

Fair Observer

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ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a US-based nonprofit media organization that aims to inform and educate global citizens of today and tomorrow. We publish a crowdsourced multimedia journal that provides a 360° view to help you make sense of the world. We also conduct educational and training programs for students, young professionals and business executives on subjects like journalism, geopolitics, the global economy, diversity and more.

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Don't Confuse Roseanne's Tweet with a Poorly Conceived Joke

S. Suresh

June 4, 2018

Roseanne Barr's racially charged tweet and Bill Maher's jokes about Donald Trump are both in poor taste, but are fundamentally different.

In swift reaction to Roseanne Barr's racist tweet — “Muslim brotherhood & planet of the apes had a baby=vj.” — ABC canceled the revived sitcom *Roseanne*, in which Barr plays the lead character. Barr's tweet was making a reference to Valerie Jarrett, former aide to President Barack Obama, likening her to an ape.

Not surprisingly, right-wing media wasted no time in defending Barr's tweet with implausible arguments. Fox News highlighted Roseanne fans crying foul at media double standards, citing Bill Maher getting away with calling Donald Trump an orangutan.

Instead of getting caught up in arguments based on ideological positions, it would be worthwhile to examine Roseanne Barr's likening Jarrett to an ape and Maher's likening Trump to an orangutan to see how fundamentally different the two incidents are. When Maher compared the president to a great ape from Borneo, he was specifically joking about one person: Donald Trump. Maher was not attacking the entire Caucasian race.

Rather, he was making fun of a specific white male, who, on multiple occasions, has spewed hateful rhetoric against immigrants, intolerance toward Muslims and disrespect toward women.

In contrast, comparing black people to apes has been done for centuries. On the surface, Barr's comment denigrating Jarrett may be confused as a poorly conceived joke on a successful African American woman. In reality, Barr's tweet is an expression of the inherent racial bias harbored by many against African Americans. Barr's tweet and Maher's joke are both in poor taste. The crucial difference between them is that Maher chose to make fun of a specific white male, whereas Barr expressed her racial bias against blacks, treating them less than human.

People of color belong to a marginalized community in the United States. Black people are disproportionately incarcerated in American jails and have been at the receiving end of excessive use of police force in many instances based on skin color. These, and a host of other issues, stack the odds against African Americans.

With her fortunate upbringing and education, Valerie Jarrett represents the minority of blacks who have overcome the challenges many others face. But that does not make her immune to the deep-seated bias that exists in the society against her race and gender. Even America's charismatic first black president had to endure him and his wife portrayed as apes in a Belgian

newspaper or in a photoshopped picture posted by a Russian lawmaker.

A telling factor in a marginalized community is the burden successful people carry on behalf of their entire group. Without doubt, President Obama would have been held to much higher standards should he have ever stooped to Trump's level, spouting hateful rhetoric or denigrating women. As the first African American to hold the nation's highest office, he shouldered the burden of representing the entire black race.

In contrast, Donald Trump embodies and enjoys the privilege that is extended only to a white Caucasian male. White male privilege is in large part the reason Trump can get away with making misogynistic statements like, "I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it, you can do anything ... grab them by the pussy." It is the same white privilege in the American society that provides him immunity for singling Mexican immigrants as rapists and criminals. Even a rebuke from a federal judge has done little to tone down his rhetoric.

His natural disposition to make outlandish statements coupled with his penchant for attention has warranted Trump's position as a lightning rod for the media. Many public personas, politicians especially, provide fodder for stand-up comedy acts and late-night talkshows. It is no surprise that Trump was roasted by Maher, the irreverent HBO host. Through his own provocative

behavior, Trump virtually invites himself onto such shows. There is no racial bias here.

America continues to remain a strongly racist society. Donald Trump's presidency has made it worse by providing an environment that is conducive to openly displaying prejudice and intolerance of fellow humans based on their race, nationality, gender and sexual orientation.

We cannot say the same of Barr's deliberate tweet about Valerie Jarrett. Jarrett did nothing to invite Barr's wrath. She is, however, a successful and accomplished African American woman, which in itself is sufficient to draw the ire of many racially biased people. Whether Roseanne Barr is a racist or not, her action unambiguously displays a racial bias toward black people.



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Saving the “Cubs of the Caliphate”

Emily Guthrie
June 5, 2018

Iraq has the potential to harness youth in countering violent extremism and the establishment of future peaceful coexistence.

With the defeat of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in Iraq announced in December 2017, the country faces critical questions about how it will emerge from and address the drivers and effects of violent extremism. Serious concerns remain about the dynamics and causes that enabled and allowed for the spread of IS and its ideology in Iraqi communities. Despite these concerns, it is clear that Iraq, which has one of the world’s youngest populations, has the potential to harness youth in countering violent extremism and the establishment of future peaceful coexistence.

Violent extremism (VE) is by no means an issue unique to Iraq. Although it comes in many forms, VE can be defined as “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives.” Countering violent extremism (CVE) can be described as, “a realm of policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups.”

Due to the many forms of violent extremism and a wide array of those who engage in it, there is no simplistic list of violent extremism drivers. Rather, the causes of violent extremism in each context are multifarious and fluid and are unique to the setting and to each individual. In general, drivers of violent extremism in a specific context can be considered as either push factors or a pull factors.

Push factors, also called root or underlying causes, consist of negative political, social and cultural characteristics that can create the impetus for violent extremism. Push factors can include elements such as poverty, illiteracy, weak governance and marginalization. Conversely, pull factors include positive factors such as “charismatic recruiters, appealing communications, and material benefits.” CVE strategies may, therefore, be broad and include counteractions to both push and pull factors or may focus on one or a few specific factors.

THE ART OF RECRUITING

Violent extremist organizations such as the Islamic State often seek to recruit youth both locally and online due young people’s vulnerability and ideological malleability. In Iraq, IS has used local recruiters and sophisticated online strategies to recruit children and youth, whom it refers to as “cubs of the caliphate.” It was estimated in February 2016 that IS had at least 1,500 child fighters.

Since its inception, IS has employed detailed and diverse online strategies to recruit members. It has relied on platforms such as YouTube and Twitter to spread and glamorize violent imagery.

One of the core components of IS youth recruitment strategy is the use of an Arabic app similar to Twitter called The Dawn of Glad Tidings. Dawn, as it is colloquially called, is advertised by IS as an official news tool. When downloaded, the app requests personal information from the user and provides Twitter content selected by the Islamic State's social media team. The group has also been known to initiate hashtag campaigns. A 2015 study by Brookings found that between September and December 2014, there were a conservatively estimated 46,000 IS supporter Twitter accounts, with typical users located largely in Iraq and Syria.

Examinations of IS online activities have demonstrated a number of detailed strategies used to recruit youth. Such strategies are often referred to as grooming, or the process of befriending and exploiting an emotional relationship with youth online for malevolent purposes. J.M. Berger, an expert on terrorism and extremism, recently outlined several elements used by IS to recruit members online. In the first stage, IS members seek out individuals and responds to those who have sought contact with them by monitoring online platforms for people they believe will be sympathetic to their messaging. They further try to make themselves both

visible and available for communication. Such platforms include forums where individuals may express anti-Western sentiments or are religiously conservative.

In a vein similar to marketing strategies used by businesses, extremist groups implement a method known as narrowcasting. Narrowcasting allows recruiters to adapt and modify their personal information, such as name and picture, to suit the dynamic of a particular online community.

In the next stage, IS maintains frequent communication with targeted individuals and encourages them to separate themselves from others. In this phase, recruiters are in constant communication with the target and are available at all times of the day. In their communication with potential recruits, Islamic State members or supporters may discourage the target from associating or interacting with both non-Muslims and non-radicalized Muslims.

Next, extremist groups and the recruited individuals begin to communicate in a private sphere. A Course in the Art of Recruiting, a recruitment manual developed by al-Qaeda, offers insights into how this isolation is exploited. The document, which outlines recruitment stages, provides scoring surveys, outlines of daily and weekly activities, and detailed explanations of who to recruit and how, defines this phase as "Getting Close (or Approaching)." The manual defines this stage as lasting for three weeks and ends once the target

has passed the survey included within the manual. Here, the recruiter aims to understand all of the daily activities of the target and begins to talk about Islamic topics. Recruiters are known to use encrypted platforms such as WhatsApp, Kik, Telegram and ChatSecure.

In the fourth phase defined by Berger, the recruiter encourages the target to take action. A Course in the Art of Recruiting encourages recruiters to emphasize, through Islamic literature and frequent discussion, “the Pleasure of Allah” and paradise as well as “the Fear of the Punishments of Hellfire.” The manual states that “the virtues of Jihad and Martyrdom” are “the goals of this stage” and that this stage continues “until he desires and hopes for this.”

LOCAL RECRUITMENT

Local recruitment generally seems to follow a strategy similar to that used online. A Course in the Art of Recruiting outlines specific groups to be targeted for recruitment, including non-religious Muslims, Muslims who newly returned to the faith, “generally religious people,” “people who convert from one movement to the Salafi movement,” “youths who live far from the cities,” “foundation members (i.e. the average member) of Islamic groups in general,” university and high school students, “people who have corrupted ideas (i.e. un-Islamic ideas), Salafis, and “memorizers of the Qur’an.”

In discussing the recruitment of university students, the manual writes,

“The university is like a place of isolation for a period of four, five, or six years and is full of youths (full of zeal, vigor, and anti-government sentiments). However, you should be careful because it is also full of spies.”

As for high school students, it adds that they “have pure minds” and that it is “very safe to deal with them because they are not likely to be spies.” Recruiters are also encouraged to provide targets with lecture CDs and Islamic books, bring them to graveyards to discuss the afterlife, pray together and even go on picnics. In Mosul, IS used local information centers set up around the city to recruit youth. At these centers, IS members distributed “leaflets, videos and CDs about their operations to men and boys.” According to CNN, pictures reportedly posted by IS online showed “men and young boys gathered in front of the centers, watching videos purporting to show IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, on giant flat-screen televisions.”

With one of the youngest populations on the planet, Iraq has both a unique opportunity and considerable obstacles when it comes to countering extremism. Iraq has a population of 34 million people — nearly 60% of whom are under the age of 24. This youth bulge will remain in the future as the population is expected to reach 50 million by 2030.

While statistics surrounding youth recruitment to violent extremist groups and support for violent extremism are

lacking, a number of indicators help shed light on the youth climate in Iraq. In 2009, UNFPA found that 62% of Iraqi youth aged 10 to 30 did not support the use of violence to solve problems, and 48% reported having friends from different religions; 62% agreed with using dialogue with others who are different from themselves, and 50% highlighted the importance of civil society in the development of youth. However, it is unclear how much youth perceptions have changed since the IS invasion in June 2014. Moreover, these figures show that there are portions of the youth population are at risk of spreading and adopting of violent extremist ideology.

GRASSROOTS CVE

In order for CVE processes targeting youth to be effective in Iraq, they must include a wide set of actors working in collaboration to address push and pull factors ranging from the local community level to the national level. Key sectors required for effective CVE processes include local governments, civil society and NGOs, community leaders, security institutions, academics and young people themselves.

First, local governments can play a key role in enhancing political representation in order to prevent exclusion of certain segments of society from the political process.

As the perception of marginalization is a key driver of violent extremism, this is critical in addressing community

concerns and isolation. Local governments can also support the implementation of trust-building programs between the community and security institutions, with a particular focus on programs at universities and schools. This can help address overall community concerns regarding security and overall safety.

Moreover, local governments are encouraged to establish fair and transparent compensation mechanisms for those affected by terrorist operations. The safe and voluntary returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) continues to be a top priority in Iraq. Ensuring that processes are transparent will establish greater trust between affected communities and the government. Finally, local governments are encouraged to activate mechanisms of accountability for corrupt individuals and practices. As the recent elections in Iraq highlighted, corruption has been seen as a top priority among communities across Iraq and is often cited as a key driver of violent extremism.

Second, depending on the target area and capacity of civil society organizations, their roles will vary greatly and should be catered to a particular community or area. In general, organizations can play a critical role through the identification and assessment of local VE drivers amongst youth and can develop district-level or governorate-level CVE strategies through collaboration with government,

security, religious and community actors.

Furthermore, NGOs are encouraged to implement grassroots CVE activities, such as community-level violent extremism awareness events, activities aimed at strengthening communication between security forces and the public and early intervention programs that target at-risk youth. Finally, civil society actors can be instrumental in developing counter-messaging, which can be spread both in the community and online.

Third, one of the key contributions of community, religious and tribal leaders is to raise awareness about the dangers of extremism and violence. This can be further strengthened by creating dialogue within tribal and religious communities to facilitate IDP returns, achieve justice for victims and to support peaceful coexistence. Support of tribal leaders for the adapting and adjusting of customs to uphold the rule of law can result in a better application of the law itself, as recent efforts show.

Fourth, security institutions can play a vital role in CVE by strengthening intelligence efforts to prevent people who are trying to mobilize citizens in favor of terrorist organizations. Furthermore, they can review current mechanisms of investigation, arrest, conviction and trial procedures within the judicial framework. They are also encouraged to qualify security services to ensure their efficiency and sound performance.

Fifth, the academic community serves as a critical component of CVE processes as they can develop qualitative and quantitative research focusing on the drivers of violent extremism. The academic community can enhance the role of universities serving as neutral and inclusive platforms for youth. Academics can play a role in providing educational, awareness and recreational courses for various sectors of the community.

Lastly, as youth are one of the major groups targeted by violent extremist organizations, their inclusion in a CVE strategy is paramount to its success. Effective strategies should seek to promote the spirit of volunteer work and implement projects funded by international organizations in order to promote youth participation in society.

Strategies should aim to establish youth groups within schools and universities to carry out awareness campaigns against extremist ideologies and promote peaceful coexistence. As unemployment and feelings of lack of purpose can also be drivers of violent extremism, particularly amongst youth, capacity building programs, especially within the field of civil society, also play an important role.

Despite the fall of IS in Iraq, the same push and pull factors that enabled the group's rise and spread are still present in communities across Iraq. It is clear that preventive and mitigating mechanisms to counter violent extremism are a collaborative

responsibility of the community, governmental institutions and local and international organizations. Without effective CVE strategies and mechanisms that help integrate different sectors and communities, Iraq will remain at great risk for the reemergence of violent extremist groups.



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The Male Dominion of the World's Richest Athletes

Ellis Cashmore
June 6, 2018

As long as women remain segregated from men in sports, they will never be just athletes, always "female athletes."

On June 14, millions of people around the world will gather in front of their TVs to witness the start of the world's most

glamorous sports competition: The World's Richest Athletes. Some call it the World Cup, but that suggests the football is the most important feature of this spectacle, which opens at the Luzhniki Stadium in Russia's capital, Moscow. What is really interesting is the formidable earnings of the 736 players, all of whom are men.

Last year, Lionel Messi, who will be playing for Argentina, earned \$111m. The Portugal captain, Cristiano Ronaldo, was close with \$108 million, while Brazil's Neymar scraped by on a mere \$90 million. All three lagged behind the year's highest earning sportsman, Floyd Mayweather, who earned \$275 million for just one night in the ring with Conor McGregor — himself in 4th place on the Forbes list, with \$99 million.

The reader will have already spotted the common denominator here: All these high earners have low concentrations of estrogen. In recent years, Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova have made their presence felt but, for the first time in eight years, no women have made the top 100. Williams typically pulls in just under \$30 million a year, but has taken time off to have a baby and, unlike the UK, the US has no statutory maternity pay (up to 39 weeks in Britain). Sharapova generates about \$22 million, but has been suspended for a doping violation. Both should be in action for Wimbledon, where there is parity in prize money — £2.25 million, or \$1.68 million — for the winners, though both women typically earn most of their

income from advertising, licensing and other marketing endeavors.

The top earning female football player in the world is Brazil's Marta, who earns \$500,000 yearly, or about 0.45% of Messi's annual haul. No one feels too sorry for her or indeed other elite female players — their income dwarfs the wages of most men.

And, while there are always likely to be critics who complain the earnings of football players are "obscene," it's usually the complainants who pay their TV subscriptions and buy the products endorsed by the top earners.

NINE OF HER

The disparity in earnings between men and women is an enduring debate, and no one doubts, first, that it still exists, and, second, that it reflects the wider gender gap in society. In other words, women are devalued compared to men. Even so, the colossal inequality in sports seems different: Let's imagine Serena didn't take her pregnancy break and had a good year, raking in \$30m. That's still less than 11% of Mayweather's paycheck. Is he really worth nine of her?

The answer is, of course. As we stand in 2018, male athletes are more valuable than their female counterparts. This makes no allowance for ability, prowess, good looks or any other athletic or aesthetic considerations. There is only one decisive factor: the market. That's the sports market.

In entertainment, the incongruity isn't nearly so stark. Mark Wahlberg (\$68 million in 2017), Dwayne Johnson (\$65 million) and Vin Diesel (\$54.5 million) head the men's list, but Emma Stone earned a respectable \$26 million last year, with Jennifer Aniston not far behind with \$25.5 million, Jennifer Lawrence lagging with \$24 million — a poor year for her. Scarlett Johansson has recently signed a deal with Marvel and Disney that will propel Black Widow (her character in the Avengers franchise) into the same echelons as top earning male actors.

In music, the gap is even smaller. While bands like U2 and Bon Jovi head the lists, the biggest earning solo artist is still Elton John. We can be sure that his motivation at 70 for undertaking is 102-performance "farewell" tour is not money; he earned \$100 million last year alone. But not far behind him was Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, known professionally as Lady Gaga, of course, with \$90m; her 137-show tour in 22 countries grossed \$170 million. Taylor Swift managed \$45 million.

So, why does sport remain such a male dominion? Over the past decade or so, we've witnessed the global rise of women's soccer, the emergence of LPGA stars such as Ariya Jutanugarn (annual earnings: \$1.7 million) and Hyo Joo Kim (\$577,500) and the explosive entry into combat of mixed martial arts fighters, the most resplendent of whom has been Ronda Rousey, who, in her best year, 2015, earned \$6.5 million.

The answer is more obvious than you think: the binary. Women have historically been squeezed either to the margins or out of sports completely. They are arriving at the party very late in the day. There was no women's marathon event in the Olympics until 1984, for example. Women were not allowed to box at the Olympics until 2012. Women still only play the best of three sets at the highest level of tennis. Few sports are integrated in a way that reflects the rest of society.

DESEGREGATING SPORTS

For most of the 20th century, sports has been haunted by what I once called the myth of frailty. Historically, women's physical activity at all ages has been strictly circumscribed by doctors and physical educators. Despite the sea change in attitude toward women and girls in sports, among doctors today there were still vestiges of the once pervasive attitude that strenuous exercise is bad for a woman's health, in particular her reproductive health.

This myth has been exorcised. But the institutional arrangements that were built to accommodate it remain. Women compete in parallel competitions to men, not alongside or against them.

It offends even women whenever I suggest they could — and perhaps, in their own long-term interests, should — compete in men's competitions. But that is what I believe would start a process to end the discrepancy in rewards. The traditional objection to this is that the

physical advantage men are thought to have over women would distort competition, creating one-sided exhibitions instead of genuine sports.

But these physical differences are like what were once considered emotional and intellectual differences. In other words, they are exaggerated, if not downright false. Women's bodies respond to training in the same ways as men's.

There may be a 5% difference in strength and power, and this could preclude women from competing head to head in a tiny number of sports, like weightlifting. In most sports, however, physical differences are less important than skill and, in sports, where women have been allowed to integrate, they fare well. Darts is the latest sport to desegregate.

Most women encourage gender fluidity; they need to let it flow into sport. As long as they remain segregated from men in sports, they will continue to be evaluated in a way that diminishes their status. They will never be just athletes, always "female athletes."



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Trump in Ottawa and Singapore: The World Turned Upside Down

Gary Grappo

June 13, 2018

The American president hasn't just turned his back on and disparaged his country's strongest allies — he embraced one of its worst sworn enemies.

Legend has it that in 1781, at the formal surrender ceremony following George Washington and the American revolutionaries' decisive defeat of the British Army under Lord General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, the British Army band struck up the now famous — or perhaps infamous for some — ballad.

Britain was the global power of the time. Yet, it had been defeated by a ragtag army of farmers, merchants and shop-owners led by a handful of professional soldiers. America has been turning the world upside down ever since.

In 1945, following a half-century of world wars, the Great Depression, a genocide, a holocaust and a run of revolutions on several continents, America helped turn the world right side up, bringing together nations to establish a rules-based, international order to ensure peace, stability and prosperity. Now joined by well over 100 nations, that effort has largely lived up to its potential, though not without hardship and challenges. The one constant that the world could

count on — nearly always — for those nearly 75 years was that America would be there to stand for stability, peace, human rights, free trade and the rules-based order.

Strike up the band again! Donald Trump's America appears to be upending that — and in the span of less than one week. Trump first dissed America's closest allies and best friends at the G-7 Summit in Ottawa, including France, which had dispatched its navy and army to fight with the Americans at Yorktown. They also include Britain and Canada — yes, even Canada — as well as post-World War II allies Germany, Japan and Italy. The world was left aghast.

Days later in Singapore, he met with North Korea's Kim Jong-un, leader of the world's best known pariah state. There Trump employed his self-touted dealmaker skills to schmooze, cajole and even pander to the world's most brutal dictator. Granted, his objective was vital and even noble — to denuclearize the unpredictable and threatening Hermit Kingdom. But following a meeting of less than two hours, including a 45-minute one-on-session, he announced “a very special bond with Kim” and even declared, “I do trust him, yeah.”

POLITICAL WHIPLASH

The American president didn't just turn his back on and disparage his country's strongest allies; he embraced one of its worst sworn enemies. Following Ottawa,

Trump went into attack mode, tweeting that the US gets “unfairly clobbered” on trade despite “protecting Europe at great financial loss.” Then in Singapore, when pressed by one journalist at the post-meeting press conference about trust and verification of Kim’s denuclearization pledge (lavishly praised by Trump), the president seemed to shrug it off. “Can you ensure anything?” America won’t trust its best friends to settle trade differences, but it can accept the pledge of an avowed enemy to eliminate its nuclear weapons. Sorry Mr. Reagan, “trust, but verify” is just old-style diplomacy. Now America has a president who “alone can fix it.”

For imagined and contrived offenses Trump and his administration admonish friends who are members of vital security alliances with the US and enjoy top ratings for their human rights records. But for the man who violated all international laws to produce and amass dozens of nuclear weapons, executed his uncle by firing squad, ordered a murder-for-hire hit on his half-brother and operates gulags across the country for an estimated 80,000 to 130,000 citizens for offenses against the “dear respected comrade” he has a “special bond” and anoints him “honorable.”

He wasn’t done either. In his meeting with Kim, Trump promised to suspend joint US-South Korean exercises, a cornerstone of the US-South Korean defense alliance. The offer to Kim was neither agreed nor discussed with America’s two staunchest allies in the Western Pacific, Japan and South

Korea. (It was a really bad week for Japan, first the gut punch in Ottawa followed by the sucker punch in Singapore.) Yet, one of Trump’s many criticisms of his predecessor’s nuclear deal with Iran in 2015 was that then-President Barack Obama had failed to adequately consult with and receive input from US allies, i.e., the Gulf States and Israel. His apparently spontaneous offer to Kim flies in the face of his earlier reproaches of Obama.

Trump’s supporters assert that the American people voted for him to “shake things up.” Starting with their revolution, Americans are not averse to shaking things up; it’s in their DNA. But the shaking mustn’t mean destroying, wiping the chessboard clean with nothing to replace it. It must be accompanied by shaping things up, too. That is presenting a strategy for genuinely addressing challenges. Trump has the shaking part but so far none of the shaping.

He cannot turn the world upside down and then fail to offer a replacement strategy for ensuring core interests of his country and of others — peace, security, stability and economic prosperity — and core values of liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights are preserved.

For that, it isn’t only American policies and actions that are necessary. As the pre-1945 era tragically demonstrated, America needs allies and friends to stand with it in pursuit of these shared goals.

Some may proffer that Trump does have an alternative strategy. It's called "America First." He's not outlined exactly what that includes. But more important, he and his supporters must understand what it means.

First, this approach will place the US on the same level of other self-serving great and near-great powers, most especially China and Russia, and also would-be challengers like Iran and even Turkey.

Second, in such a scenario the world enters into a new era of great power rivalry and competition for greater control — political, economic and military — as occurred in the late-19th and early 20th centuries.

Third, the great powers then seek and recruit smaller states to form respective spheres of influence and then wait for opportunities to cleave off portions of a rival's sphere.

The US, isolated geographically in North America, will be at a disadvantage. The rules-based order — the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court and other recognized international and regional bodies currently in place to resolve conflict — will have little sway. The scenario leads to inevitable conflict as it did with the First and Second World Wars. Only in the early 21st century, the great powers — and even lesser ones — have nuclear, chemical, biological

and cyber weapons never imagined in the early 20th.

FAREWELL TO FRIENDS

"America First" becomes America "alone." That cannot be in its own or the international community's interests. Yet Trump seems to be turning his back on America's allies and best friends, those we typically turn to first in a crisis or conflict for support and consultation. Instead, he embraces the world's best known dictators, autocrats and potentates: North Korea's Kim Jong-un, Russia's Vladimir Putin, China's Xi Jinping, Saudi Arabia's King Salman, Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte.

Trump can't be faulted for wanting to address trade imbalances that may disadvantage the US and American workers. But must he villainize governments that hold the same interests and values as the US? Neither can he be faulted for reaching out to Kim. It was a strategic necessity as is diplomacy with all real and perceived adversaries. But must he embrace and exalt him and others who represent all that the US has stood against since its founding? Are these to be America's new friends and allies?

The shaking up is easiest. It's the shaping up — the formulating of strategies, the securing of allies and the actual building — that is the most difficult. And in that, Trump is showing

precious little capacity. His country and the world are the worse for it.



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World Cup 2018: The Beautiful Game in an Ugly World

Atul Singh

June 14, 2018

Football is a simple and beautiful game that gives joy to billions around the world, but it needs urgent reforms.

The English have bequeathed the world many legacies. Some of them, like Israel-Palestine, India-Pakistan and Northern Ireland, tend not to be pretty. Football, on the other hand, is the one English export that has literally taken the world by storm.

From June 14, the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia will bring many countries to a standstill. Brazil, a nation with an incorrigibly corrupt political elite, is limping back to normalcy after a 10-day strike by truck drivers that paralyzed the country. Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right leader, is leading in the polls.

Football is the only source of hope for beleaguered Brazil. Its superstars are playing well, egging each other and having a good time. Perhaps they will atone for the disgrace of the last tournament in 2014 when they lost 7-1 to the Germans.

Like Brazil, many other countries are dreaming of glory. With the Premier League having the fattest footballing wallets in the world, England is making customary noises about winning the World Cup for the first time since 1966. Tiny Belgium has an embarrassment of riches from bull-like Romelu Lukaku, twinkle-toed Eden Hazard and eagle-eyed Kevin de Bruyne all in the same team. It too is hoping.

So is Egypt. This land of pharaohs last made it to the World Cup in 1990. This year they are back with the best player in the English Premier League, the Egyptian king, Mohamed Salah, running down the wing. The Liverpool forward is fast-recovering from his UEFA Champions League final injury to boost the spirits of his long-suffering countrymen, even as they continue to suffer under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's repressive regime.

Yet the World Cup is largely the preserve of the traditional powers of football. Germany, the current holders, play with such metronomic precision that their team is termed *Die Mannschaft*, the man machine. Spain's coach has been fired just a day before the tournament kicks off, but they still have great players schooled in the tiki-taka philosophy that has brought them great success in the recent past. Arguably, France has the most exciting young team with Kylian Mbappé, Antoine Griezmann and Ousmane Dembélé offering an embarrassment of riches in attack.

Of course, there are two more teams: Lionel Messi's Argentina and Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal. The land of Eva Perón and Diego Maradona has recently been a persistent bridesmaid at international tournaments. This has made some question Messi's commitment, performance and nerve when playing for his country. On the other hand, the land of Vasco da Gama and Eusébio won a gritty final at the 2016 UEFA European Championship. Despite Ronaldo limping off injured, the Portuguese beat the favored French on their home turf. The Adonis of the Portuguese team is coming to the World Cup after winning a third straight Champions League title with Real Madrid, indubitably dreaming of more glory.

BEAUTY, JOY & UGLY UNDERBELLY

Even countries that are not in the FIFA World Cup will be following it over the

next four weeks. India is atrociously awful at football and sport. With over 1.3 billion people, its sporting prowess is perhaps the most pathetic on the planet. Yet any Google search throws up Indian newspapers offering expert commentary on the forthcoming World Cup. The same is true for China, another footballing pygmy that is trying hard to grow in stature by buying world-class players in the autumn of their careers.

As Pelé put it memorably, football is the beautiful game. It is the global game. Even famously insular Americans who are besotted with baseball, basketball and the variant of rugby-with-helmets that only they call football, will tune in to the FIFA World Cup this summer. That is the power of the beautiful game.

At its best, the World Cup has conjured up magical moments that people continue to watch today. Young Pelé's goal in the 1958 final or his assist for Carlos Alberto's goal in the 1970 final continue to delight people around the world. Millions still watch with bated breath Diego Maradona's goal against England in 1986 as a moment when the footballing gods smiled on this diminutive genius. Andres Iniesta's celebration after his extra-time goal in the 2010 final is legendary not only because of the historic importance of his goal, but also because of the tribute to the late Dani Jarque handwritten on his undershirt.

Over the decades, the World Cup has given thousands of moments of joy to billions. At its best, the sport has been a

symbol of athletic prowess, artistic expression and scintillating teamwork.

In 1970, a repressive military dictatorship ruled Brazil with an iron hand. Mário Zagallo's team played with a freedom and poetry that gave the country a vision of a different future. In 1974, the Netherlands may have lost in the final, but they introduced "total football" to the rest of the world. In 2006, Germany proved to be the perfect host and forged a new identity as a nation on the global stage.

In contrast with 2006, demagogues are on the ascendant today. Inequality is increasing, repression is rising and climate change is accelerating. FIFA has suffered a string of scandals.

The US, along with Canada and Mexico, has won the bid to host the 2026 World Cup after Donald Trump's repeated threats to other nations. The 2022 World Cup in Qatar has been dogged by one controversy after another. The host of this year's World Cup is none other than Vladimir Putin's Russia, and even the lovable Salah has been criticized for a photo with Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.

Football is a simple game and a joyous sport. Yet it is beset with many of the challenges that the world faces today. The amount of money in the industry is now obscene. Big corporations, corrupt federations and scheming strongmen take great advantage of the global popularity of the sport. Even as the

World Cup begins, it is time to kick off reforms in the beautiful game.



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Syria Deserves a Real US Policy for Peace

Rose Youhana
June 14, 2018

Donald Trump's Syria "policy" has been largely reactionary and too reliant upon military force, ignoring opportunities to negotiate an end to the war.

On April 13, US President Donald Trump authorized what he called a "perfectly executed strike" against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's weapons caches in Damascus. The

strikes took place mere days after the Assad government used chemical weapons against the last remaining rebel-held town of Douma in Eastern Ghouta, a largely civilian-populated area not far from Syria's capital. Despite the support Trump received for the strikes from the Syrian opposition and longtime allies France and the United Kingdom, Trump's Syria "policy" has been largely reactionary and too reliant upon military force, and has, so far, ignored its opportunity to negotiate an end to the war.

Since the start of his presidency, Trump has ignored prospects for a political solution to the war, allowing Russian President Vladimir Putin to call the shots in Syrian peace negotiations. This worries the Syrian opposition, who feel that the United States is the only party that can push for the political transition the now stalled Geneva talks intended to broker. Unburdened by past inaction, Trump has the opportunity to do what President Barack Obama didn't — go beyond military force and take the initiative to engage in a meaningful peace process that ends the war and ensures a peaceful post-war transition.

This is not the first time Trump has taken military action against Assad. In April 2017, he authorized air strikes against al-Sharyat air base in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons in the town of Khan Sheikhoun in northwestern Syria the same month. Despite Russian, Syrian and Iranian claims that these attacks were staged, they have offered no evidence that

anyone but Assad is responsible. It's evident those strikes did nothing to deter Assad from using chlorine and sarin gas again, and his government is alleged to have used chemical weapons on at least three other occasions.

Apart from military action, Trump has demonstrated no appetite to get involved in Syria, preferring to leave the diplomatic problem-solving to Moscow. Since 2017, the Russian-led Astana talks have been the main channel of communication between the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition. This is a worrisome arrangement given Russia's political and military support for Assad, leaving little doubt where their sympathies lie. While the primary focus of the talks has been to implement UN Resolution 2254, which calls for a ceasefire and political transition in Syria, the Astana talks have done no more to stop the violence in Syria than the Geneva peace process. Meanwhile, Russia continues to strike rebel-held cities and towns and obstruct UN Security Council resolutions on Syria, blocking 12 since the start of the civil war in 2011.

Despite this, in November 2017 both Putin and Trump reaffirmed that the ultimate political solution to the Syrian conflict must be reached through the Geneva process, pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2254. This is a signal that it's time to work with Putin to revive the Geneva talk as the only viable way to really bring about an end to the wholesale bloodshed in Syria. The Geneva process has its critics who

think that despite rhetoric supporting a Geneva revival, there is no will in Washington or Moscow to deal with the ugly and daunting task of mediating a political transition — the issue that is the crux of the problem in Geneva.

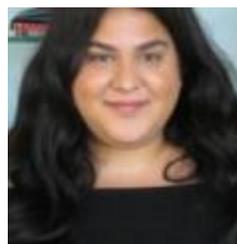
The dilemma of political transition will be the toughest hurdle to overcome in Geneva. The Assad government is essentially being asked to willfully negotiate its own demise and, from its perspective, hand power over to an unorganized and mixed bag of secular, Islamist and jihadist groups that comprise the Syrian opposition. The latter, however, won't accept any solution where their murderous leader whose history of using indiscriminate weapons and siege tactics, as well as withholding of humanitarian aid, is simply overlooked as he's allowed to remain in power.

The opposition continues to push for implementing the Geneva Communiqué, wherein a transitional governing body would administer a free and fair election and preside over a Syrian-led political transition. Couple the intransigence of the Syrian government with the unwavering demands of the opposition, and you have a seemingly stalled peace process.

This, however, does not mean that there is no use to continuing the talks. There is still much progress to be made, both between the warring Syrian parties and the great powers, to negotiate a ceasefire and a lasting solution. If nothing else, it's wise to reinvigorate the

Geneva process so that a line of communication remains open, in the form of UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura's shuttle diplomacy, should circumstances change and one party chooses to sue for peace — or if a great-power deal is struck that brings their respective allies to the same table. If the aftermath of the August 2013 chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta is any indicator, Russia can be amenable to American demands in Syria if presented with a deft diplomatic touch. This is the solution that the US president should seek for Syria.

US interest in Syria cannot begin and end every time Assad uses chemical weapons. Trump should double down on his diplomatic capital with Moscow to negotiate an end to this war and focus the United States' military prowess on defeating the Islamic State in Syria. There is still time to seek a political solution for this war, and Syria deserves a real policy that aims to attain a lasting peace. If Trump wants to mean what he says, then he needs to capitalize on the mutual respect he shares with the Russian president to reach a conclusion in Syria that both parties can accept. For Trump, it's the Geneva talks or bust.



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The Role of Fear in Turkey's Elections

Nathaniel Handy
June 23, 2018

Never mind who's afraid of President Erdogan — what about his supporters' fear of life without him?

When Turks go to the polls on June 24 — only a little over a year since the controversial referendum that paved the way for a new presidential system of government — the question of fear will be central to most narratives. The most dominant of these, certainly outside the country, is the one broadly attached to the opposition: the fear of another victory for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his consolidation of power.

This narrative is well worn in Western media. It has many advocates within Turkey and among Turks abroad, as well as much hard evidence to support it.

There is also — particularly after the slim margin of victory in the 2017 referendum — the suspicion of potential

electoral fraud. But against this backdrop is also another awkward, yet important, truth: President Erdogan still commands huge support.

Were Turkey a true dictatorship, as it is increasingly portrayed under Erdogan, he would have no electoral challengers, except perhaps for a few late entrants who suddenly and mysteriously realized a desire to run for president, despite being long-standing stalwart supporters of the incumbent. Instead, Turkey has a genuine field of candidates who are most definitely independent of President Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Turkey is still a functioning, if dysfunctional, democracy. President Erdogan and the AKP could lose. But they probably won't. This is due in large part — with all the intimidation, jailing of candidates and control of the national media excepted — to his enduring appeal for a large sector of Turkish society. While fear of Erdogan is well known and well documented, what about fear of life without Erdogan? What is it that AKP voters most fear?

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

Fear of President Erdogan has become an almost all-pervasive narrative in opposition circles. Critics point to his majoritarian conception of democracy, his illiberal instincts, the muzzling of the media, jailing of journalists and opposition politicians, and the steady weakening of the rule of law as the judiciary and even financial institutions

become more and more beholden to the president. What is less often cited is the increasing unease of many in his own party.

For many members of the ruling Justice and Development Party, the erosion of open borders, a soft power foreign policy and democratic foundations within the country are seen not as an erosion of traditional Turkish principles, but of principles championed by the AKP itself. Look to a major figure such as former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, and we see a man who led policies of “zero problems with neighbors” and “strategic depth” that have been abandoned.

In another clear sign of the division in the ruling party, rumors swirled briefly in May of former President Abdullah Gul — a founder of the AKP — running for president against Erdogan. In the event, he didn’t risk the challenge, yet there is a sense of potential momentum in this election. “It will be the most unpredictable election ever,” suggested a political observer in Istanbul who wished to remain anonymous. “Not even expert public opinion pollsters know what is going to happen.”

“I personally believe that the chances of a surprise victory for the opposition have significantly increased,” said the observer. He cited the victimization of the Kurdish and left-wing party, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), and the successful left-wing populist campaign of Muharrem Ince, candidate for the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP). He also believed

President Erdogan’s numerous public gaffes, such as acknowledging that the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) has been used to spy on the opposition campaign and threatening the death penalty for HDP candidate Selahattin Demirtas, had undermined the confidence of moderates.

ENDURING THREATS: FEAR OF LIFE WITHOUT ERDOGAN

Demirtas is the charismatic figurehead for the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, though he is viewed by many as a mouthpiece for the other jailed Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan. The threat to execute a popular politician is no idle threat in a country that did just that following the coup of 1960. Adnan Menderes was the leader of the Democratic Party, which ruled for a decade in the 1950s following an early multi-party experiment in the Kemalist state.

Following the party’s fall in a military coup, the coup leaders chose to execute Menderes by hanging, an act that still casts a long shadow over Turkish politics. It is one small window into the minds of those who support President Erdogan and his ruling AKP. Like Menderes and his party, Erdogan and the AKP came to political prominence through popular support at the ballot box, not through military tutelage. They too spoke for a largely disenfranchised provincial electorate of pious Turks who had never wholly embraced Kemalism.

Despite all the turmoil of the last few years, and all the illiberalism exhibited by President Erdogan, his supporters have the whole 20th century to reference in considering where their interests lie. It was a century dominated by the staunchly secularist Kemalist elite, supported by a military that was ready to defend the state created by founder Kemal Ataturk, even against the popular will of its citizens. Long years of cultural and religious oppression are not easily forgotten.

JUST BECAUSE I'M PARANOID...

Erdogan is a personification of this history. He was himself jailed by the Kemalist establishment in 1998 for the crime of reading a poem by the Turkish nationalist Ziya Gokalp that spoke of how “the minarets shall be our bayonets” — a reference that whiffed of Islamism to the Turkish elite of the era. Perhaps even more acutely, the AKP constituency has the failed coup of 2016 to consider now.

Though it has been surprisingly quickly forgotten in Western media against the prominent post-coup purge, what occurred on July 15, 2016, is now central to President Erdogan and to his support.

For all that he and his ruling circle can now appear paranoid, defensive and illiberal, it cannot be denied — beyond conspiracy theories of a false flag operation — that Erdogan's administration was the victim of a violent attempted coup. It claimed the lives of

over 200 people, involved elements in the air force who bombed key government buildings, and even the hotel in Marmaris where the president was staying that night. Whatever we may think of the likes of US President Donald Trump or British Prime Minister Theresa May, neither has been subjected to such action from within their own state.

Consider for a moment what that means to a man in Erdogan's position. He is a combative leader, determined to not only bring his constituency within the country representation, but real power and influence. Turkey is no stranger to the military coup, but for an attempt to have occurred in 2016 was, nevertheless, an audacious surprise in a country now wary of such practices. Moreover, in the shadow of Menderes, President Erdogan can have been pretty sure that night of what his fate might so easily have been.

In such a political climate, it is easy — perhaps not that surprising — that a leader would move toward illiberalism, toward a majoritarian vision that rested on the knowledge that unless you hold the power, those who do will not hesitate to oppress you.

Unlike what might now be seen as the “AKP Spring” of the early 21st century, Erdogan's trajectory now borrows much from the lessons of the rule of Ataturk himself, who erred on the side of one man, one party rule — strength and stability for the good of the nation. There

are many for whom that message still rings true.



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A Case for Technocracy in America

Iziah Thompson

June 27, 2018

Policies grounded in ideology can’t help but ignore information that may upset that ideological foundation.

According to World Values Survey data, 49% of Americans (60% of these under the age of 29) rather have decisions be made by experts than the government.

Considering that lack of experience is rampant in US leadership today, it seems like this 49% is definitely losing the battle. In fact, the views of Americans hungry for evidence-based governing are nowhere to be found. But they exist among the mostly young progressives who don’t fit into the quintessential radical-left mold.

If you’ve been reading any of the large news outlets since the 2016 election, you have probably been exposed to a broad array of various types of American conservatives — a smorgasbord of right-wing political figures and views. Reporters have spent weeks out in “Trump Country,” toiling in the hopes that they can show that the media has remembered these once forgotten people. Outlets have scurried to hire conservative voices to stave off the criticism that they are the “liberal media” and nothing more than “fake news,” as the president and his followers have dubbed them.

Take The New York Times, who hired Bret Stevens, the Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist from The Wall Street Journal, along with David Brooks, Ross Douthat and Bari Weiss. Meagan Kelly, the former Fox News anchor who promised us that Santa Clause is indeed white, secured a primetime spot at NBC. The Atlantic supplemented its preeminent #NeverTrumper and former George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum with the hiring of Kevin D. Williamson. While at the National Review, Williamson asserted that “women who have abortions should be hanged” and once

described an African-American boy as a “three-fifths-scale Snoop Dogg,” harkening back to the time black Americans counted as three-fifths of the person in the Constitution.

In sustained efforts to regain the trust of Donald Trump’s constituency — the “real Americans” — the general public has been subjected to focus group after focus group from the heartland. Conservatives come in every flavor and class; they are as Trump-hating as Jeb Bush’s presidential campaign advisor Anna Navaro, as trolling as the cultural warriors Ben Shapiro and Jordan Peterson, and devout Trumpists like Paris Denard, Jefferey Loyd and Katrina Pierson. CNN hired Jason Miller, a Trump surrogate, just last year.

While it’s wonderful to see that free thought is alive on the right, what is worrying is the platform for the expression of various points of view has become restricted to them. This brings us back to that 49%.

In America, the left gets painted with a much broader brush, but there are differences. The point is to talk about one segment — a group that isn’t made up of cultural Marxists, social justice warriors and socialists. This a group has been quietly generalized, overshadowed by our peers who scream about neoliberalism and subscribe to ideologies that are a mix of political prefixes and suffixes. Plodding, working, moseying along in the American left is a group often derogatorily called the technocrats. Some may hide their

technocratic virtues, while others just don’t know they have them yet.

THE END OF DEMOCRACY?

Exposure to the term technocrat usually comes from conspiracy theory propagandists like Alex Jones and Patrick Wood, who indict technocrats as leaders in globalist plots to control the masses. But outside of talk radio and conspiracy podcasts, technocrats are public servants with technical expertise — managers, budgeters. The term has often been associated with nerds or wonks. Technocrats do, while politicians give speeches. The 28th president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, fit the bill. He was an academic — a political scientist who helped found the field of public administration, at a time when the discipline of public policy was fledgling and far from the science it is today.

Some would associate technocratic governance in the US with Michael Dukakis, the governor of Massachusetts, and the Democratic opponent of George Bush Sr. in the 1988 presidential election. He was mocked for his penchant for wearing tweed and bore the brunt of one of the dirtiest ad campaigns in presidential election history. Dukakis was not an adept orator or charismatic leader. But he was an incorruptible, efficient administrator, known as the architect of the “Massachusetts miracle” — a 1970-1980s era of growth that turned a state reeling from the manufacturing industry collapse into the economic powerhouse

Massachusetts still is today. That is the kind of leadership that comes with technocracy.

In *Technocracy: Rise of the Info-State*, Parag Khanna explains why a little more technocracy would be good for America. Technocracy, he argues, “is government built around expert analysis and long-term planning rather than narrow-minded and short-term populist whims. Technocrats are not to be confused with the complacent establishment elites that were just stunned by Trump. Real technocracy has the virtues of being both utilitarian ... and meritocratic.”

You may be wondering if Khanna knows what happened to Dukakis or has ever seen how the American “experiment” works. It’s often argued that generally the idea that democracy in and of itself is as good as it gets, needing no perversion or tampering. But polling data shows that Americans are beginning to lose faith in the idea that liberal democracy is all you need to have a good government. Not only do young Americans have a proclivity for expertise, like it or not, we’re not so sold on democracy as the solution to everything.

General dissatisfaction with government is currently very high. Some of it can be attributed to the economic crisis. Historically, economic worries have significantly attributed to a loss of trust in government, and millennials are characterized by their own Great Recession. But this time there is something interesting happening.

The charge for change is in the youth — as usual — but this charge doesn’t run counter to government rule but with government as the driver for change, with or without democracy. According to a report by the *Journal of Democracy*, “only about 30% of Americans born in the 1980s think it’s ‘essential’ to live in a democracy. That’s compared to 75% of Americans born in the 1930s.” Unfortunately, this disaffection has led to countries like Austria, France and Germany seeing a resurgence of the far right thanks to the support of the youth.

In the UK and the United States, the youth have gravitated toward populists on the left end of the spectrum led by Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn. Despite the cantankerous nature of Donald Trump, his politics mirrors those of other nationalist, conservative, anti-minority leaders across the globe, like the Philippines’ Roderigo Duterte, Japan’s Shinzo Abe, China’s Xi Jinping and India’s Narendra Modi. Millennials are at the helm of all these movements.

The young of today are not the flower children that their parents were, nor are they believers in democracy like their grandparents have been. While millennials have begun to distrust the government at rates similar to older citizens, for some reason the decline in trust has not been as drastic. Young Americans think politicians are corrupt, but still believe large government institutions can work. While it may seem like every young person is devoted to extreme ideas, one is reminded of Mark Twain’s definition of a patriot as “the

person who can holler the loudest without knowing what he's hollering about." Just because you don't hear technocrats, doesn't mean they aren't there.

SO, WHO ARE THEY?

If you accept the premise that there is a technocratic variant lurking in liberal and some not-so-liberal bastions, how can you tell who they are? How can one know if the person next to them at a Democratic Socialist of America meeting is one? Well, firstly, it is unlikely that a person is a conservative and a technocrat. The religious, fiscal and anti-bureaucratic nature of Republicans puts them at odds with policy wonks. The technocratically-minded know better than to tie themselves to vague principles. Technocracy lives on the left, but what makes its supporters different than their progressive peers?

The budget issue is the perfect place to display the difference. We often expect the right to be hypocritically calling for balanced budgets while adding millions to an already bloated military. But, to be fair, no one has ever heard members of the Bernie Sanders left address the long-term budgetary issues we face — and this author has spent months aiding his presidential campaign online. Both the right and left engage in fiscal extremes when times are bad (balanced budget amendment versus unbound spending) and a carte blanche when times are good. No matter what either side promises, we are headed for a demographic and a budgetary crisis.

Deferring to the head of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) Doug Elmendorf, as quoted in *Red Ink: Inside the High Stakes Politics of the Federal Budget* by David Wessel, "We cannot go back to the tax and spending policies of the past because the number of people sixty-five or older will increase by one-third between 2012 and 2022." That means social security and Medicare spending will rise. A macroeconomically optimal budget policy would have a balanced budget on average — reserving the ability to utilize expansionary policies, allow automatic stabilizers to activate in bad economic years and to retire amounts of that debt during good economic years. But that's not worthy of a political hot-take, is it?

It's not provocative to consider Center for Budgetary Priorities (CPC) reports when talking about budgets. You won't hear a political pundit talking about economist Eugene Steuerle's recommendation to stop measuring "growth by the nominal change in spending and tax subsidies." Steuerle claims that this is misleading because "programs can increase nominally and appear to be sharing in overall economic growth, when in fact they are declining in real terms." There is no voting bloc organizing around his recommendation that the CBO "show all projected changes in after-inflation spending and taxes, clearly delineating automatic changes due to past legislation from new legislation." This, he argues, will make the president and Congress more accountable for their policies.

But it's more exciting to allow two polarized sides to frame spending numbers to support their own views. Using real dollars and considering not just what effects new laws will have but what effects they will have when considered with current and proposed laws are two ways in which the public and the lawmakers can be better informed about how to react going forward. These are not emotionally enticing fantasies, but they are the dreams of technocrats.

Every year we hear from Democrats and Republicans alike how evil or acceptable it is to run a deficit, increasing our ever-growing national debt. It is theatrical to hear them fight about it on panels and sensationalize it across the front pages of national publications. But seldom is the case made for aiming for something below 60% (debt to GDP ratio) and setting multi-year goals along the way to accomplish that. That's exactly what economists like Jack Lew, Doug Elmendorf, Paul Krugman and Christina Romer would do, but they are just "elitist economists" with years of experience studying budgets and the economy. Who would follow them?

SAY IT LIKE IT IS

To their credit, the American left's concern for global warming has been unwavering — nothing else matters if there is no world to govern. But too often, American liberals give a partial story. They fight for health care for all and don't mention that health care costs

will continue to rise if we don't completely re-organize the system and deal with the fee-for-service payment structures and disparities in care other than the class-based one. Britain's socialized health-care system, the NHS, shows us that care for the elderly, prescription costs and systematic spending don't just stop when you put an insurance card in every person's hand.

The left calls for education for all while ignoring the evidence that education has proven not to be the great equalizer it was thought to be. Sending everyone to college does not mean ending inequality, and it means even less when factoring in racial inequality. These omissions are the key to technocracy — without ideology, technocrats have no trouble tackling racial issues without reducing them along class lines, as they are in most far-left narratives.

American socialists and progressives often have to obfuscate when talking about the market crash and the bailout. They are never honest about the fact that the Troubled Asset Relief Program didn't cost anything near the \$700 billion that was earmarked for it. In fact, the Wall Street firms paid the bailout back, with interest. It's General Motors and the government housing corporations, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, that owe the American people. In many ways, technocrats are willing to say things neither side can: There is nothing stopping the automation of American jobs. Infrastructure legislation is

necessary, but it only takes so long to build a bridge.

Now, this is not to suggest that the American left is purposefully lying, but policies grounded in ideology can't help but ignore information that may upset that ideological foundation. There are many on the left who feel that they belong in liberal spaces, but not for the same reasons as those that get all the limelight.

Technocrats in America see a system that logically leads to a celebrity becoming president, and they aren't too happy with that. They don't get why the first hundred days of a presidency is important or why Congress gives power over what laws are voted on to committee chairs — a position they get for being really good at fundraising. They don't want to eat the rich, and understand that capitalism as we know it may need to be tinkered with due to declining birth rates and increasing retired populations. They don't just like data — they love it. They don't care about “big government” versus “small government” — they want a government that can work well for the people. If when you hear a leader say he relies on his or her advisors, and you are wondering why his advisors aren't leading, you're probably a technocrat or understand why technocracy can be useful. Despite what you see on television and read in the mainstream media, you are not alone.

In *Technocracy*, Khanna relays a vision for what a good government can do that

most people will probably agree with: “Respond efficiently to citizens' needs and preferences, learn from international experience in devising policies, and use data and scenarios for long-term planning. If done right,” he goes on to say, “such governments marry the virtues of democratic inclusiveness with the effectiveness of technocratic management.” He calls this marriage a direct technocracy.

Perhaps his vision of an America with a collective presidency of six executives, a strong well-paid civil service, multi-party legislature and a governors assembly to replace senators is a bit idealistic taking into account the nightmare of American federalism. But it's pretty clear that efficient governance doesn't come from two ideological sides constantly clashing. And while it may be fun to watch #NeverTrumpers rhetorically own Trump surrogates, and establishment Democrats do battle with socialists, it is about time the mainstream media let the grownups to the table.



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Are Mexico's Winds of Change Blowing in the Right Direction?

Kinga Brudzinska

June 29, 2018

The current wave of support for Andrés Manuel López Obrador was unthinkable a decade ago.

Mexico goes to the polls on July 1 for what promises to be an unprecedented set of elections. Not only will Mexicans vote for the presidency, legislative posts, governors and mayors at the same time, but it's also likely that they will opt for a president from outside the established party system. It is anticipated that a victory by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) will add another nail to the coffin of the ruling bargain — *dedazo* — that dominated the country between 1929 and 1990. His elevation to the top office will also demonstrate that, despite Mexico's ongoing travails, its elections and relatively young democracy are free, fair and transparent.

Recent polling suggests that Obrador and the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) have built a significant lead over their rivals. According to Oraculus' poll aggregator,

Obrador is 13 points ahead of José Antonio Meade (25%), the candidate for the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), with Ricardo Anaya's (23%) conservative National Action Party (PAN) in third place. This huge wave of support for AMLO was unthinkable a decade ago and reflects the emergence of two key trends in Mexican politics.

The first is that the country's electorate is tired of the current political climate and hungry for change. Disillusionment with the political establishment has accelerated since the turn of the century. Put simply, Mexicans want fresh faces and new ideas for familiar problems such as crime, corruption and poverty.

Despite groundbreaking structural reforms introduced by President Enrique Peña Nieto, economic growth has fallen well short of expectations. It was hoped that closing corporate tax loopholes, opening Mexico's energy sector to private investment and other initiatives would help the country's economy to grow by 6% a year. As Peña Nieto's term of office comes to an end, annual economic growth stands at a more modest 2.5%.

The outgoing Mexican president has also failed to deliver on his promise to improve security. Approximately 100,000 Mexicans have been killed in cartel-related violence over the past six years. According to the recent estimations the number of murders will pass 30,000 in 2018, more than the number of casualties for the previous

year — over 25,000 according to government estimates. These victims don't include 120 politicians (mostly from PRI) killed in the build-up to the elections. Arguably the most appalling act of violence to have occurred during Peña Nieto's presidency came in 2014, when 43 students heading to protests in the state of Guerrero were pulled off buses to be killed and burned by the local drugs gang Guerreros Unidos (United Warriors).

Alongside rising violence, Peña Nieto's PRI has been plagued by countless corruption scandals, with the chair of his 2012 election campaign currently under investigation for receiving bribes from Odebrecht, the Brazilian construction firm. Seventeen former governors have either been convicted or remain suspected of fraud and other criminal activities. Mexico currently ranks at 135 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. The country's status as one of the world's most corrupt seems well deserved.

Finally, Peña Nieto hardly did his PRI successor any favors when he invited then-US presidential candidate Donald Trump to Mexico in 2016. The visit of a would-be policymaker with a harsh opinion of the country and its citizens was viewed negatively by many Mexicans. The consequences of the decision to welcome an American politician who wants to build a border wall — for which Mexico is expected to pay — will most likely be felt in the days and weeks after Sunday's elections.

The second important factor behind López Obrador's growing popularity has been his ability to reinvent himself. The former Mexico City mayor has learned from the mistakes of his two previous presidential bids and successfully positioned himself as the country's sole candidate of hope. Obrador secured this status by targeting and appealing to the average voter. Instead of solely identifying with Mexico's poorest voters, he has also campaigned as a middle-class candidate, a strategy that has placed him firmly in the center of Mexican politics.

López Obrador has also taken MORENA into coalition with the Labor (PT) and conservative Social Encounter (PES) parties. In doing so, Mexico's would-be president has shaken off his left-leaning tendencies and now presents himself as the only politician capable of bringing diverse groups and individuals together. This is the same approach to politics that the PRI employed almost 90 years ago.

Finally, López Obrador has replaced his criticisms of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with vocal support and declarations that Mexico welcomes foreign investment. And while Trump remains a figure of hate for many Mexicans, AMLO has been careful not to use anti-US rhetoric on the campaign trail. It's a tactical move that makes a lot of sense. Beyond a shared border and strong cultural, familial and historical ties, Mexico is the United States' third largest trade partner after China and Canada. Despite tense relations, both

countries must find a way to work together. A Trump-led retreat from NAFTA would have dire consequences for Mexico's economy.

Observers are divided over what López Obrador's popularity means for Mexico's short-to-medium-term future. While some worry that his anti-institutional rhetoric could pose a threat to Mexico's democracy and economy, others are confident that he can transform his pragmatic campaigning into the type of politics that the country so desperately requires. It will also depend whether his coalition can gain a majority in both houses of congress.

Irrespective of who wins on July 1, the main job of Mexico's new president is to make the country safe and tackle corruption. Doing this will help to reinforce Mexico's political institutions and lay the foundations for a sustainable economic growth that works for all its citizens. As the columnist and political analyst Denise Dresser recently noted, Mexico needs an "accountability shock" and a president that will strengthen the rule of law and civil rights. Let's hope the successful candidate can deliver this for ordinary Mexicans.



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Mexico Has Bigger Problems than Russian Interference

Jamie Shenk
June 30, 2018

Just like the US elections in 2016, fake news has become a fixture of Mexican social media during the electoral season.

In a video posted in January, Mexico's leading presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (better known by his initials, AMLO), stands on the edge of the port of Veracruz, looking out over the gray waters. "I'm waiting for the Russian submarine," he tells the camera, "because it is bringing me gold from Moscow." AMLO's video was filmed as a joke, poking fun at what he insists are preposterous allegations that his campaign is supported by the Russian government. But in Washington, the fear of Russian interference in Mexico's presidential election is very real.

In December 2017, then-US National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster insinuated that Russia had already begun efforts to influence the Mexican election. A month later, then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson echoed McMaster's remarks, telling Mexico to "pay attention" to Russian meddling. Both Tillerson and McMaster are long gone, but the fear of Russian interference among Washington's policy circles remains. In late April 2018, a bipartisan group of House members filed a resolution calling on Russia to stay out of Latin America's elections.

Clamor in the United States over Russian interference has quietened in recent weeks, as the yawning chasm between AMLO and his next closest competitor in polling continues to grow. But when Mexicans take to the polls on July 1, they will not only choose their next president, but also governors, representatives and mayors in states across the country.

While the possibility of Russian interference cannot be ruled out, three domestic factors — home-grown fake news, physical insecurity and declining trust in politics — will be bigger determinants of the election results and pose greater threats to Latin American democracy.

FAKE NEWS IN MEXICO

As with the 2016 US elections, fake news has become a fixture of Mexican social media during the electoral season. In addition to the dubious

allegations of AMLO's ties to Moscow, voters in Mexico have been told wrongly that Pope Francis denounced the leading candidate, and that voters must re-register by the end of the week in order to be able to vote. Fake exit and opinion polls have even circulated around social media, allowing parties to distort reality and confuse voters.

While the narrative about fake news during the US elections revolved around Russia's role in disseminating false information, the power of fake news in Mexico is predominantly domestic and intimately connected to the Mexican government's history of collusion with the media, rather than driven by Moscow's efforts. For decades, national and local political parties have co-opted media outlets for the purposes of self-promotion. As a result, distrust of the traditional media runs deep in Mexican society.

Groups in Mexico have mounted valiant efforts to combat the spread of lies. But disinformation persists and, as Ioan Grillo noted in a recent op-ed, it exerts a pernicious effect on the civility of public discourse and fosters polarization. It may also confuse voters enough to discourage them from even participating in the election, undermining the mandate of whoever wins.

But fake news is not the only threat to the elections. Voters and candidates in Mexico also face physical violence that could undermine the electoral process. Changing dynamics of organized crime and violence in Mexico have made the

country an increasingly dangerous place to be interested in politics. Mexico reported its highest number of homicides in 2017, and local officials and candidates have borne the brunt of this violence. Mayors are at least 12 times more likely than the general population to be killed. Over 100 candidates and current or former politicians have been killed so far during Mexico's electoral season.

The violence also compounds the issue of fake news. Journalists are three times more likely to be killed than the general population, and many of the journalists that remain practice self-censorship under constant threat from drug trafficking groups or corrupt local governments. Without independent reporting, Mexicans may be exposed to an increasing proportion of disinformation generated within the country, supplemented by growing penetration of Russian media content aimed at Latin American audiences.

These two conditions — increasing insecurity and a polarized media landscape — have contributed to a worrying decline in support for democracy in Mexico. According to polling conducted in 2017 by AmericasBarometer, only around half of all Mexicans believe democracy is the best form of governance. This has a marked impact on how citizens view elections.

Experts warn that what Russia seeks in manipulating elections is to sow distrust rather than pick a particular candidate.

However, only a small percentage of Mexicans — around 25% — trust their country's elections anyway. Meanwhile, nearly half of Mexicans would support a military coup under conditions of rampant corruption or high insecurity, characteristics that could describe Mexico's current environment.

SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY

These three domestic threats to Mexico's elections — disinformation, insecurity and distrust in democracy — run much deeper than this year's electoral cycle. As such, it would be shortsighted for concerned policymakers in the United States to focus on Russia's discrete threat this election. In order to support Mexico's democracy, the US would do better to focus on supporting whoever wins to work toward longer-term goals of transparent governance and security in an effort to regain Mexican's trust in democracy.

Admittedly, such a commitment from the Trump administration seems improbable. From insulting Mexicans while on the campaign trail to his imposing harsh tariffs on Mexican goods, President Donald Trump has alienated America's southern neighbor.

But Washington is more than the White House, and members of Congress, as some of the most vocal in denouncing the Russia threat in the Western Hemisphere, could work around Trump to support Mexican democracy. Congress has already demonstrated its commitment to its southern neighbors in

its most recent budget. The congressional appropriations bill passed in March increased foreign assistance to Mexico by \$14.1 million, 25% of which depends on State Department verification that the Mexican government is taking steps to address a number of human rights concerns.

Continuing to fund governance programs and demanding accountability from the Mexican government may, in fact, be the best answer to the Russian threat in the region. Russia specifically targets polarized and weak democracies where its efforts to sow contempt for liberal democratic values are most likely to take root. For the US, the best defense against Russia gaining a foothold in the Western Hemisphere is to help build solid institutions in Latin America, from the inside out.



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