naive models of human behavior built into policy. Imagine what we can do if we put even a half decent model of how people behave into what we do and how we design our economies and societies.”[7]

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As the awareness of our flaws when designing policies became ever more clear, other countries followed suit with their own versions of the BiT, though with a more limited scope. [8]

In September 2015, former U.S. President Barack Obama created the Social and Behavioral Sciences Team (SBST) through Executive Order 13707.

This executive order included key advice for integrating behavioral design into public policies such as:

1. Small barriers to program access can have a large impact on outcomes: Behavioral insights have shown that people who do not sign up for programs that benefit them may not be due to a lack of interest. Instead, low take-up may result from barriers to program access that deter eligible people from participating.[9] These barriers, for example, might be travel or time costs or complex enrollment requirements.

2. Individuals understand and respond to information depending on its presentation: Often it is thought that people respond to information if every possible detail is offered, which would allow a rational evaluation by the individual. Behavioral insights, on the other hand, show that how the information is presented is also very relevant. This suggests that governments should present information in a manner that effectively promotes the use of that information to the intended audience.

3. Excessive choices offered can lead individuals to choose inconsistently: Academic literature shows that individuals can have difficulty choosing, and choosing consistently, when choices involve numerous alternatives, vary along complex dimensions, involve assessments of risk, or have consequences in the long-term future. For example, Miller & Krosnick (1998) found that individuals are more likely to choose the first item from a list or the first option they consider.[10]

4. Individuals also respond to non-financial incentives: There are design components of programs other than prices, taxes, or subsidies that can be used to encourage or discourage particular behaviors. For example, in many contexts, individuals are motivated by social comparisons, such as learning about the behavior of their peers. One study found that individuals reduced their residential energy consumption when provided with information on how their consumption compared with that of their neighbors.[11]

Designing for humans: What exactly is the behavioral sciences approach?

According to Tantia (2017), the design process centered on people and based on behavioral sciences has the following stages:[12]

1. Definition. The first step is to carefully define the problem, avoiding biases, previous assumptions, and definitions of problems that fit already designed solutions. Ideally, the problem should be defined according to the modifiable behavior. For example, how to encourage people to consume less energy at home.

2. Diagnosis. This stage seeks to understand and generate a hypothesis to determine why the previously defined problem arose. Proper diagnosis requires a minute revision of academic literature that includes the most recent findings of behavioral sciences as well as qualitative interviews and quantitative data research.[13]

3. Design. Once the behavioral barriers have been filtered and prioritized, it is time to generate ideas, bearing in mind the behavioral bottlenecks that each design aims to solve.

4. Test. If possible, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) should be implemented to compare the results from groups randomly selected. While it is possible to conduct streamlined RCTs, it is necessary to maintain scientific standards of quality. There are also other innovative ways to test solutions, such as A/B testing.

5. Scalability. Finally, if all of the results are positive, scaling up can be considered. The public sector is particularly suited to scale up solutions that can positively impact millions of citizens’ lives.

Apprehensions about the integration of behavioral sciences into the formulation of public policies

There are legitimate reasons why citizens and public policy formulators could be reluctant to integrate behavioral sciences into the design of public policies.[14]

First, there are emotionally-based motives. If the approach seems paternalistic, it will not be welcomed, and some citizens might feel that their range of freedom is reduced through this approach.[15]

Second, nudges might have a detrimental effect on the subjective well-being of individuals.[16] Often, behaviors such as high caloric food consumption and alcohol intake are part of people’s preferences, so policies that aim to reduce their consumption could have a negative impact on people’s well-being.

As a result, these policies might be seen as paternalistic and will require more justification.[17]

Conclusion

Addressing the decline in trust indicators - either towards fellow citizens or governmental institutions - is critical if we want to pursue a shared path of sustainable development.[18]

One approach to tackle this issue is through rethinking the way public policies are designed and taking advantage of the increasingly popular advancements of new technologies and of behavioral science.[19]

Integrating behavioral design is not a panacea. But it is bringing attention to our flaws and biases, reminding us that we are designing for (and that, in fact, designers are also) homo sapiens and not homo economicus, and holding already tremendous and yet unseen potential on policy-making.

**Data on decrease of trust in national governments**

Table A: Confidence in national governments (2007-2016, percentage change), selected countries.

Percentage of people who answered "yes" to the question, "Do you have confidence in national government?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Confidence in 2016</th>
<th>Confidence in 2007</th>
<th>Percentage change since 2007</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Gallup Poll.
What happens when you bring together young people from across the globe — from vastly different cultures, and with vastly different backgrounds, experiences and expertise — and challenge them to solve a deeply entrenched global problem? Add to that some classic startup techniques, and you might have a pretty powerful weapon against some of the biggest challenges facing society today.

Taking this journey with two dozen Columbia students representing seven schools from Engineering to Policy to Business across the University provided some surprising, fresh ideas. Their specific task was to come up with ideas for solving common, but seemingly intractable challenges in K-12 education such as how to engage disengaged parents, how to prevent students from dropping out and how to better serve students with physical or learning disabilities. The teams were focused on public education in Brazil but these issues are, of course, universal.

Case Study: K-12 Education, the $4.4 Trillion Challenge
Research shows that the acquisition of education — and the earlier the better — not only empowers individuals with knowledge, but increases chances of a healthier and longer life, boosts lifetime income, balances inequality and is a potential pathway out of poverty.

According to The World Bank, there is a 9% increase in lifetime earnings for one extra year of schooling. There is data to back this up but it is also something most people know intuitively. So why if education is so important, do some 264 million children across the globe not have access to formal education? Why do those with access go to mediocre schools and why do schools continue to fail our children over and over? A UNESCO report states that only 83% of children who do attend school complete elementary school and just 45% finish high school.

It’s a resource and equity issue despite the fact that education is a $4 trillion business. More is spent on education in New York City, for example, than on any other public service — some 30% of New York’s annual nearly $90 billion budget. While these numbers are staggering, the reality is that this is likely not nearly enough to serve all children well and, of course, not all investment in education is equal. But this is not just about money. The issue is much more complex, one that involves not just resources but parent engagement, community support, strong policies and on and on. In Brazil, the location for the K-12 challenge, data on education spending across the country’s public school system, which serves 50 million students, suggests that how resources are utilized has a greater impact on learning outcomes vs. how much money is spent.

How better to make a dent in such a multifaceted problem than with an interdisciplinary approach?
**Problem-Solving With An Interdisciplinary, Entrepreneurial Approach**

With all of these challenges, a new approach to problem-solving is needed—and perhaps the setting of a University is the perfect place to experiment and to engage fresh minds on the subject of the future of education. University students are people who are now outside of the formal K-12 system but who also know a bit about how it works, having experienced it first hand. They also represent diverse perspectives that can, together, consider the full scope of a problem based on their knowledge from different fields of study such as business, policy, education, engineering and the arts and sciences.

The challenge with a University is moving away from theory and into reality, and that’s where harnessing the speed and agility of a startup are crucial. Research on the ground, talking to customers and stakeholders to both understand the problem and have empathy for the people the solution is being built for, allow for rapid testing and the ability to discard solutions that may sound promising, but ultimately won’t work.

This focus on extensive people research seems logical in the for-profit world but is sometimes overlooked when trying to solve problems that are happening right now. Often in the social sector, the drive to get resources out there is so strong that good old customer discovery—understanding what the people on the ground can really use—gets left behind.

**Promising Results**

By mixing fresh, diverse perspectives with startup methodologies and, most importantly, startup methodologies that focus on the customer, new ideas and solutions really do emerge. Among the teams engaged in the K-12 education challenge for Brazil, 33% went on to implement their ideas and are currently testing their assumptions in the real world. Whether they make it past the startup phase—always a period of precariousness and uncertainty—remains to be seen. However, at the very least, some new ideas are out there in the ether. Maybe one of them is the next Coursera or Khan Academy or Google Classroom.

So, perhaps when we think about the myriad of problems society has yet to solve, Universities—and their multifaceted students—are places where new ideas in any field in need of innovation and experimentation can indeed blossom.

*This piece was originally published on the Thrive Global blog.*
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