

Issue

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# THE HORACE MANN Review

## The Alumni Issue: Media



VOLUME XXVIII - SEPTEMBER 2018

# Letter From the Editor



Hello Horace Mann! I hope that everyone had a great start to the new school year. During the summer, writers and editors have been putting together the first issue of The Horace Mann Review volume XXVIII. The first issue of The Review for each volume is always the alumni issue, which is unlike the other issues because the editorial board invites alumni to participate in the writing. It is clear evidence of the warm community spirit of Horace Mann that alumni return years after their graduation to contribute their perspective to The Review.

The Review continues to be a great way for students to voice their opinions on current events. For this issue, the editorial board chose media as the feature topic. Especially in light of the recent attention news outlets have received for partisanship, media is a timely topic in the sphere of global events. The topics of our articles range widely within the topic of media, from exploring the relationship between Trump and Fox to looking at the ways governments could effectively “clean up” social media. I hope that our articles on media will lead to some interesting discussions.

Beyond media, our writers covered many pertinent topics, both domestically and internationally. Our other four sections are Domestic, International, Economics, and Sci-Tech. In this issue, writers commented on topics such as unions, gender disparities in healthcare, and universal basic income.

I’m very grateful for the dedication of both alumni and students to the making of this issue. I would like to thank everyone - sophomores, juniors, seniors, and alumni - for their insightful contributions to this issue. A special thank you to our editorial board and junior editors for their valuable ideas and hard work. It is an honor for me to be trusted to continue the legacy of this award-winning publication. I would like to thank our dedicated faculty advisors, Dr. Kotchian and Dr. Weinstein, and last year’s Editor-in-Chief and Executive Editors, Zoe Mavrides, Kyra Hill, and Ethan Finley, for their guidance and support throughout the transition. While we welcome our new faculty advisors, we would also like to thank our outgoing faculty advisor, Mr. Donadio, for his years of invaluable support.

I am looking forward to a great year! Enjoy the issue!

Pana Persianis  
Editor-in-Chief  
Volume XXVIII

# THE HORACE MANN Review

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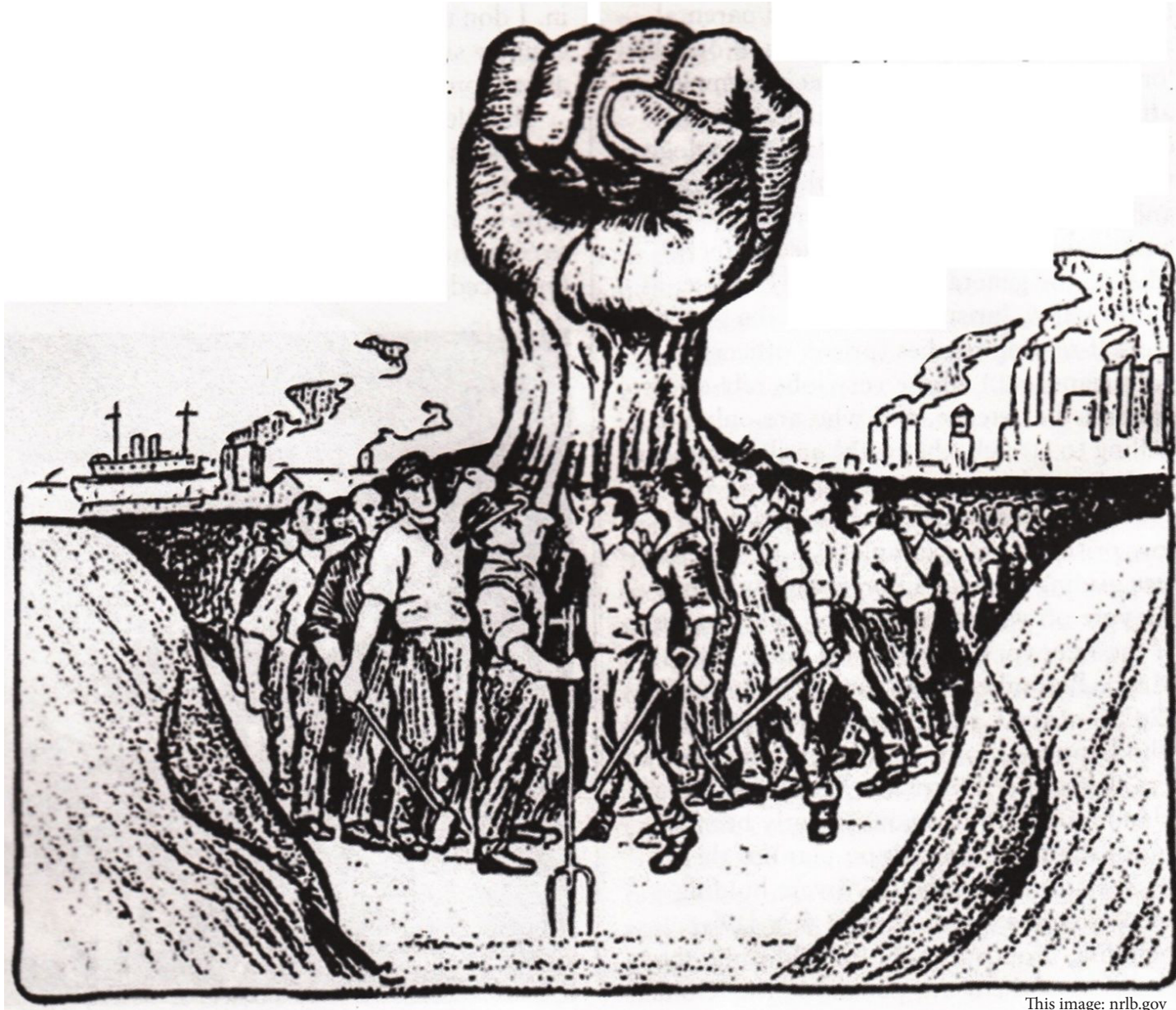
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# The State of our Unions

Alexa Mark

With unionization in the U.S. already at a historic low of 10.7% in 2017, the Supreme Court has dealt a huge blow to unions in the recent *Janus v. AFSCME* decision. The 5-4 decision in favor of Mark Janus has effectively put in place “right to work” laws nationwide by ruling that it is unconstitutional to require public employees to pay agency fees to unions under the First Amendment. Under the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, “closed shops” were outlawed, meaning that employees were no longer required to join a union in order to be eligible for hire. However, this act did not affect the existence of “union shops,” where employees were not required to unionize in order to be hired, but were required to meet with union representatives and pay agency fees (around 78% of the cost of union dues) to the unions in return for services like representation in collective bargaining after being hired. The *Janus* decision is in line with the “right to work” laws currently in place in twenty-eight states, all of which ban agency fees, but still require unions to represent all employees in collective bargaining. Because employees know that they will be represented whether or not they pay fees, it is not in their best interest to pay the fees, causing unions to lose both revenue and members.

The decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* overturned the precedent set in the 1977 Supreme Court case *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*. Louis Abood argued that being forced to pay agency fees to his union was a form of compelled speech because he disagreed with its political views. In that case, the Supreme Court ruled that agency fees could not be used for political activities like lobbying, but that non-unionized employees still had to pay agency fees for services that the union provided all employees that weren’t political in order to prevent free-riding and promote “labor peace.” In the more recent case, Mark Janus sued the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, arguing that because he didn’t agree with the union’s political views, he shouldn’t be forced to support it. In contrast to its earlier ruling, the Supreme Court decided in *Janus* that all required payments to unions negotiating with the government (public-sector unions) compelled workers to pay for political messages that they didn’t believe, violating the First Amendment. Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the majority, reasoned that there was no evidence that “labor peace” would not hold without agency fees and that Ja-

nus was not a free-rider, but rather “a person shanghaied for an unwanted voyage.”

Though the decision doesn’t apply to and is therefore unlikely to affect unions in the private sector, the bulk of union members work in the public sector, making this decision incredibly impactful. Currently, only 6.7% of private sector employees are unionized, while 35.5% of public sector employees are unionized. Those arguing on the side of “right to work” legislation and the recent Supreme Court decision have claimed that unions will not suffer because unions still exist in “right to work” states. However, there has been a drop in union membership in all such places. One example is Wisconsin, which saw its union membership drop from 16% in 2009 to 8.1% in 2016 and its median salary for teachers drop 12.6%. Some experts claim that Wisconsin is an extreme example, as there were laws passed other than “right to work” that weakened unions. Even so, reports have found that unionization has fallen 5-10% after the passage of right to work legislation alone, and studies estimate that unionization in the public sector will decrease by 8.2 % points because of the *Janus* decision. Economists explain that over time workers will “bail out,” leaving unions with less money and support.

Unions are vital to the protection of quality of life for many workers throughout the U.S. The recent increases in the minimum wage have been due to lobbying by unions for many years. Unions have helped workers gain benefits like paid health care and pensions, and have increased average wages for all workers (even those not belonging to a union). Experts believe that one of the main reasons why workers’ wages have not been increasing with their increased productivity is because of a decline in unionization and the power of unions. Before the 1980s, as productivity increased, so did wages. However, from 1980 to 2008, productivity increased by 75%, while wages only increased by 22.6%. Because of this trend, the Center for American Progress found that if workers had been rewarded for 100% of their productivity, average wages in 2008 would have been 42.7% higher. Though studies have come to conflicting conclusions on the question of whether wages are higher or lower in right to work states, it is clear that unions are necessary to raise wages, and that a decline in union membership will most likely lead to decreased wages.

As Alana Semuels of *The Atlantic* argues, in order to survive, unions will have to make drastic changes so that they are able

to attract more members, and can do so by following the example of similarly affected unions. In the *Harris v. Quinn* Supreme Court decision, the Court decided that requiring home aid to pay agency fees violated their First Amendment rights. As such, home-care unions were affected in the same way that public-sector unions are currently being affected by the *Janus* decision. The United Domestic Workers of America (UDW), one of the unions representing home-care workers, was at first harmed after the decision, with its membership dropping from 68,000 workers to 48,000 workers. However, the UDW is now thriving and has 75,000 members. The UDW has been able to succeed after its initial setback by providing services other than mere wage bargaining. The union launched a service that matched members with potential clients and provided free classes to members on topics such as CPR and dietary restrictions to help members in their profession. By doing so, the union has provided valuable services to members for a lesser cost, attracting more members. Without agency fees, unions will have to attract more members in order to increase their revenue, and will be able to do so if they provide new services to entice workers to join.

The *Janus* decision is by no means the end of unionization in the American public sector, nor should it be treated as such. Unions are already taking steps to protect themselves, and some states like California and New York have begun to pass legislation making it easier for unions to attract new members and prevent their current members from leaving. However, regarding the *Janus* decision, it is critical to recognize the extensive role that unions play in the lives of all workers, and for there to be an increase in pro-union reform across the nation. It is almost a guarantee that the rate of unionization will drop in the near future. Unless unions are able to implement considerable change quickly, the negative effects of a drop in unionization, like decreases in wages and benefits for workers, will follow close behind. **HMR**





# The California Wildfires and the Underlying Issues that Provoke Them

Jacob Rosenzweig

California has had its share of turbulent weather patterns. On multiple occasions throughout the 20th century (and certainly at times before that) the state has been afflicted with crippling droughts, taking a severe toll on the region's natural health. During the Great Depression era, the late 1980s, and the recent 21st century, the dry conditions that befell California have weakened the land, thus reducing its resistance to natural disasters. In addition to depleted water supplies, subsidence (decreased elevation), and damages to the aquifer system that carries crucial water supplies to millions, California has been subjected to abundant wildfires, not only destroying the state's natural beauty and thriving ecosystems but engulfing in flames the homes of many residents. This environmental tragedy has already caused severe damage and immense suffering, and the particularly devastating season Californians now face is a sign that the problem is not dying down; rather, the situation is being aggravated by a pattern of climate change impacting the entire world.

Since California's most recent drought started in 2012, the state's residents and businesses have been forced to comply with strict environmental regulations, but the government's efforts to control the situation have not saved the state from disaster. Throughout the 2010s Governor Jerry Brown has mandated that residents and businesses conserve water with the hope of combatting rapidly dwindling supplies. Californians have done an extraordinary job enduring this challenge, saving over 25% of their water supplies in February 2017 with responsible usage. Residents have demonstrated a fighting spirit in the battle against unfriendly weather patterns because they have suffered terrible consequences in their presence. In late 2017, a series of wildfires devastated populations and ravaged homes across the state. Wildfires can be started by both natural and human causes, examples being a lightning strike and exhaust from a vehicle, and they are carried long distances by dry winds. Though fires are a naturally occurring phenomenon and can have a beneficial impact on ecosystems, the addition of man-made fires has been a negative development, and the flames that engulfed the state late last year were catastrophic to the drought-ridden region. In total, an astounding 9,000 different fires tore through the vast California landscape. They scorched 1.2 million acres of land, a size comparable to the state

of Delaware. At least 46 people lost their lives from severe injuries caused by the fires, and the health defects that result from excessive smoke inhalation might lead to further consequences for those exposed in the future. The wildfires appeared all over the state, affecting diverse climates from the mountainous north to the desert south. Unfortunately, California's brawl with atrocious environmental conditions is far from over.

In late spring of 2018 the state's wildfires resurfaced in spectacular (yet appalling) fashion. At the end of last year, the Thomas Fire covered a huge swath of Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, becoming the state's largest fire ever. Only eight months later did the Mendocino Complex in the north surpass that record, burning over 290,000 acres alone as of early August. The 2018 fires have taken lives, destroyed homes, and scarred the earth. Worst of all, the season hasn't even reached its peak, which is expected in October as was the case last year. Fires are becoming increasingly common in a state that has already suffered tremendously, and there is no sign that the trend will stop anytime soon. Fire season used to be more easily containable and generally less destructive, but it appears to have become an unpredictable year-round phenomenon.

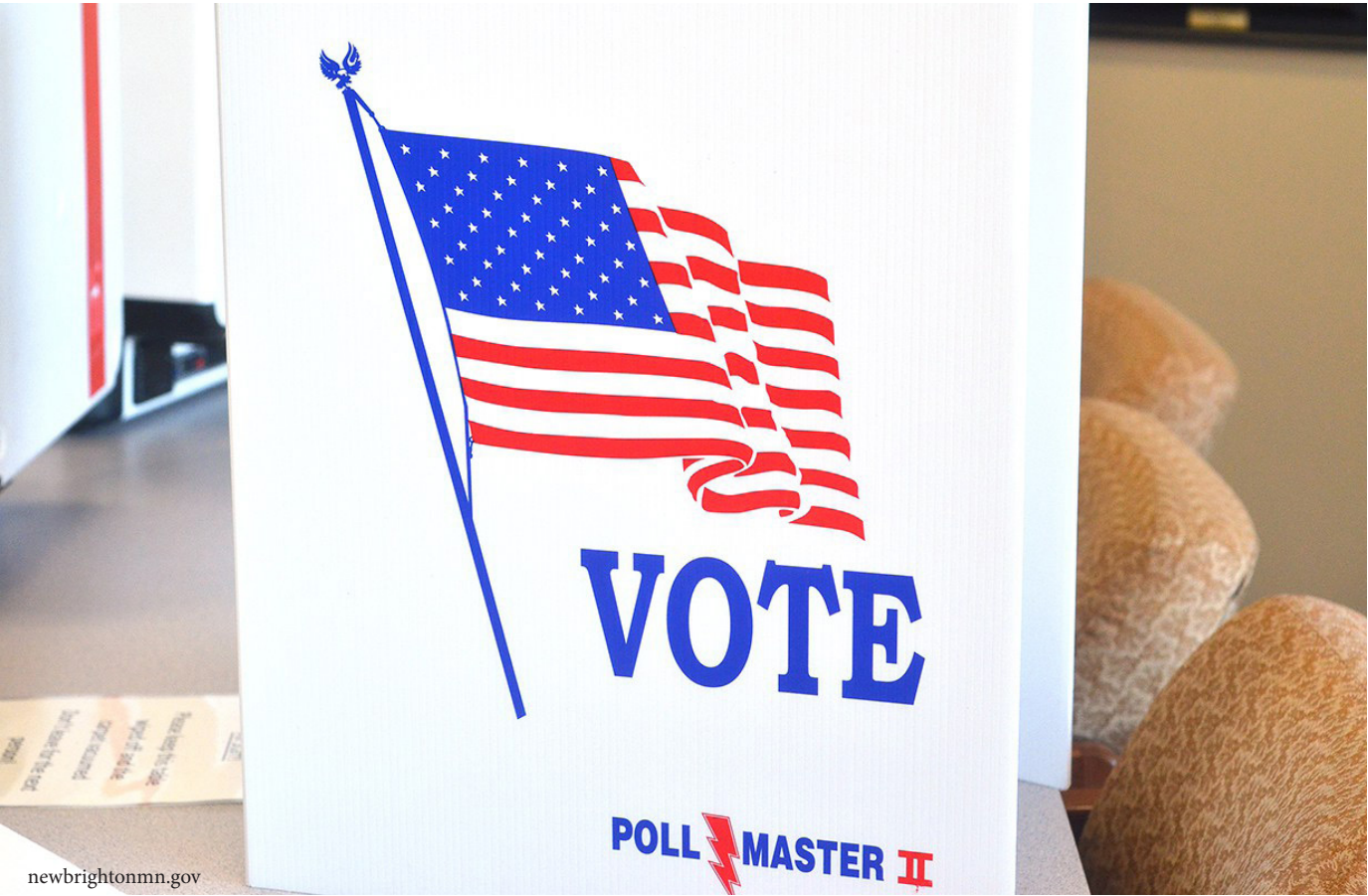
The toll of these fires on California has extended far beyond the loss of life and property, egregious as those consequences are. Hazardous conditions have forced the National Park Service to close the Yosemite Valley of Yosemite National Park for the first time in 20 years, and this during peak tourism season. The state has already spent over \$125 million, more than a quarter of its annual fire allowance, in the first month of the budget year, and there is no indication that conditions will allow for a break in massive spending. Thus, the state is not only losing money on tourism revenue, but increasing spending in a fight against nature that is incredibly tough to win. California's budget is being depleted, its forests burned, its lakes dried up. Its ecosystems are falling victim to the same phenomenon that countries around the world are beginning to face; the climate is rapidly evolving and becoming harmful to existing wildlife.

California has faced particularly rough environmental challenges over these past few years, but its hardships are the result of underlying issues affecting the entire world. Natural disasters have become increasingly frequent and devastating in re-

cent years, a trend that drives the wildfires to cause greater destruction. Just last year, two successive hurricanes nearly obliterated the American territory of Puerto Rico and a multitude of other Caribbean islands. Hurricanes Maria and Irma left Puerto Rican residents without power for months and led to the deaths of thousands of civilians. People's suffering did not end with the deprivation of electricity; rather, many homes were destroyed, and businesses were forced to suspend operations as well. Many Caribbean islands rely heavily on tourism for maintaining a sufficient GDP. Because many hotels and resorts have been afflicted with heavy damage, tourists have hesitated to travel to the region. Therefore, in addition to the heavy spending on restoration and rebuilding, multiple island economies have suffered a halted cash flow, yielding already impoverished countries greater financial despair. The increase in large scale hurricanes is often attributed to the increase in average ocean temperatures, which in part results from the growing volume of "greenhouse gases" that are released by the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, etc.). These molecules, naturally occurring but dangerous in excess, trap heat from the sun within the atmosphere, preventing its escape. Another event attributed to the climate's increasing average temperature include the melting of polar ice caps, which causes sea levels to rise. Numerous Pacific nations like the Marshall Islands are threatened by the rising ocean, for the water has the potential to swallow inhabited islands.

California's wildfires, the Caribbean's hurricanes, and the rising sea levels have already impacted millions of lives, but the problem does not appear to be going away. Twenty-eight is on track to be the fourth hottest year on record, topped only by the previous three. If this trend continues, next year's wildfires might burn more land than they ever have. With the season upon us, 2018's hurricanes might bring even greater devastation to a region that has not fully healed. Lives in these places will become increasingly unpredictable and hazardous, and Earth might begin to change both physically and demographically. Unfathomable damage has already befallen the planet, but whether we choose to act for earth's preservation will determine if humanity shall continue to thrive in the future. **HMR**





# Your Primary Concern

Ben Rosenzweig

Four primaries and an indicative special election took place on August 8, 2018 and continued to redefine the expected trends for this November’s upcoming congressional, senatorial and gubernatorial elections. Democrats strive to take a majority of seats in the House of Representatives for the first time since 2008, which was the last time Democrats won both chambers and the White House. They lost the House soon after in 2010, the Senate in 2014, and finally the presidency in the last general election on November 8, 2016. Some anticipate a 2018 Democratic comeback like that of Republicans—who gained 62 House seats—in 2010. Democrats

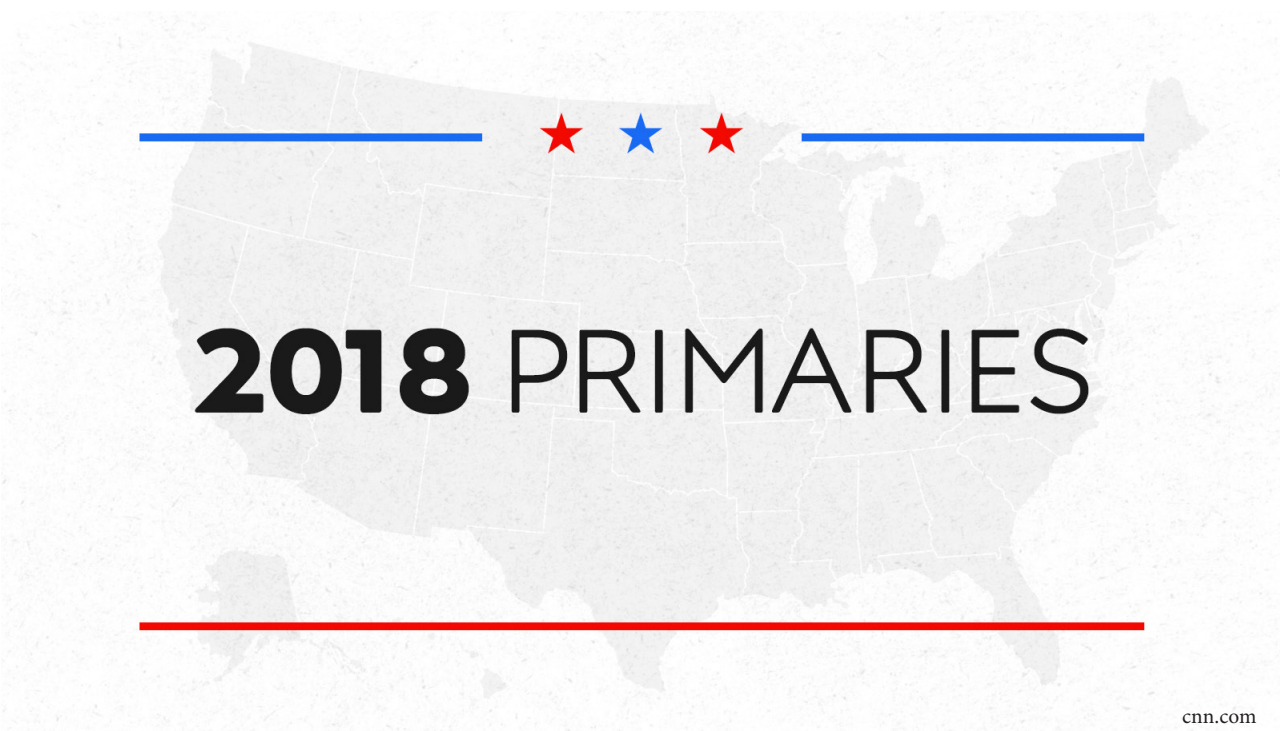
need 24 seats to gain a majority, a feat that will prove very difficult. Only 23 Republican-controlled seats were elected in districts that voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016, already one short of the number required for majority. To make things harder, another 12 districts with Democrat-controlled seats helped elect Donald Trump in the last general election. Democratic candidates aim to use the president’s 41.4% approval rating against him and the candidates who support him. The results on August 8th might convince you that the anti-Trump sentiment is not quite enough to get the Democrats ahead, but looks can be deceiving. The Ohio special election, which was

fought between Danny O’Connor (D) and State Senator Troy Balderson (R), was deemed too close to call until all votes were counted, though Balderson ultimately won by a margin of 0.8%. The election took place due to the resignation of Representative Pat Tiberi (R), who decided to lead the Ohio Business Roundtable, on January 15. President Trump said it was his influence that enabled Balderson’s victory, but that most certainly may be the case. This seat has been in the hands of the GOP since the early 1980s when John Kasich defeated Bob Shamansky (D). If you disregard Shamansky’s two-year stint in Congress, Republicans controlled the seat since 1939.

Whereas Balderson won with 50.1% of the vote this year, Tiberi managed to take the seat with 66% of the vote by exerting less effort, just a couple of years ago. The district also voted for Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump in 2016 by an eleven-point majority. The GOP should most likely be pondering the question of why the election was so close rather than celebrating a temporary victory. The severe drop in Republican turnout—about 150,000 voters—is surely a factor, as the Democrats lost only 10,000, but the Republicans don’t have much more time to solve the problem. So why was the Republican voter turnout so disastrous? The first thing I must mention is Trump’s aforementioned 41.4% approval rating, which is abysmal and the lowest among American presidents since George W. Bush in the wake of the real-estate bubble bursting. As an increasing number of Republicans turn against the party’s leader, fewer voters want to elect representatives who will support his controversial agenda. This is highly problematic for Balderson because Trump is the face of the modern-day Republican Party, so his actions and reputation (to an extent) rub off on all Republican politicians. This has not always been the case, but we are in a political climate with unusually high polarization. Many high-ranking Republicans are deemed “Tea-Party,” and many high-ranking Democrats are deemed “socialists” by their enemies, regardless of the statements’ accuracy. This polarization scares off many

moderates who don’t want overly liberal or conservative laws in place, and too few politicians are taking advantage. Senator Balderson, for one, promotes himself on his website as a staunch conservative who “believes in protecting all life, our Second Amendment rights, and in getting government out of the way so Ohio’s job creators can grow without the restraints of government red tape.” His additional efforts to appeal to the right wing include his outspokenness against “Obamacare,” advocacy for tax cuts and religious involvement. O’Connor, though clearly left-leaning, presents himself as a more moderate candidate than Balderson to appeal to a more politically diverse audience. He states on his website that he strives to “help end the partisan dysfunction in Washington.” This is an unfortunately refreshing agenda in contrast to most modern Democratic candidates who instead focus their attention on humiliating or potentially impeaching the president, rather than compromising. Justified or not, Democrats unanimously voted against the 2017 tax bill and declined the border wall/Dreamer compromise. I do not aim to mislead you and say that they don’t want to compromise with Republicans, but most of them don’t seem to put much effort into doing so, as the prior examples show. This goal to work with both parties earned O’Connor a fantastic and unexpected result on August 8. Yes, O’Connor strives to create universal health care and marriage equality like most other

Democrats, but because he is not as radical or polarized as many modern Democrats, he managed to fight an extremely tight race in a Republican-dominated district. To make things even more interesting, Balderson and O’Connor will be facing each other once again in less than three months. With this substantial progress in Ohio’s 12th District, Democrats can surely take this seat, and with one down, there would be just 23 to go. I fully anticipate a Democratic takeover of the House because in the middle of nearly every modern president’s first term, the non-presidential party generally takes a high number of seats from the other, with the exception being George W. Bush. The Senate, however, is a different beast. Only eight Republican seats are up for re-election this November, and the remaining 25 are currently held by either Democrats or independents who caucus with Democrats. Not only is it unlikely, thus, that the Democrats will gain many seats, but due to the sheer quantity of Democratic seats in jeopardy, Republicans may strengthen their majority. While the Senate seems nearly out of reach, there is no doubt that Democrats have excellent momentum entering the 2018 House of Representatives elections and will likely break the Republican legislature monopoly. HMR







# “Serial Misdiagnosis”: Gender Disparities and Bias in Healthcare

Zoe Mavrides

Samantha Bee, the only female late-night show host, recently aired a skit concerning the deficit in women’s health resources throughout history. The idea Full Frontal With Samantha Bee introduced is one that is all too familiar for women. The treatment of endometriosis, fibroids, and other female medical issues is often brushed aside as unimportant. Classifying female health as an afterthought is part of a larger issue facing women: a nationwide reality where 50% of the United States population are treated as second-class citizens. While 10% of women today have endo-

metriosis, medical professionals do not have extensive knowledge on the subject. It is entirely unknown what causes the illness, and there is no cure or even temporary solution. Contraceptives and Advil tend to be the two generic treatments for women’s pain at or below the belt. The same percentage of adults today have diabetes as those that have endometriosis, and yet 100 times the amount of funding goes towards research for the improvement of diabetic healthcare. The difficult journey of being treated for endometriosis starts out with a typical diagnosis period of seven to eight years.

While a patient awaits diagnosis, she must deal with both the extreme pain she is experiencing and the frustration of being repeatedly dismissed. The lack of knowledge and appropriate treatment for this illness may be one of the main factors as to why so many women with endometriosis also suffer from mental health issues. A 2017 Femedic article cites London Women’s Centre doctor Pandelis Athanasias, explaining that “women with endometriosis are [not only] at risk of developing anxiety or depression caused by the symptoms of the disease but also because of the length

of time until the diagnosis is established.” Faulty healthcare is quite literally perpetuating the issues these women face. The poor treatment of female-exclusive diseases also extends to chronic conditions and medical ailments that disproportionately affect the female body. Let’s explore, for example, the treatment of heart attacks in women today. A Yale University School of Medicine study found that young women have double the likelihood of their male counterparts of dying from a heart attack. A later study by the Yale School of Public Health delved into the potential causes of this discrepancy. Two main factors were healthcare providers’ dismissal of women’s complaints and women’s quite justified fear of being labeled as hysterical or displaying hypochondriac tendencies. The female heart attack is not only consistently inad-

equately approached but is additionally treated as unconventional. Heart attacks are seen in the public eye in the way they manifest themselves in men. Female symptoms are not those of the “Hollywood” heart attack - and yet, textbooks and talk shows alike display the condition this way. Female heart attacks are perceived as diverting away from the “textbook” heart attack when in reality, they should be approached and assessed as an entirely separate event. When more than 50% of all heart attacks occur in female patients, the medical community really ought to reassess this perception. When it comes to dementia, female treatment is similarly disproportionately lacking. Women are consistently given inadequate care for the illness. A study at University College London found that women were often given medication that

was more likely to exacerbate the disease than their male counterparts. They were additionally monitored at lesser rates and received fewer visits to a general care provider overall. Yet again, stigma and treatment work together to bar women from receiving appropriate care. This divide is further extended by the massive gap in access to appropriate health care for non-white women. For women of color, racial bias in hospitals contributes to a lack of accessibility. While doctors may provide the same diagnosis and treatment plan for minorities and their white counterparts, the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found that non-verbal cues during patient-doctor conversations were often influenced by bias. Doctors were found to display more distant characteristics, such as closed body language or even

“When it comes to dementia, female treatment is similarly disproportionately lacking. Women are consistently given inadequate care for the illness.”

stepping away from a patient’s bed, when working with people of color. The discrimination seen in these results fosters an environment of distrust, where, even if bias is not influencing the treatment plan (which it often does), patients do not feel as if they are being respected or cared for. Beyond creating a harsh environment of treatment, US News and World Report explains that discrimination in daily life can exacerbate other serious health issues. This often results in increased high blood pressure and insomnia in those who have faced bias. Some steps have been taken by organizations that have become aware of women’s

health issues. In an attempt to make endometriosis diagnosis and treatment a more seamless process for all parties involved, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) released new regulations. The Guardian explains that these regulations call for healthcare providers to “listen to women.” It is sad that our standard for improved treatment regulations in 2018 is to encourage professionals to give women a voice in their own treatment. This should not be something we need to tell people. Samantha Bee’s skit went all the way back to the Stone Age. In this process, her reporting pointed out a key flaw in the rhet-

oric doctors use today. We consistently treat women’s views as if they are inferior, as if they lack the validity of male suffering. We, as women, are treated as if our complaints are a sign of fragility, not a sign of the strength to fight. This must change. Until those in positions of power in both government and the health care system as a whole recognize and account for this dilemma, all women will continue to suffer. **HMR**





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# Why Immigration Won the 2018 FIFA World Cup

Kyra Hill

This summer, I was surrounded by Brazilian campers hailing from São Paulo and other small cities surrounding it. Their young, infectious energy was channeled through soccer (football, to them), as the FIFA World Cup was progressing nicely in their favor. I had never seen such enthusiasm directed through a sport in such a young crowd – on the day of matches they sported bright yellow jerseys and ran around the field dawning huge Brazilian flags. They wasted hours of their data by trying to stream matches on their phones during excursion time, their cheers loud and deafening as a goal was scored. When Brazil lost to Belgium, the loss was crushing, sadness spreading like an infectious

disease. Fat tears rolled down their cheeks and their sobs were heavy. I remember one camper telling me, “Brazil doesn’t have good schools, government, or even people. But we have good soccer. This is why we cry.” For most countries, excluding the United States, soccer is the most popular sport in their country, especially in South America, Central America, and Europe. While sports fans in the U.S. tend to lean towards sports such as American football, baseball, and basketball, the connection to soccer differs slightly for sports fans in other countries. Soccer, which simply requires a flat surface and a ball, does not require extra training, money, or equipment, making it the most popular sport played by children.

The connection is also personal for many nations; Doug Sibor of Complex Magazine explains that for countries that struggle through political or financial hardship, soccer serves as a beacon of hope and unity for a community. While the U.S. has many sports competing for entertainment dollars, soccer serves as the primary national sport for most nations around the world. The pinnacle of all soccer is the FIFA World Cup, a quadrennial tournament that pits the best against the best in passionate matches over the course of several weeks. This year, the tournament took place in Russia and was ultimately won by France – however, World Cup news was dominated largely by another theme besides

athleticism: diversity and immigration. For the first time ever, there was a record number of first and second generation immigrants on all World Cup teams combined. When the teams the tournament were finally narrowed down to its semifinalists and the four teams left were exclusively from Europe (Belgium, France, Croatia, and England), many fans began to wonder of the true continental identity of each of the teams. As stated by Ishaan Tharoor in the Washington Post, “Seventeen of France’s 23 players are the children of first-generation immigrants. Half of the French and Belgian squads’ players trace their ancestry to Africa, a much higher percentage than the ratio of immigrants in either country.” Even England’s team features stars of Jamaican birth and Nigerian descent, among others. While France may have won the World Cup, so did immigrants all over the world. The display at the World Cup serves to prove of the importance and massive effect immigration has on today’s societies – with 50% of players from all four teams combined coming from African backgrounds/descent, it is impossible to ignore the significant impact of immigration on the modern world. It is also equally important to note that each of these European countries would have had a significantly slimmer chance at getting closer to the grand trophy if it weren’t for the role of immigration. Like in the United States, countries in

Europe struggle with legislation on immigration and have remained in a deadlock for over two years due to continuous disagreement between political parties and their leaders. Many immigrants and refugees from parts of the Middle East and Africa travel to Europe in search of economic opportunity and often in order to escape political hardship at home. Despite the display of diversity at the World Cup, leaders such as President Donald Trump continue to claim that immigrants coming across the Mediterranean are putting a strain on Europe’s resources by stating that crime rates have gone up in countries such as Germany following the migrant crisis. False claims like those made by Trump create a sense of xenophobia within locals, who have become just as vigilant on matters pertaining to immigration. With a European population that is wary and unsure of an influx of migrant arrivals, politicians and lawmakers have consistently found it difficult to make progress. Following the migration crisis in 2015, numbers of immigrants are currently lower compared to the peak that the region experienced. Because of several forms of legislation such as the agreement between Italy and Libya and the EU’s immigration deal with Turkey, immigrant numbers are lowest they have been in three years, but they are beginning to slowly increase as immigration laws in the United States tighten under President Trump. The un-

certainty within Europe is caused by the disagreements between the countries and the willingness each country has to accept their share of immigrants and refugees. Italy and Greece are currently accepting the largest amounts of immigrants due to their geographical location, with political parties urging for increased border control. With the rise of Matteo Salvini, Italy’s interior minister, came the rise of the populist party and his refusal to accept 629 migrants on a boat that arrived in Sicily on June 11. Spain stepped in and accepted the migrants, but this solution is only temporary. Poland and Hungary have denied the entry of immigrants altogether, while Germany’s Angela Merkel contrasts with her open-door policy. In order for Europe to gain a consistent lead on the migration crisis before numbers dramatically peak again, they must agree on legislation that appeals to each country while efficiently maintaining the crisis and providing immigrants with the opportunity to create new lives in European nations. The diversity of the World Cup represents a region that is heavily reliant on the presence of immigrants. Like all countries around the world, European countries must find a consistent balance between denying and accepting entry of the many immigrants that escape their lawless homes in search of economic prosperity in an effort to create a more unified and strong region. **HMR**



cnn.com





# The Rohingya Crisis

Lexi Kanter

It has now been over a year since the tensions in the Rakhine State of Myanmar erupted into violence that rose to international attention. Myanmar, formerly Burma, is a country hidden away in South-east Asia, nestled between Thailand, India, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh and Laos. It is a nation largely untouched by tourists, and, with the exception of these bouts of violence, seemingly left out of the Western consciousness of the world; few know where it is; some don't even know that it exists. Myanmar has a complicated history and an even more complicated demographic makeup, making it one of the most interesting and dynamic places in the world. Unfortunately, this has also resulted in division and tensions that the country has struggled with and will continue to struggle to overcome. Ever since Myanmar became independent in 1948, the Rohingya, a minority Muslim ethnic group living in the Rakhine province in Western Myanmar, have been persecuted. Rohingya people

have suffered periodic bouts of severe repression for decades, at the hands of the military government as well as nationalist Buddhists with whom they share the Rakhine state. Deep-seated tensions between them and the majority Buddhist population in Rakhine have often been exploited by the military and have led to deadly communal violence. Many still do not understand the context of the violence, the history of the country, or the current political climate, which are critical to understanding the conflict. Myanmar is a majority Buddhist country that was taken under British imperial rule in 1886. The British, as they did in many other colonial territories, emphasized and fostered ethnic divisions in order to strengthen their control. They attempted to convert minority tribes to Christianity and in some cases favored groups who had already been converted to Christianity. They also brought in workers from their border territory, Colonial India, as they saw Bur-

ma as essentially part of the British Raj. All of this severely minimized the power of the majority Buddhist Burman ethnic group. The country officially gained independence in 1948. The Buddhist Burmans have been in power since independence, and their persecuting of the Rohingya, and other ethnic minorities as well, is often considered to be a reaction against the disempowerment they suffered during colonial times. At the core of the persecution of the Rohingya is the unique and complicated 1982 citizenship law in the country that has been designed to subjugate the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities. The Burmese military has promoted its Burman Buddhist nationalism by insisting that citizenship may be given only to individuals in ethnic groups deemed to exist before colonialism. This list of ethnic groups who are considered taing yin thar is much smaller than the actual number of ethnic groups that exists. The many individuals with ethnicities outside those recognized as taing yin thar

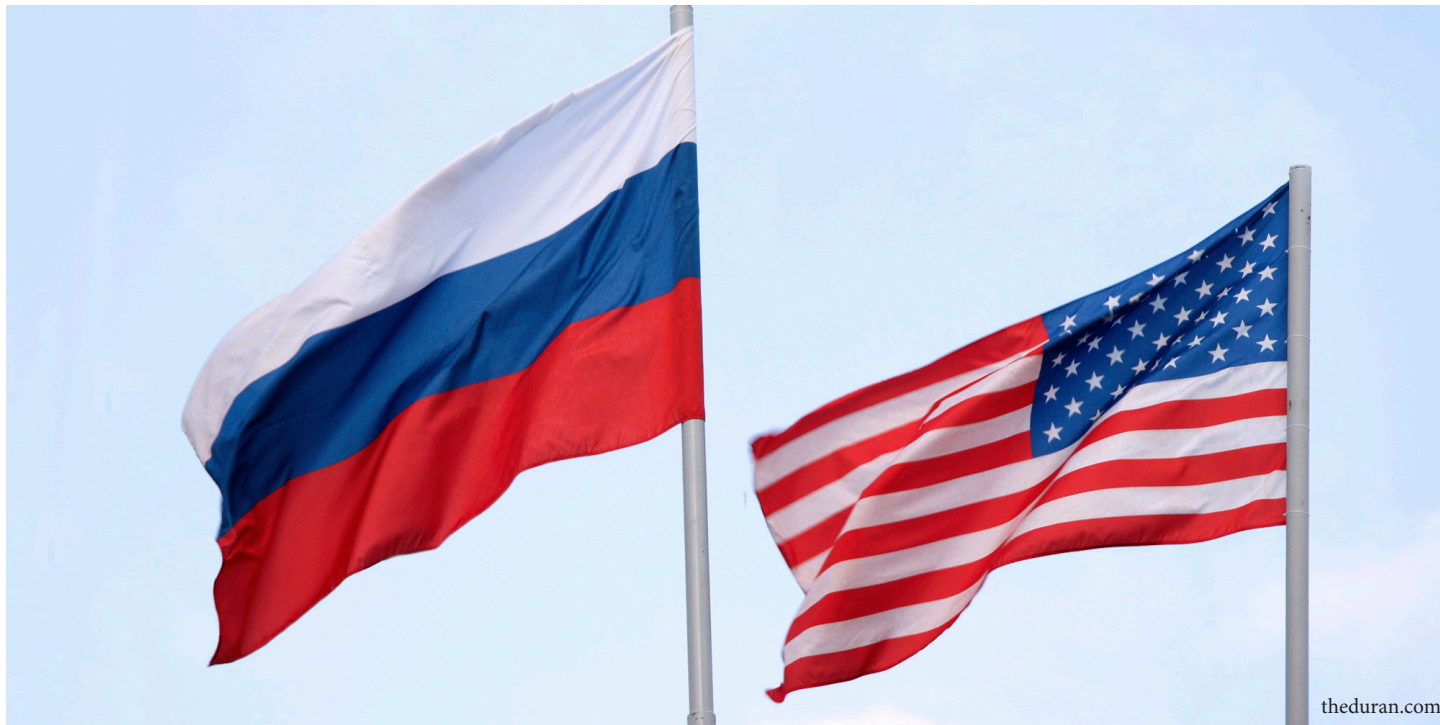
have other forms of less privileged citizenship. For example, one can be an "associate" citizen who had citizenship under the previous citizenship law, or a "naturalized" citizen, if you one can prove your family has lived in Myanmar for more than three generations. These types of citizenship do not allow for participation in government offices or in the military. In the case of the Rohingya, however, the government has left them out completely, deeming them illegal migrants and conflating them with the Indian and Bangladeshi migrants that came over during colonialism. The Rohingya do not have any form of citizenship; they are essentially a nationless people. Discrimination against the Rohingya is extensive. They are denied access to healthcare and to hospitals, each person must register his presence and all their possessions with government officials every three months, intermarriage between Rohingya and other ethnic groups is against the law, they are subject to travel bans and free movement restrictions; the list goes on. Of course, this is just normal procedure in relatively peaceful times. During the conflict that erupted in August 2017, hundreds of villages were burned and thousands of civilians were killed just in one month after the initial violence broke out. Women and girls were also raped and abused, according to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Doctors Without Borders (MSF). As a result of government propaganda, highly censored media, limited access to the outside world, and an undereducated general public, there is pervasive racism and anti-Muslim sentiment in the country.

Burma Buddhists will often speak of the Rohingya as Bengali invaders who don't belong in their country. They claim that the Rohingya are the ones who are acting violently, not the Burmans or the military. When asked about photos of the Rohingya villages burning, a common response is that the Rohingya are burning their own villages to frame the military. Witnessing, from within Myanmar, the inability and unwillingness of the international community to react to the crisis in any substantial way was beyond frustrating. The unwillingness of Aung San Suu Kyi to take a strong stand against the violence was appalling. Many will argue that she was unable to say anything because her power is still very limited and fragile, and that if she took a stand against her supporters, who are largely the Buddhist Burman majority, the military might retake the government. First and foremost, almost no one who lives within the country believes the military will retake the government. That threat has been used as an excuse for Aung San Suu Kyi's and other leaders' inaction. The military officials and their families, who are often powerful and wealthy, have benefited immensely, if not more than anyone else in the country, from opening up Myanmar to trade with the international community; they have no incentive to return the nation to an economically destitute situation. Second, regardless of whether she might lose her base supporters, maintaining one's own political power or ensuring one's own political progress is never an excuse for ignoring ethnic cleansing and genocide. People may argue that Aung San Suu Kyi needs to

maintain her position if there is any hope for sustaining democracy in Myanmar, but a democracy that commits ethnic cleansing with few consequences is not a democracy the world should want; a leader who does not condemn ethnic cleansing is not a leader fit to lead any government, let alone a supposed democracy. Unfortunately, now it is mostly too late. Over 700,000 of the 1 million Rohingya reported to live in the Rakhine State have fled and are now refugees in Bangladesh, where conditions are dire, especially as the camps face a fierce monsoon season. There is little hope of the Rohingya returning to Myanmar; without any form of documentation, they cannot prove they lived there in the first place. Further, they have nothing to return to but trauma and ashes. It is true that it is more difficult to understand the urgency and the necessity of a response to a crisis when it is happening so far away. This conflict, then, if nothing else, should renew a commitment in each and every person to building empathy and understanding. Society's tendency is to indulge in fear, and hatred of those who are different from ourselves and whom we have not made an effort to understand has led us to deny our common humanity time and time again. Being complacent in even small instances of prejudice and discrimination is to underestimate the human capacity for evil. For this time, the tragedy happened to be far away, but next time it may be surprisingly close to home, and when that time comes you will hope that people, no matter how far away they are, will care enough to take a stand. **HMR**







# Russian Meddling in the US

Taimur Moolji

This summer has been rife with revelations regarding President Trump's alleged collusion with high ranking Russian officials during his 2016 campaign. Along with these has come a deeper understanding of just how much direct influence Russia has over American politics. Perhaps most striking, however, is that this plan has been in the making for decades. The most recent example of this is the curious case of Maria Butina, a secret Russian operative who infiltrated the NRA.

Born in Barnaul, Russia, Butina was encouraged from a young age to oppose gun control. She often went on hunting trips with her father growing up and in 2011, she founded the Right to Bear Arms, a Russian gun lobbying group similar to the National Rifle Association. The group successfully lobbied for years to increase citizens' access to guns, and eventually grew to over 10,000 members. In 2013, Butina came into contact with Alexander Torshin for the first time, through her lobbying group. Torshin is a former Russian govern-

ment official, and a prominent member of the NRA. He also has strong ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and is currently being investigated by the Spanish government for suspected involvement with the Russian and Spanish mobs. Torshin introduced Butina to the leaders of the NRA, and for three years, Butina and Torshin worked together to find allies and build relationships with influential American figures. She attended the NRA convention all three of those years, and the two set up meetings with powerful politicians and donors, which Butina's emails later revealed were sanctioned by an unnamed aide of Vladimir Putin. Ultimately, hundreds of Russians were introduced into the American political sphere. Butina even went so far as to attempt to set up meetings between both Donald Trump and Donald Trump Jr. and Russian senators on a number of occasions. She did all of this while still in Russia.

In mid-2016, Butina finally arrived in America on a student visa and began studying at American University. Her text mes-

sages with Torshin from that year demonstrate her clear support for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, and the belief that the success of the Republican party would lead to increased diplomacy between the US and Russia. Communications between Butina and Torshin show that just three days after President Trump's victory the two were already formulating plans for a pro-Russia-Conference, involving various American Congressmen. Though the Russian government shut down the conference before it came to fruition, Butina had a backup plan. She and Torshin selected the members of the Russian Delegation for the Nation Prayer Breakfast, with the sole intention of "[establishing] a back channel of communication."

In July of 2018, Butina was arrested for violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act since she did not register as a foreign operative upon entering the country. Meanwhile, Alexander Torshin is still under investigation by Special Counsel, Robert Mueller, for his part in the Rus-

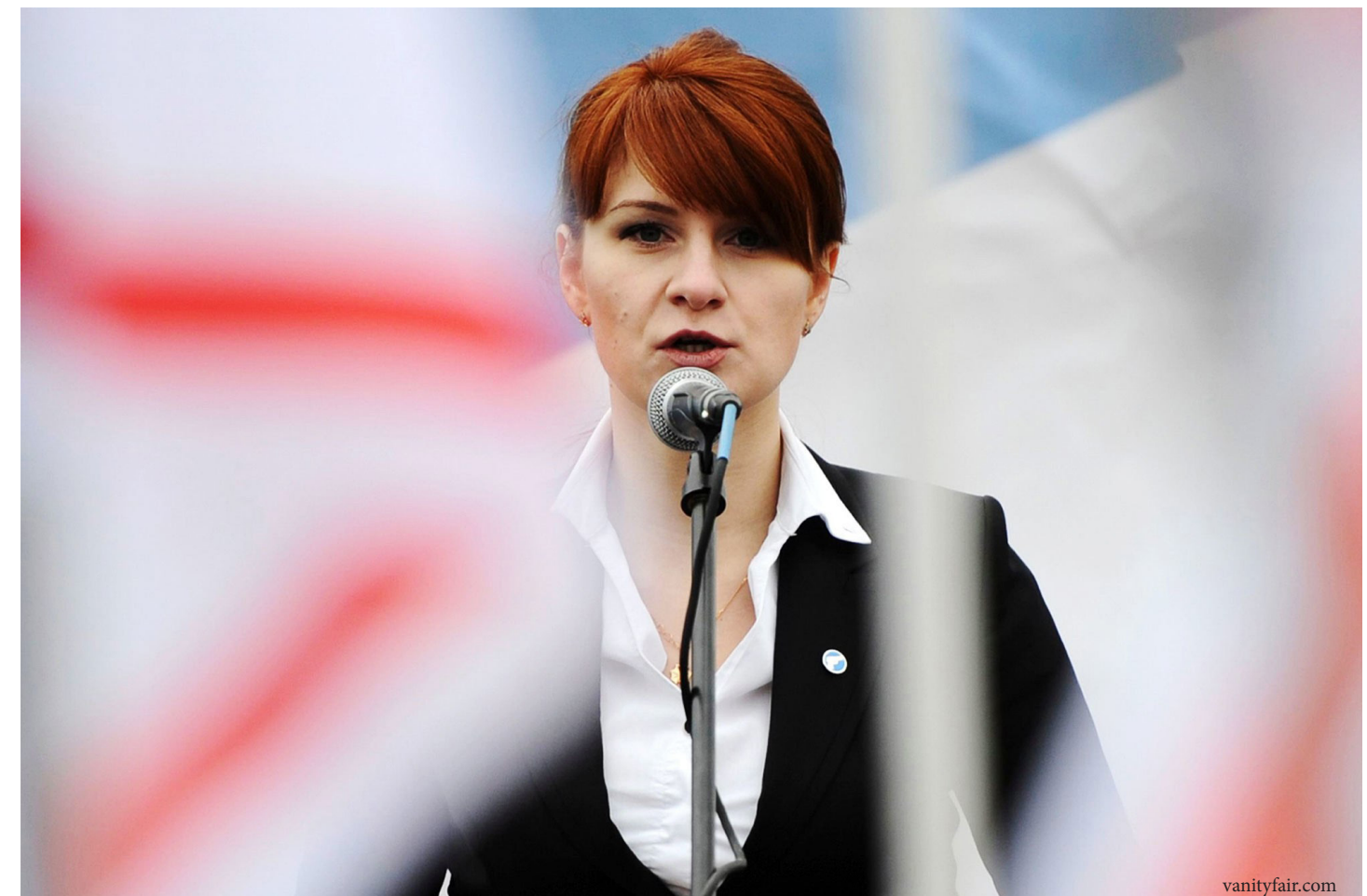
sian involvement in the 2016 election. The two are also suspected of funneling large amounts of Russian money into the Trump campaign through the NRA. Though there is currently little definitive evidence of their violating campaign finance laws, documents have come forth showing that Russian sources contributed \$25,000 to the NRA during Trump's campaign. Because the courts deemed her a flight risk, Butina was jailed in July until her trial.

Whether or not every single one of the meetings Butina set up successfully increased Russian influence in American politics is insignificant. In the grand scheme of things, one meeting will not shift the public perception of Russia in the United States. It's the long game that matters. Go back to the 1960s, and Russian-American tensions were the highest they have ever been. Fast forward five decades and the tensions have barely diminished in reality. However, it certainly doesn't seem that way after listening to some of our most powerful politicians. From our President to prominent Congressmen and Congresswomen, the current consensus seems to be that we

should attempt to befriend Russia. Meanwhile, Russia and America are fighting a modern day proxy war in Syria involving brutal drone strikes and thousands of civilian casualties. It's taken countless tiny actions to completely shift our perception of Russia, without their altering their geopolitical strategy whatsoever. Each move, whether it be Butina's meetings, or factually incorrect news articles, pushes them a few inches closer to their goal. Russia is displaying the same Cold-War tactics employed 50 years ago. The only difference is that now our president wants to be friends with them.

In order to stop the expansion of Russian influence over American politics, the US should employ two tactics. The first is fair and honest media coverage. As long as the people of America are informed about the state of Russian affairs, they can vote on meaningful policy that can stabilize the situation, and can vote for representatives that will best combat the Russian threat. The second way to stop Russia from increasing their geopolitical strength is to revert to our own Cold War strategy, specifically George F. Kennan's tactic of containment. The idea

is simple. As long as we stop Russia from expanding their reaches, the threat will die out. Right now, Russia as a whole is suffering massively, but still they continue to support their current leaders. Despite rampant and increasing poverty, massive wealth inequality, three quarters of the Russian people still voted to re-elect President Putin. This is because he brilliantly distracts from the domestic problems with the promise of restoring Russia to its Cold-War glory through military successes. For example, in 2015, when oil prices crashed, and Russia experienced its two worst quarters since 2008, Putin launched the first Russian airstrikes in Syria. If the United States can prevent Putin from succeeding in his displays of military might, then we can end the rally around the flag effect, that Putin has preyed on for years to keep Russia politically stagnant. If no one supports the government anymore, then Putin will be too busy trying to regain control of his people to meddle in American political affairs. Only then can we successfully safeguard our nation from Russian influence, and open up Russia to the political change it so drastically needs. **HMR**







# Kerala Flooding, Climate Change, and the Indian Economy

Ben Doolan

Reports by the BBC and The New York Times indicate that nearly 400 people have died and over 800,000 have been displaced by mass flooding that has devastated the Kerala State in Southern India. Residents of the region are not strangers to this kind of extreme weather, as the monsoon season brings heavy downpours and flooding annually. However, these catastrophic surges are the worst India has experienced in over 100 years, and many scientists have begun to attribute the intensification of these storms to one pri-

mary cause: climate change. When global temperatures rise, nearly eight hundred million lives will be at risk in South Asia. The Republic of India, housing 1.4 billion people, will sustain the most damaging impacts of global temperature rise, with intense droughts disrupting both the national economy and the livelihood of millions of individuals throughout the country. A Washington Post article by Vidhi Doshi reported that these droughts, caused by global warming, have led to nearly 60,000 farmer suicides in India over the

past 30 years. The droughts have generated unusually dry soil that has introduced significant crop cultivation issues, provoking farmers to commit suicide because the farmers are unable to pay off their debts and support their respective families. Although India has begun to feel the damaging effects of global climate change, the nation can, and must, take all the preventative measures possible to prevent the further intensification of the crisis. Legislators, innovators, and community organizers must all come together and lead the charge

toward the construction of renewable energy sources and away from fossil fuels, such as coal, that emit dangerous levels of carbon pollution, poisoning the Earth, a planet battling against rising temperatures to sustain human life as we know it. A significant transition towards solar energy would have both short- and long-term political, social, and economic benefits for India, so now is the time for Prime Minister Modi to make the leap of faith and commit to renewable sources of energy in order to ensure the nation's longevity and prosperity for years to come. India must act now, and it must act swiftly in order to prevent its current predicament from worsening. Before the advent of the Anthropocene era, carbon dioxide had always existed in the Earth's atmosphere. However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the economies of Western Europe and North America shifted towards mechanized labor and production in an era widely known as the Industrial Revolution. Although this period provided novel advancements in the efficiency of the production process, it also required a need for energy. Western society decided that the development of power plants, where an industrialized economy could burn fossil fuels at an exorbitant rate while releasing an immense amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, was the best way to deal with these energy needs. The invention of the Model T by Henry Ford in 1908 kicked off the automobile industry, introducing yet another carbon polluter into Western society. The "Roaring '20s"

popularized energy consuming household appliances such as dishwashers, refrigerators, and televisions that became symbolic of Western lifestyle and culture. World War II, a global conflict between European, American, and Asian powers, prompted yet another wave of industrialization and a corresponding increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration. American suburbanization in the 1960s reinforced the value of appliances and tools as status symbols in society, leading to yet another spike in energy consumption. In the 1970s, electronic technology began to dominate Western economies, as computers became an essential tool in many types of industry. Finally, the 2000s saw a boom in consumerism and production, due to technological advancements such as the invention of the smartphone and the popularization of the personal computer. However, these two hundred years of rapid industrialization have almost exclusively benefited the fully developed and modernized nations of the Western world. It is now 2018, and developing nations, such as India, are entering their industrial heyday, in an age of extensive and comprehensive economic growth, while they strive to modernize just as Western society did several decades ago. However, many Indians believe that the global community has put a gag on the nation's development. Indian citizens view signing treaties such as the 2015 Paris Climate Accords, which limit India's energy production from fossil fuels, as the West pushing their foot down

on the country as it attempts to swim and starts to drown. The world asked India to assume an unfair burden in order to mitigate the effects of global warming, although this request may be justified. An increase in global temperatures coupled with rising sea levels, ocean acidification, more frequent and intense extreme weather events such as monsoons and flooding, and sustained intense droughts will impact the world on an unimaginable scale. These devastating effects will further destabilize fragile regions across the globe, such as the surrounds of the warring Kashmir region in India. Therefore, the world's second largest country by population and sixth largest economy must make a choice. On the one hand, India could continue to build coal power plants in order to produce the energy necessary for a swiftly industrializing nation for the next ten years, while watching society begin to crumble. On the other hand, policymakers could listen to the scientists, engineers, and economists by moving towards a world powered by renewable energy sources. There may be bumps in the road with the latter choice; however, in perspective, those costs are merely speeding tickets in the long run. The choice is clear; unlike Western nations during their age of industrialization, India must take its unfair share, a heavy burden, in preventing the intensification of global warming through enacting swift and comprehensive solar energy policies. **HMR**







# Google’s Censored Chinese Search Engine

Ishaan Kannan

Google’s prospectus, 2004: “Don’t be evil. We believe strongly that in the long term, we will be better served—as shareholders and in all other ways—by a company that does good things for the world even if we forgo some short term gains. This is an important aspect of our culture and is broadly shared within the company.”

The media industry acts as a conduit of power within countries because it defines what the masses see and listen to. Imagine, for example, that every piece of news created about Donald Trump was never released. Would any given person have a perspective of what kind of person or leader he was? Or,

if newscasters described him as an equitable and accepting individual, Americans would support him accordingly. The media decides what the country sees and knows. This is why broadcasters have been given spectrum worth billions of dollars for free by governments around the world, and why media businesses have a fiduciary responsibility to society as a whole. Today, this power has been magnified manifold in the hands of aggregators such as Google, which curates legacy media not only through its search algorithm but also through emails, traffic data and phone use (through Android, which Google owns). And so, bear-

ing responsibility both on a wide political scale and on an individual consumer basis, Google has to be viewed as more than a company, and its actions hold a significance that is unique in the corporate and political worlds. The company seemed to understand this at its inception with its “Don’t be evil” motto. Today Google is redrawing the line of what is a “good thing for the world.”

In 2010, Google withdrew its services from China when it suspected the Chinese government of hacking into the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists. The company claimed subsequently that “We launched Google.cn in January 2006 in

the belief that the benefits of increased access to information for people in China and a more open Internet outweighed our discomfort in agreeing to censor some results.” Google acted in a self-detrimental manner in order to protect free speech, the ideology which Communist leaders find threatening, and which Google promised to stand by at its inception. This was eight years ago.

Google recently announced the development of project Dragonfly, a search engine for use in China which will be censored in accordance with Chinese governmental regulations. So what’s changed since 2010? In terms of China’s political climate, not much. If anything, things are worse with Xi Jinping recently becoming president for life and the strongest leader since Mao. Upon reentering China, Google will be expected to help Mr. Xi maintain absolute control by propagandizing his regime. Therefore, Google

is not developing Dragonfly because of improvements in China; instead, changes in Silicon Valley are motivating the project. Most large tech firms have by now expanded their reach through north America, Europe, and much of Asia, meaning that Google no longer has a headstart over its competitors. Its lack of participation in the world’s largest consumer market makes it weak against this competition and cuts back its earnings growth. It’s also likely that AI technology plays a part in the decision, as Google CEO Sundar Pichai has commended China’s AI scientists and going back into China is the way to recruit this force.

While Google’s return to China might have been inevitable under this competition, employees and users are not pleased. Roughly 1400 employees upset with the project signed a letter in protest, arguing that due to the secrecy of Dragonfly,

Google employees “don’t know what we’re building,” and “do not have the information to make ethically-informed decisions about our work, our project, and our employment.” The employees called for a Code Yellow on Dragonfly, a process used in engineering development to assess a problem that affects multiple teams. Although employee protests have had significant effects in the past (just recently, employee complaints about Google’s tie-ups with the Pentagon to use AI for military defense led the company to pull out of the deal and lay out ethical plans for AI development), it is unlikely that Google rolls back on Dragonfly due to the intense pressure it is likely facing to release products in China.

China’s leadership has kept a safe distance from American tech firms such as Facebook and Google, preferring domestic giants such as Baidu instead, since the

“China’s leadership has kept a safe distance from American tech firms such as Facebook and Google, preferring domestic giants such as Baidu instead, since the government has hands-on access to influence these companies.”

government has hands-on access to influence these companies. Therefore, those who support Google’s involvement in China have made the argument that the company’s withdrawal in 2010 did nothing to change Chinese policy due to Google’s backseat role in China, only taking away revenue from the tech giant. If Google accedes to the CCP’s demands and becomes widely used in China, then it would have an upper hand on its competitors which are frustrated by governmental restrictions. Unfortunately this attitude only lends legitimacy to China’s censorship decisions.

Even once Google is back in China, it will take time and enormous effort before the search engine is widely used. The majority of Chinese citizens currently use

Baidu, a search engine app which incorporates “mini-programs,” or apps within the app. This allows users to do virtually anything one needs a phone for, such as ordering food, messaging, playing games, and many others, without ever leaving Baidu’s app. It also has the government’s favor and abides closely to any censorship restrictions allowed. When Google left China in 2010, Baidu had nearly caught up to it in usership and many people said that the very reason they preferred the American search engine was for the freedom that came with it. Now Google is playing the catch-up game, and depending on whether the Chinese government backs it, the odds are stacked against it.

Nevertheless, Google has its name going for it and is synonymous with the internet

in much of the world, and so regardless of whether it overtakes Baidu or not, its compliance with the “evil” that the Chinese government imposes on its people is a striking message for the world. If a government can control the entity whose job it is to decide how the people view that very government, then the crucial power of the media is undermined. And for every other country using Google’s service, the understanding that the media will act as a fourth branch of government and provide stability is based on hypocrisy. Google cannot have it both ways; it must either choose to take a gamble in China for the profits and leave behind its noble cause from 2004, or it must pull back from China and send the message that the world is better off without evil. **HMR**





# Social Media and Protest Movements

Silvia Wang

Bzzt. Bzzt! Technology is constantly interrupting our stream of consciousness, flooding our daily lives with notifications, advertisements, and information. The sound alerts and bright illuminating screens surround us, borrowing our attention and creating a subconscious impulse to check an email or the amount of likes on a Facebook post. This era of technology has created platforms for communication that were once unimaginable, but has also come with benefit and backlash.

New digital technologies have advanced protests by disseminating information, connecting like-minded individuals, and reducing the cost and time it takes for a movement to grow. However, they have also increased the spread of misinformation, the power of terrorist groups, and government surveillance on Internet users. To claim that the digital revolution has either positively or negatively affected protest movements is reductive and overly simplistic. Doing this personifies social media instead of acknowledging that human actions determine its effects. Thus, technology is only a tool that can either spur social change or reverse progress, depending on the intentions of the user. By providing easy access to information, E-news-

papers, social media, data leaks, and the online presence of organizations generate publicity and mobilize supporters, prompting the emergence of protest movements.

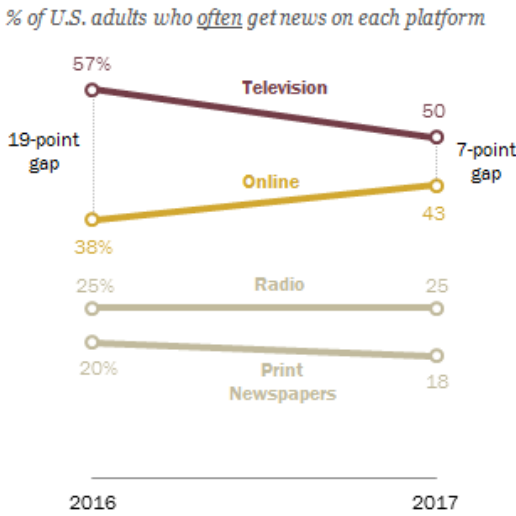
In the past, activists have always used the most efficient communication technologies to disseminate information, raise awareness, and organize collective action. Communication is essential to the success of a movement, increasing its numbers and building a network of support. During the American Revolution, the printing press multiplied the number of local newspapers and pamphlets, spreading the ideas that eventually led to a war for independence. Similarly, in 1930 Mohandas Gandhi publicized footage of the salt march, where images of British soldiers brutally beating nonviolent protesters with clubs sharply captured the oppression by the Raj. This generated a wave of public support, which helped India gain independence. Improved relations with the public strengthen and energize a movement, as seen throughout history. With the advent of camera-equipped mobile phones and portable laptops, users can now access the digital world at all times, with the power to instantaneously share any event or opinion to millions of others. Online news sources, social media, and web-

sites address the social and political issues of a movement, capturing international attention and garnering support for a cause.

Technology has given us the ability to not only spread information, but also to access it with ease: as newspapers become digital—providing easier access and more accurate updates online—the need for printed newspapers is declining. According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, as of August 2017, 43% of Americans receive their news online while only 18% received it from a printed newspaper. Now anyone can download newspaper apps on their phone that send notifications throughout the day on news around the world.

Social media has allowed members with similar beliefs and interests to connect in productive and effective ways. Websites like MeetUp, Doodle, and the Facebook event function are used as tools to assemble and mobilize people for action. Prominent forms of cyber-activism include online petitions, fundraisers, campaigns, and volunteer pages. For example, a group called Colorlines.com led a three-year campaign to end the mainstream news outlets’ usage of the word “illegal” to describe immigrants in the United States without required documentation. Persistent in their

Gap between television and online news consumption narrows from 2016



Survey conducted Aug. 8-21, 2017.  
PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
pewresearch.org

“According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, as of August 2017, 43% of Americans received their news online while only 18% received it from a printed newspaper.”



convictions that the term was degrading and racially charged, the group finally succeeded when the Associated Press agreed to its demand. This event was significant and empowering because the Associated Press was the largest news gathering organization, providing to hundreds of local television networks and newspapers. Online activism has proven to be effective in social and political struggles within the United States and across the world.

Digital whistle blowing and hacktivism aim to expose corruption by leaking private information to the public and attacking websites as a form of protest. In general, whistleblowers are dissenters who decide to go public with their complaints within an organization, such as an employee who exposes private practices in their workplace. One example of this is infiltrators of food processing facilities who film the cruel treatment of animals. Hacktivism involves obtaining private information by hacking online systems and threatening to attack an individual or organization's network as a strategy to force them into furthering a social or political interest. For example, an online group called Chanology managed to

crash the website of a church accused of Internet censorship with DDoS attacks. These attacks made the site unavailable by flooding it with traffic caused by different sources. However, afterwards Chanology received DDoS on their own online services, inhibiting their ability to disseminate information. This further supports the claim that technology is a tool whose effects are determined by the user. Tactics like hacktivism can target protesters just as easily as they can be used to attack corrupt organizations.

WikiLeaks is an organization that publishes classified information and news leaks to advocate for greater transparency in government. According to Associate Professor of Sociology Victoria Carty, "WikiLeaks has ultimately redefined whistle-blowing by gathering secrets and then releasing them instantly and globally." In 2007, a US officer released a classified video of US soldiers killing civilians in Iraq and then celebrating. US officer Chelsea Manning initially tried to submit related leaked government documents to news outlets, but when they declined, Manning sent them to WikiLeaks. She hoped to publicize the US troops' cruel treatment of civilians, thus improving pub-

lic knowledge of the war and prompting protest against it. WikiLeaks played a key role in nationally distributing information that other news sources refused to. It secured a check on government, therefore fulfilling the press's duty of speaking truth to power.

Though in some cases new technologies have provided greater transparency of government and private organizations, they can also circulate misinformation. According to journalist Franklin Foer, sixty-two percent of Americans read news through social media, mostly Facebook. This new trend has transformed the style and values of journalists, encouraging them to write articles that will attract the most attention online. This priority has arisen as a result of digitized news and dependence on tech companies. Foer writes, "Even journalists of the highest integrity have internalized a new mind-set; they worry about how to successfully pander to Google's and Facebook's algorithms. In pursuit of clicks, some of our nation's most important purveyors of news have embraced sensationalism; they have published dubious stories; they have heaped attention on propagandists and conspiracists, one of whom was



elected president of the United States." He mentions Trump's presidency as a result of this change in journalism, explaining that this new obsession with attention has led to the large amount of media coverage that Trump's campaign received compared to those of other candidates. New technologies have reduced journalism by flipping its values: the most captivating, instead of most important or accurate content will be pursued in order to gain clicks on social media.

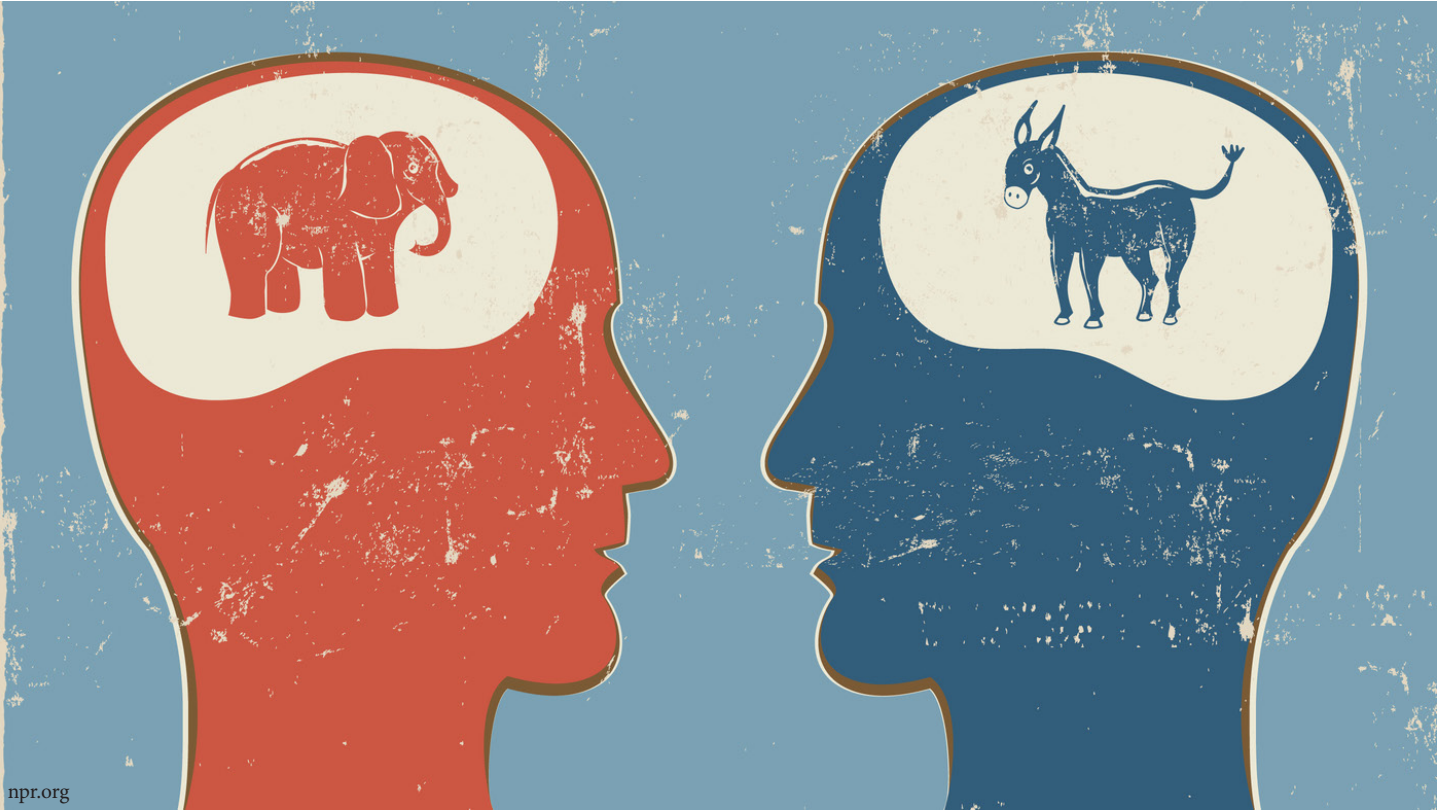
The rise of new technologies and social media has transformed protest movements, offering a new form of communication, visibility, and connection. While in some cases, digital technologies have been a catalyst to social change, they also exacerbate privacy risks and further reactionary causes. Government can more conveniently spread propaganda, surveil internet users, and monitor protesters. With the abilities

to track Internet, cell-phone activity, and personal emails, and even store biometric data, authorities can pinpoint the location of participants in protests. They can also target organizers by attacking their public image and reputation through false information and propaganda. New dangerous tactics like these became more accessible and effective through technology.

Technology is a neutral tool, an idea reinforced by its capacity to be used for both progressive causes and conservative ones. While social media and websites are able to create communities of people with shared beliefs, they also widen the divide between groups with opposing views. Multiple different sides form, each with their own individual opinion. Conflicting ideas coexist on the Internet just as opposite motives do. Victoria Carty claims, "Mobile video recording devices can keep police abuse in check, but

they can also be used by terrorist groups to publicize their acts and recruit new members." Technology can be used to organize a peaceful protest, but is just as likely to be used to plan out violence. In addition, constant engagement with the online world can distract from the real one. Emotional commitments to online communities create a separation from the offline one, allowing people to leave differences with members of their local community unresolved. Social media is a catalyst, not the product of reactants, used by the world to disseminate information and provide platforms of communication to reach the user's goals. **HMR**





# The Rise of Partisanship in the Media

Noah Phillips

It is tremendously unfortunate that the news institutions tasked with supplying objectivity to informed citizens—by inception intended to be harbingers of fact and honesty—have morphed and become slanted and blatantly partisan. In effect, the harbingers of information in our democratic society, are now frequently the news themselves.

Various realities drive this novel age in media reporting. First and foremost is a dramatic increase in sensationalism in news organizations, and similarly a business-first model employed by these organizations.

Sensationalism, while not new, has clearly proliferated in recent years as journalists are more and more desperate to generate clicks for increased exposure and to a wider audience. Because of this, journalists have a tendency to craft headlines in such a manner that they can accomplish this goal, which can lead to news bordering on the slanderous, misleading, or inaccurate.

But the rise in sensationalism dually fuels a partisan divide in the media, as certain outlets attack certain politicians to acquire viewership. Journalists end up replacing what should be objective reporting with bold—and sometimes unwarranted—rhetoric.

And this sensationalism and by extension, partisanship in media is propelled by the monetarily-oriented times in which we live. News outlets view themselves as money makers and businesses, before unbiased fact-bearers. This gives reporters significant leeway in terms of objective reporting, as executives seek stories that generate greater click-revenue, not further public discourse.

“The press is sometimes called the fourth branch of government, but in the U.S., it’s also very much a business – one whose ability to serve the public is dependent on its ability to attract eyeballs and dollars,” said a recent Pew study.

Beyond sensationalism and the manic attempts to garner ‘eyeballs,’ journalistic bias is exacerbated by the physical locations of newsrooms around the country. Statistically, journalists are likely to reside in staunchly Democratic pockets of the nation, inevitably fostering lopsided reporting in favor of the left wing. According to Politico, in 2016 over 72% of journalists lived in Clinton-voting areas—and 71% of them lived in areas where Clinton won by 30% votes or more. This large-scale Democratic control of the media creates a form of journalistic groupthink, wherein journalists band together in favor of Democratic principles in their reporting, failing to recognize the error. And this groupthink leads to institutional change to the point where whole news outlets are shifting with this left-wing political perspective. Examples of this phenomenon include the Huffington Post, The Daily Beast, Slate, National Public Radio, and more.

Yet this is not to say that there hasn’t been a rise in media bias towards the right as well, just manifested in a different manner.

On the right-side of the political spectrum, there has been a tremendous increase in policy hard-liners—staunch conservatives (or even further to the right in some cases), effectively creating a need for political sites of the same beliefs to satisfy the right while dually combatting the left-wing majority of the populace.

Per a Columbia Journalism Review study, “Donald Trump supporters clustered around Breitbart — headed until recently by Stephen Bannon, the hard-right nationalist now ensconced in the White House — and a few like-minded websites such as The Daily Caller, Alex Jones’ Infowars, and The Gateway Pundit. Even Fox News was dropped from the favored circle back when it was attacking Trump during the primaries, and only re-entered the fold once it had made its peace with the future president.” What this entails is a dramatic shift to rightwards by originally conservative news sources to pander to the newfound far-right consumers. A notable exception to this trend is the Wall Street Journal, which seems to have remained on par with its right-of-center principles even in the wake of the 2016 election.

Another interesting theory as to the increase in media bias tracks back to the education of budding journalists, even at the collegiate level. Nowadays, it’s increasingly uncommon for professional journalists to have majored in journalism or communications. Rather, journalists are expected to carry a niche that sets them apart, whether it be economics, political science, theology, or more. As a result, the value of objectivity in reporting is never imprinted upon these students who will one day be tasked with carrying out objective reporting as professionals, allowing for reporters to more readily utilize their own implicit bias in their writing.

And while a multitude of factors combine to create the partisan divide evident in media today, the effect is clear and tremendously damaging. A functioning press is integral to a functioning democracy and can have a large impact on governmental decisions and operations. Just as the media has seen great divide, so too has Congress, where a spirit of bipartisan collaboration is antiquated. John McCain was celebrated on both sides of the aisle and in just about every reputable news outlet, but there are no more John McCains in elected office today who command across the board respect. And I don’t believe the divide in Congress to be unrelated to the divide in media. With politicians so reliant on their constituents, and their constituents reliant on various news outlets for accurate reporting, all of these institutions are sacred, and as one slips away into partisanship, the others will follow suit. In effect, the Fourth Estate has been compromised, and to restore it requires joint cooperation and zero tolerance for unfair reporting by consumers and journalists alike. **HMR**





# Trump and Fox vs. the Others

Reha Mathur

On July 13th, during a joint press conference with the UK Prime Minister Theresa May, Donald Trump refused to answer a question from a CNN reporter, stating “CNN’s fake news, I don’t take questions from CNN,” and then proceeded to address a question from John Roberts from Fox News. While the president’s attack on CNN was concerning, what is more worrying is that the Fox News reporter John Roberts didn’t make any comment refuting the president’s claim that CNN does not display real news. He later did post on social media that he stood by the journalist who was ignored, but action should have been taken directly with the president where it would have made a difference. These insults from the president are in line with a worrying trend from the administration of restricting access to news networks whom they view as “enemies of the people,” and attempting to control the news narrative for their own benefit. Therefore, in order to combat that dangerous pattern, the press must

unite together in order to preserve an integral check on our democracy and to preserve the trust that our citizens have in it. The attack on July 13th was not the first time President Trump insulted CNN and other news organizations such as the New York Times and the Washington Post. He has labeled them as “Fake News” and the “Enemy of the People.” At his rallies, supporters eagerly chant “CNN sucks” and Trump frequently touts his close relationship with Fox’s Sean Hannity frequently. He told his supporters to “Stick with us. Don’t believe the crap you see from these people, the fake news,” demonstrating his desire to control the media. He even last year posted a video of him beating up a man with a CNN logo superimposed on his face. Not only has he verbally attacked many major news organizations (except his beloved Fox News), his administration has taken steps towards preventing these networks from doing their jobs. Privately, Trump has been reported to have vented about encounters with “fake news” organizations and has asked aides to

revoke credentials to those organizations or deny them access to other events. The White House in February barred news outlets like CNN, the New York Times, Politico and the Los Angeles Times from attending an off-camera press briefing. This time, Fox News did issue a statement condemning the move, but still took part in the briefing. Once again, Fox News only stood up for their colleagues after the event, rather than taking direct action against the administration, allowing this behavior to continue. Fox News and other organizations that Trump deems to be legitimate need to show more solidarity with their press colleagues when Trump repeatedly demonizes them, rather than just condemning the president after the event has happened. Their silence only exacerbates the divide between “real news” and “fake news.” While past presidents have not had such an adversarial relationship with the media, they too have tried to restrict possibly unfriendly news organizations from accurately reporting on the administration.

President Obama’s administration tried to prevent Fox News from conducting interviews with the members of the administration. In addition, Obama’s chief of staff had stated that Fox News is not a news organization. The other news organizations however swiftly issued statements that they would not attend the interviews unless Fox was included and condemned and questioned the White House over those remarks. We need to see similar actions from Fox News now during this administration. The most recent example of the Trump Administration trying to undermine the free press is when CNN journalist Kaitlan Collins was prevented from attending a Rose Garden ceremony after she asked about the tapes between Michael Cohen and Donald Trump and Putin’s postponed visit to the White House. Those questions were deemed inappropriate by deputy chief of staff Bill Shine and press secretary Sarah Sanders, and Collins was barred from attending an event that is usually open to all of the media. Fox News and other media organizations issued strong statements condemning the president and affirming their solidarity with CNN. But while it was commendable that Fox News issued such strong condemnations of the White House, once again, this needs to extend to the repeated labeling of CNN and other news organizations as “Fake News.”

Fox News needs to step up and continue to defend their other press colleagues like during the Rose Garden incident. Specifically, they need to clarify that they are not the only “Real News” outlet. Trust in the media is reaching dangerously low levels as only 32% of responders in a Gallup poll stated that they trust the media in 2016 compared to 74% in 1976 during the post-Watergate Era. Yet, the media is critical to providing an independent assessment of our government and holding it accountable for their mistakes. As Trump increases his attacks on the media, he is preventing others from assessing his administration fairly. He even stated that people should not believe anything in the papers and to only believe what he says which is incredibly dangerous as it allows him to outright lie to his constituents without any responsibility to tell the truth. Fox News and other traditionally conservative organizations need to stop being complacent with these attacks against the press and defend their colleagues. If this trend continues, the Trump administration will lose almost all accountability as the only “real” news organization would only report favorable news. Opposition and accountability are vital for democracy and also to allow our government to become aware of their mistakes and fix them. Trump’s actions with the media are almost dictatorial as he only acknowledges media that makes

him look good. This animosity towards the media could have serious consequences. The publisher of the New York Times stated that Trump’s words are being used to crack down on journalists overseas. In late June, a gunman killed 5 employees and injured two others at the Capital Gazette for reporting unfavorable information about him. Reporters from news organizations he has labeled as “fake news” have also received death threats because they are the “Enemy of the People,” and have reported unfavorable information about President Trump. As stories about accusations of fake news stories proliferate, citizens need to be able to trust major news organizations to provide reliable and credible stories. President Trump’s continuing attacks on the media that he disagrees with lessens that vital trust in the media and helps him control the narrative to his advantage. Ultimately, the objective of the media is to inform citizens and investigate issues, but they can’t do their job without the trust of their readers. Fox News and other conservative organizations have an obligation to not only defend their press colleagues when they are prevented from access to the administration, but when they are labeled “Fake News” and the “Enemy of the People” as it is destructive for our democracy. HMR







# Cleaning Up Social Media

Arman Kumar

The age of social media is in full force and with it comes a multitude of concerns, from the potential for cyberbullying to the threat to privacy. Recent scandals with Facebook sharing data with third parties such as Cambridge Analytica and AggregateIQ are just examples of how everyday social media users are not aware of the little privacy they have. The list of companies that sell users' data expands beyond Facebook. Social media giant Twitter also sold data to a Cambridge Analytica affiliate called GSR or Global Science Research. The founder of GSR, Aleksandr Kogan, was given access to private posts for about four months in 2015. While Cambridge Analytica and GSR may not be clients of Twitter anymore, the company has sold data to developers and advertisers through its application programming

interfaces (APIs), a software that acts as an intermediary for information. Those companies that receive this data use it to enhance customer experiences, target specific audiences, and to judge consumers' reaction to products. The list of companies that share, sell and collect data on users goes on, Facebook, Twitter, Verizon, AT&T, Comcast, Whatsapp, Yahoo, and Amazon. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Thursday, July 28, 2018, saw the worst one-day drop in market value of any company in history, with Facebook's market value dropping by 120 billion dollars, and Mark Zuckerberg's net worth falling by a jaw-dropping 12 billion dollars. This drop came after Facebook's CFO, David Wehner, announced that the company's revenue growth has and will continue to drop as they undergo a "slowdown" in the

next few months. This slowdown is meant to enhance user security from a new aspect, and to compensate for the loss of revenue that this new change will cause. Advertising is essentially the largest component of Facebook's revenue, and that will be jeopardized to prioritize user security. The cost of "cleaning up" for major companies is truly detrimental. When investors viewed this giant deceleration in Facebook's value, they started selling. Therefore Facebook got hit from both sides. Their value fell due to scandals about user security, then when the company revamped the security measures it scared investors, thus continuing to the already plunging value of the company. Essentially, Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook chose to lose money and not go the route of short-term compensation to prioritize the everyday user. This thought should not

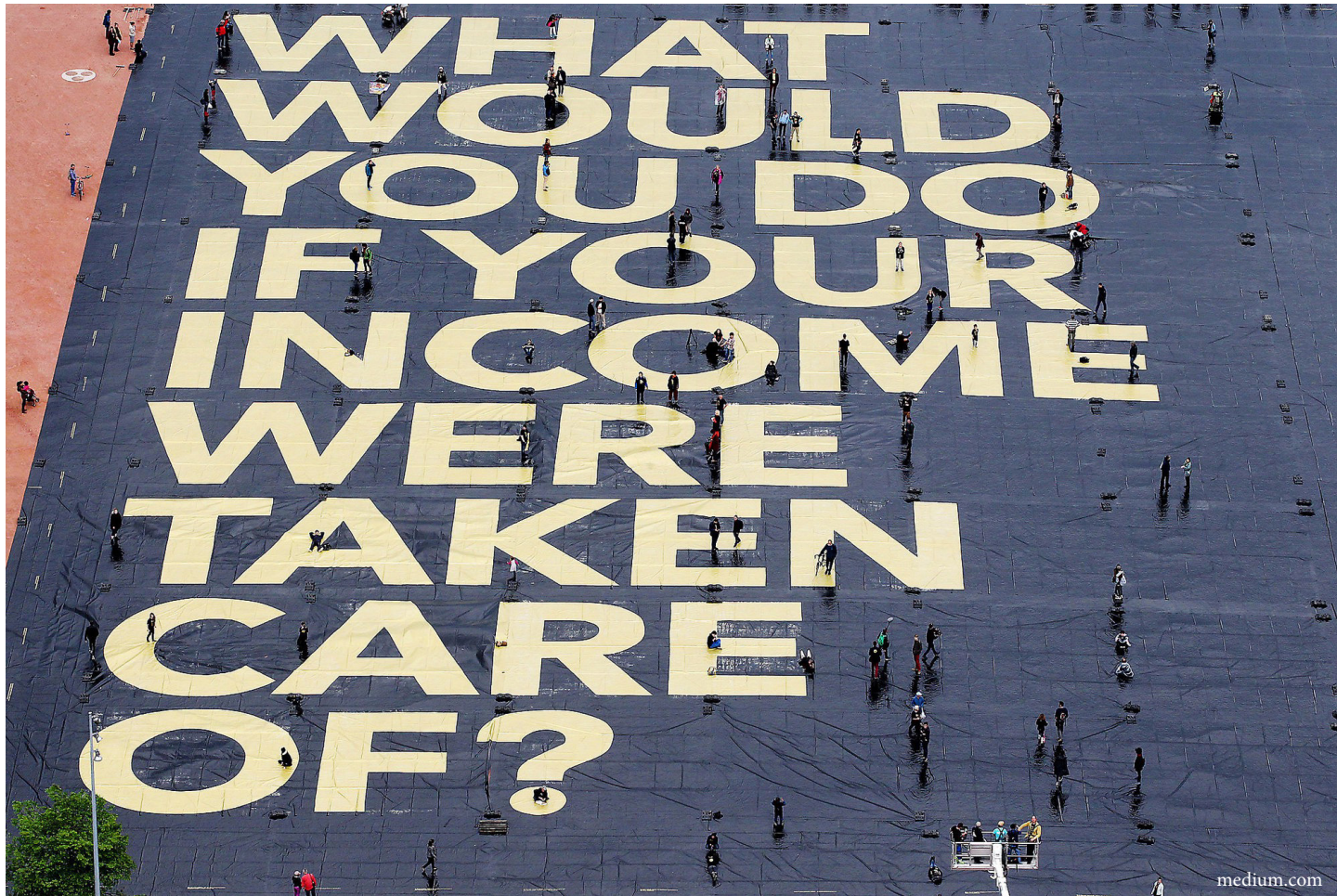
“The simple truth is selling data to third parties is both profitable and useful to companies.”

go unnoticed, especially in an age where everyone in tech is willing to cash out. This leads to the question, can a social media company maintain and sustain a business model that is totally secure for users? The evidence seems to point to no. Facebook was undoubtedly punished when they announced changes to user security. The simple truth is selling data to third parties is both profitable and useful to companies. It allows for advertisers to be able to know their consumer base and for social media companies like Facebook and Twitter to be able to profit and have a value from the billions of users on these sites. However, it also violates the very essence of social media. By forcing users to have to choose between the countless benefits and interactions on social media or privacy, social media sites and applications are proving themselves to be untrustworthy. Our lives are slowly being transferred online, and the fact that the general population of users does not even know what their data is being used for has dire and daunting implications. However, social media sites are trying to allow users to interact with one another with security. One example is a new social media platform called Ello. Ello in recent years has capitalized on the anti-Facebook backlash and is an alternative for users who prioritize the security of their information. It is marketed as a “Facebook killer social network,” and the company does not sell user's data and does not contain constant advertisements. As of now, Ello is the first choice for the creative population, such as artists, designers, and writers. Another growing service that has found a business

model built on privacy is a revolutionary site called Steemit. Steemit is a forum based site where users post and answer questions and can upvote or downvote others' posts. Users can use Steemit to engage in debates or find answers to questions, or they can try to receive cryptocurrency tokens. Steemit crypto tokens are rewarded to users who have upvoted answers and can be used in order to receive cryptocurrency. Steem was recently ranked the 32nd most used cryptocurrency. Many use Steemit for financial compensation as well. Steemit also works with a video service called d.tube which utilizes the InterPlanetary File System (IPFS) protocol to allow users to watch videos without being tracked and without advertisements. Right now Steemit has around 10 million views a month, which is small when compared to similar sites like Reddit, Quora, and Facebook, but it is on the rise. Finally, while not a social media platform, DuckDuckGo, founded in 2008, is a revolutionary search engine that decentralizes data not to track the search history of users. While search engines like Google and Yahoo make it mandatory for users to submit to virtually zero privacy when using those platforms, DuckDuckGo is a legal and efficient way to keep information private while still having access to the internet. What happened to Facebook provides a perfect example of the cost of being more secure extending beyond social media. Companies like PayPal, which handle vital data like credit card numbers and checking accounts, don't inform users that they use their data. However, PayPal sells and shares most of users' data to various third

parties for lucrative contracts. Users of the popular online payment service found using it outside the country was impossible, and that PayPal will not let users log in with a VPN, which allows users to use the internet with privacy. People also observed that while there are various privacy settings on PayPal, there is no way not to allow PayPal to sell or use a person's data except for deleting the entire account. Because PayPal is so established today, many must submit their data and lose their privacy. What is so twisted about this system today is that the normal regular human being must now choose between being able to access and utilize the wonderful benefits of digitalization at the price of security, and keeping their information safe. Social media and the internet, in general, have opened doors to connect the world and make life easier for the everyday citizen. However, this comes at a terrible cost, privacy. Already, our information is online, credit card numbers, social security numbers, addresses, names and so much more. If the everyday user is not even aware of what these companies are doing with this data, for all they know it can end in the wrong hands, or even worse be used against the original user. Because these giant media companies control such a large percentage of the market share, people have no choice but to submit to this loss of their privacy. These companies need to be held accountable for keeping information private, which is only possible if everyone is aware of what is happening and if a majority of users advocate for more security. **HMR**





# Universal Basic Income

## Lauren Futter

With the 2018 midterm elections still in swing, only a few people have declared their intention to run for president in 2020. While the field currently includes a conspiracy theorist, a former football coach, and a journalist, one is a former CEO and advocate for an overhaul of the United States' welfare system that has long eluded not only the US but the United Kingdom and Canada, as well. Andrew Yang, the founder of Venture for America, stated his intention to run on the basis of establishing a Universal Basic Income. Although the concept of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) has existed in many forms, at its simplest, a UBI is a regular, unconditional cash transfer from the government to citizens of a city, state, or country.

While some cities such as Oakland and Ontario have run UBI pilot programs, the program has not been widely adopted due to the difficulties associated with funding it. Despite these difficulties, if provided with a suitable funding source, such as rents from a natural resource, a UBI could be a viable option. One state, Alaska, has a model that may not be replicable nationally but could be possible on a state by state basis.

Alaska, as well as countries such as Iran and Norway, adopted permanent funds to manage a phenomenon economists describe as "Dutch Disease." Without programs such as the permanent fund, "Dutch Disease" can run rampant. W. Max Corden and J. Peter Neary first described Dutch Disease in their paper "Booming Sector and Dein-

dustrialization in a Small Open Economy" as the negative consequences of natural resource discovery. The primary symptom of Dutch Disease is an increase in the "real exchange rate." This increase is the result of the influx of foreign currency that results from a country selling its commodity (such as oil) abroad. As foreign currency is converted to local currency, an increase in the money supply increases prices. Alternatively, an influx of new currency could increase the demand for local currency, also leading to an appreciation in the exchange rate. As this occurs, the local economy shifts its focus to the natural resource industry (usually oil), while other industries are neglected. While these shifts can lead to short-run prosperity for the country, if the natural re-

source industry begins to falter, economic disarray can ensue. With underdeveloped non-natural-resource-related industries, these countries fail. As Mauricio Drelichman notes, Dutch Disease can result in an increase in the price of non-traded goods relative to traded goods, meaning that consumers in economies suffering from Dutch Disease will pay more for electricity and housing. While this may not initially be a problem when incomes are high from oil revenues, if oil prices drop and people begin to earn less, this can become problematic.

An over-reliance on natural resources can also lead to political corruption. James Robinson, Ragnar Torvik, and Thierry Verdier note that the extraction of natural resources in a country or state often leads to political incentives that can corrupt a government by increasing the value of being in power through giving politicians more resources they can use to influence political outcomes. As a result, politicians have a tendency to over-extract natural resources because they discount the earnings they can gain from extracting in the future. Corrupt institutions only exacerbate the effects of an over-reliance on natural resource extraction. While Robinson, Torvik, and Verdier note that countries with institutions that promote accountability, such as Indonesia, can benefit from resource extraction, the tendency of countries and states to put too much pressure on their natural resource extraction often results in severe ramifications for the economy and those who live in these countries.

While Alaska's Permanent Fund (APF) did not begin as a means of ameliorating the effects of resource extraction but rather as a means of preventing government over-spending of rents from oil extraction, its success suggests a means by which countries and states can solve the economic problems that occur when they can no longer rely on a particular resource. These unreliable resources could range from oil to the manufacturing sector. The idea of developing a form of UBI in Alaska, known as the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD), began in 1969 after oil was discovered in Prudhoe Bay. Through leasing the land to oil companies such as BP, the state earned over \$900 million in revenue. While this revenue was initially spent on projects such as the Alaska Student Loan and Alaska Longevity programs, an effort soon began to encourage the state to save the revenue and prevent overspending on capital projects. After passing a state constitution

amendment and long legal negotiations, the legislature approved the creation of the Permanent Fund and Permanent Fund Dividend. Article 9, Section 15 of the Alaska State Constitution states that at least twenty-five percent of rents and royalties from mineral extraction must be placed in the permanent fund. The permanent fund is then invested in an array of diverse assets including real estate, infrastructure, and public equities. Depending on how well investments do, every Alaskan resident receives a portion of the dividends from those investments. These dividends usually range between \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year.

While Alaska's dividend payments are not enough to live on, they assist Alaskans in making purchases and serve as the basis for many Alaskans' college funds. Accumulated over time, the permanent fund dividends could smooth consumer consumption in the event of an economic downturn due to lower oil prices. In a 2015 paper, Northwestern professor of finance in the Kellogg school of management Lorenz Kueng writes that the household spending on non-durables is responsive to receiving Permanent Fund checks. This result suggests that Permanent Fund checks influence the way Alaskans spend and could be vital in a period of high unemployment such as might occur if oil prices fall.

In addition to smoothing consumption in the event of economic downturn, recent research has shown that the existence of the PFD does not disincentivize work as might be expected on the basis of economic theory. In their paper, "The Labor Market Impacts of Universal and Permanent Cash Transfers: Evidence from the Alaska Permanent Fund," Professors Damon Jones and Ioana Marinescu find that 10% increase in unearned income, such as a PFD check, is only correlated with a one-percent decrease in earned income despite the fact that theory suggests that cash transfers such as the PFD might decrease the labor supply. Furthermore, certain welfare programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) have work requirements that may offer incentives so that workers have to work in fields that fit those particular requirements. A UBI is unlikely to disincentivize work or distort incentives to work in particular fields.

While funding for a traditional UBI may come from a Value Added Tax, which does not currently exist in the United States, a UBI derived from a permanent fund would have the added benefit of preven-

ting a misuse of excess funds. In a paper for the International Monetary Fund, Sanjeev Gupta and Alex Segura-Ubiergo both note that a primary cause of the resource curse is the mismanagement of rents by governments. Distributing dividends from resource investment would prevent the government from taking on excessive capital projects while also giving the population a stake in revenue earned from natural resources. As Alaska is currently suffering from a budget crisis, legislators have discussed cutting the PFD. Because Alaskan residents are faced with the prospect of having their yearly \$1,000 to \$2,000 taken away, they have become more engaged with Alaska's fiscal troubles.

Although instituting a permanent fund dividend program provides numerous benefits, this type of program would be difficult to implement nationwide because the US lacks an ubiquitous resource that provides rents large enough that investing some of those rents would provide significant dividends to be distributed. For this reason, advocates for a UBI should not advocate for a national UBI but state-level programs. Supporters of a national UBI, such as Andrew Yang, often argue that a UBI would protect workers against an Artificial Intelligence boom by providing them with a minimum income to live on. However, because a national UBI is not sustainable, politicians should instead focus on encouraging states that already have workers who have lost jobs to technological advances to invest what few rents they can earn through taxing these industries in permanent fund programs. States such as West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Michigan may then be able to smooth workers' transitions to a new economy. Through the use of a UBI, the US can focus on ensuring a smooth transition to a new economy.

The success of Andrew Yang and his plan for a national UBI may be a long shot. However, for several states whose economic success has faltered in recent decades, it may be a necessary step in smoothing the transition to an economy based not in manufacturing and resource extraction but in technological innovation. If countries and states hope to take advantage of such a system, it will be necessary to begin investing in such programs now. Otherwise, it may be too late to extract any remaining benefit these industries have. **HMR**





# MoviePass

## Owen Karpf

On August 15th of last year, Helios and Matheson Analytics, a big data company focused on gathering social data and then selling it, bought MoviePass, an American company selling monthly subscriptions that in turn allowed customers to see a movie a day. Prior to being acquired by Helios and Matheson Analytics, MoviePass had a monthly subscription price of \$50, causing the company to have a relatively small subscriber base of 20,000 subscribers as only the most dedicated of moviegoers shelled out such large sums of money each month. However, directly after being acquired, Helios and Matheson significantly lowered MoviePass’ price to \$10 in a gambit to become the head of a new industry instead of a niche subscription seller.

At first it looked as if Helios and Matheson’s bet on MoviePass and the new subscription plan they had implemented would pay off as MoviePass quickly grew,

gaining over two million subscribers and becoming around 3% of the domestic box office for films, just seven months after being acquired. However, due to the low subscription price of \$10, which alone is often cheaper than a single movie ticket, MoviePass could not solely rely on subscriptions to make profit or even break even as each new subscriber was equivalent to a drain on the subscription service’s financial resources.

As a result, MoviePass was forced to look towards other avenues of profit, primarily through advertising small films that had relatively low budgets, gaining a portion of concession sales at theatres and implementing surge pricing. MoviePass quickly succeeded in the first venture using their subscriber base as leverage, with the company stating that when MoviePass advertises a film, MoviePass contributed to 10% of that films box office. However, these contracts for advertising films were relatively small

for a company such as MoviePass as Mitch Lowe, the CEO of MoviePass, stated that the contracts were “in the six-figures-type range.” MoviePass also implemented surge pricing, which was meant to add fees when the movies that subscribers went to were highly trafficked. It was ridiculed by subscribers for occurring even when theatres were empty, yet even still it did not bring in a large enough amount of revenue to turn a profit, as evidenced by MoviePass eventually abandoning the plan that Helios and Matheson had originally put into place due to financial losses. Thus, in order to ensure that they would have monthly profits, MoviePass also needed to succeed in their third venture of gaining a percent of concession sales from theatres. Although MoviePass was able to leverage their user base in order to convince small, independent theatres into giving them a portion of concession sales, MoviePass was unable to do so with large theatre chains such as AMC, which

make up the bulk of American theatres.

With MoviePass finding only minor successes in its three ventures to ensure profit, few were surprised when the company was unable to pay for subscribers to see films for an entire day in late July, requiring the company to take out an emergency loan just to continue with the service the next day. Ever since then, MoviePass has tried all sorts of things in order to stay alive, including preventing users from seeing blockbusters altogether, which they did initially for “The Meg” and “Christopher Robin,” preventing repeat viewings of the same movie, and raising the price from \$10 to \$15. However, even that wasn’t enough, with MoviePass finally capitulating on August 6th, announcing that on August 15th, the company would switch to a plan that allowed subscribers to see only three movies a month for the price of \$10, alleviating the company of its largest financial burden as Helios and Matheson believed that “only 15 percent of the subscriber base has been stressing the [MoviePass] system.” With this new plan, MoviePass altogether abandoned the idea of becoming the Netflix of the movie industry. Although MoviePass themselves failed in becoming a new titan in the movie going industry, the after effects of their attempt can still be seen in the film industry. Indeed, AMC, which had originally stated that MoviePass’ \$10, one film a day plan was “not in the best interest of moviegoers,

movie theatres and movie studios” recently introduced its own service, one that is quite similar to the old MoviePass. The subscription program, named AMC Stubs A List, grants members the ability to see three movies a week, or about twelve movies a month for \$20 each month. Although not truly an unlimited program, AMC’s A List grants benefits that MoviePass had lacked in the past, such as the ability to see movies in 3D and the ability to reserve seats.

Having only launched in late June, Stubs A List has already exceeded 260,000 members and already makes up more than 4% of AMC’s US theatre attendance. Despite these large numbers, and a growth similar to MoviePass’ own after it had switched to its original \$10 plan, AMC is likely to be able to jump over the very hurdles that MoviePass had tripped over. This is because with moviegoers constrained to seeing only 12 movies a month at most, AMC won’t have to deal with customers who see movies every day. Also, movie theatres like AMCs garner the majority of their profits through concession sales and more moviegoers will drive up concession sales, and, by extension, likely increase profits.

AMC isn’t the only theatre chain inspired by MoviePass to launch a subscription service as in December of last year Cinemark, another US based movie chain, released its own, albeit much more limited, program called Movie Club. A monthly subscrip-

tion to Cinemark’s Movie Club (\$8.99 per month) allows subscribers to see a single 2D movie (with the ability to upgrade for a price), along with a 20% discount on concession prices. Yet another subscription service, this one promising the ability to truly see unlimited movies for a fixed monthly price, is in the process of being created at Alamo Drafthouse, another American theatre chain.

For consumers, whether or not MoviePass is able to survive the effects of its old subscription plan and its stock falling more than 99 percent in less than a month, something highly improbable, is of little importance. Instead, moviegoers, and likely theatres as well, with their boosted concession sales, will thrive in this new landscape of subscription based movie going, where the subscription itself could be equivalent to the price of a single ticket, if the landscape is able to survive. However, although the new, non-MoviePass movie subscription services look quite sturdy right now, with industry titans such as AMC hopping on board, the future of these services is unknown. After all, these services have emulated MoviePass in almost all manners as of now, with their growth being fast and seemingly endless. Due to this, it waits to be seen whether or not MoviePass has truly refashioned the American movie going experience, or if instead it, and its ideas, are just a fad, soon fading away. **HMR**







# Are Big Businesses Bad?

Oliver Keimweiss

On August 2nd, 2018, Apple reached a market value of more than \$1,000,000,000,000. While that number may seem terrifying, it seems more tame compared to historically successful companies. According to Business Insider, in 1637, the Dutch East India Company reached a market value of \$7.9 trillion when adjusted for inflation, which is about the combined GDP of modern day Japan and Germany. What is market value? Market value is the price that a certain product would fetch on the open market. That means if Tim Cook decided to sell Apple in full, it would cost the buyer more than \$1 trillion. While Apple may be today's most

valuable company, other enormous corporations are not far behind. As of early summer, Amazon had the second highest valuation at around \$800 billion, followed by Alphabet (Google) and Microsoft each at around \$750 billion. Facebook rounds out the top five at around \$500 billion. While these numbers change constantly, it is interesting to note that all of the five largest companies in the world are tech companies based out of the west coast.

These massive corporations are not alone in their financial dominance. Greater than 80% of all profits are earned by less than 10% of the world's publicly traded companies. What is even scarier is the amount of

well known brands that are owned by these corporate giants. Take Amazon for example, everyone knows that Whole Foods was bought by Amazon, but did you know that they bought Zappos in 2009 and Twitch in 2014? Some of the most intimidating of these are in the food industry. PepsiCo is well known for their soda, but they also pull in tons of revenue through Frito-Lay, the manufacturer of Fritos, Lays, Doritos, Cheetos, Tostitos and other popular snacks. Additionally, PepsiCo owns popular brands such as Aquafina, Sabra Hummus, Naked, Gatorade, and Quaker Foods. PepsiCo is not the only massive food company. Nestlé owns over 2000 brands in around 150

countries including Häagen-Dazs, DiGiorno, Poland Spring, and Nespresso. Similarly, Kraft-Heinz and Mondelez, which were one company until 2012, own many popular brands including Cadbury, A1, Ritz, and Oreo. The entertainment industry is also dominated by a handful of giants looming. Disney already owns ABC, ESPN, and an extensive theme park network, and once they complete their acquisition of 21st Century Fox, they will control 27% of the film industry, not to mention an enormous amount of television channels and viewership, 60% of Hulu, and the rights to popular franchises and studios such as the Simpsons, Family Guy, Avatar, and Fox Searchlight. Other industries have similarly terrifying companies. Thomas Edison's General Electric (GE) operates in every sector from aviation to healthcare. ExxonMobil owns 14.6 million acres of US soil and has developed more than four times as much land in Russia, not to mention elsewhere. Warren Buffet's investment company Berkshire Hathaway owns 100% of well-known companies such as Benjamin Moore, Dairy Queen, and GEICO as well as large shares of American Express (16%), IBM (8%), Coca Cola (10%), Delta Airlines (8%), Wells Fargo (10%), and the aforementioned Kraft-Heinz (27%). Additionally, Berkshire Hathaway also owns smaller shares in many companies such as American Airlines (4%) and the most valuable company in the world, Apple (3%).

While the big names are frightening, what is arguably scarier are the companies that you might have never heard of. A great example of a lesser known but as powerful company is British public service company Serco. Founded in 1929 as a cinema-related section of RCA, it broke off and changed its name to Serco when GE bought RCA in the mid 1980s. Today, Serco manages and operates public service programs on government contracts. In the UK alone, Serco runs parts of border security, two immigration detention centers, four prisons, four hospitals, four naval bases, four Air Force Bases, the UK's ballistic missile defense system, a portion of the UK's nuclear warheads, and more. In the US, Serco does everything from air traffic control in some airports to parking meters in Chicago. In Australia and New Zealand, Serco runs more than 5 prisons and maintains operations for a significant amount of justice department activities. In the UAE, Serco operates and manages air traffic control as well as a large portion of Dubai's public transportation.

Serco isn't the only lesser known but extremely powerful company. Other companies, like McKesson, which supplies around one third of all prescription drugs in the United States, are equally as unknown and control important aspects of everyday life. As scary as it is to think that the same company that gives you a ticket for a meter violation in Chicago maintains Britain's nuclear warheads and research facilities, it's important to remember that just because a company is large and intimidating doesn't mean that it has bad intentions.

Corporate philanthropy, like individual philanthropy, is when a corporation donates a portion of their resources/profits to a charitable cause. Bill Gates is well known to be one of the most charitable people on the planet, and his company Microsoft is no different. Microsoft donates around \$2 million per day to philanthropic causes. While \$2 million is only one thirtieth of Microsoft's daily profits, it is still a substantial amount of money. Microsoft isn't the only large corporation to consistently donate millions of dollars to charitable causes. Another great example is Merck and Co, a healthcare company worth \$177 billion. The healthcare giant, which first developed the mumps vaccine, gave \$1.7 billion in 2015 alone, or one twenty-third of their yearly profits. Not all companies are as charitable. Apple's Steve Jobs for example was opposed to any kind of charity and argued that Apple products changed the world. Since Jobs' passing, Apple's outlook on philanthropy has gradually changed. The company's employee matching program hit \$50 million in 2017. Apple also donated large sums of money to Anti-Hate organizations after the events in Charlottesville and gave generously to relief efforts for Hurricanes Harvey and Maria. Corporate philanthropy is an important way for companies to give back, but it is not the only way.

Many large companies are making major changes to their products themselves that both profit the company and have a positive impact on the world. In 2005, GE started a renewable energy strategy called Ecomagination. Through the next decade, GE invested around \$17 billion in Ecomagination, creating \$232 billion in revenue from those products and in the process spreading environmentally friendly products all over the world. Nestlé operates worldwide and in communities of all economic and social standing, which puts them in a unique position to address some of the largest nutritional problems around the

world, and they have delivered. Since 2000, Nestlé has cut sugar, salt, and fat from thousands of their products worldwide and has filled their products with nutrients specifically important to the communities where they are being sold. They base their efforts on extensive research and are constantly adding new products that can help the markets that they are being sent to. In parts of Africa for example, Nestlé is helping the fight against anemia by selling soup cubes enhanced with iron. Other companies like Nike, whose environmentally friendly activities have led to more than 70% of their products being made of recycled material, are also changing the world with their products. While both Nestlé and Nike have seen their brands tarnished by child-labor lawsuits, these companies are also making a positive difference.

Steve Jobs was not wrong, the products that large corporations make must be groundbreaking in order for those corporations to make money, so most corporate giants are making the world a better place just by the nature of their company. Where would the world be without Facebook, Disney, or Google? While these companies are not the largest philanthropic donors and don't tailor their products to specifically help the world, their impact on the world as a whole is still overwhelmingly positive. Facebook has connected the world like nobody has before, Disney inspires and entertains millions, and Google has made information easily accessible to the majority of the world. Even companies like Amazon that have been detrimental to other companies in their fields are successful for a reason, they offered a better alternative to what was already in place. The end of the old and introduction of the new is not always a bad thing. Even though Amazon is killing small retail businesses, as jobs and companies are lost, new jobs and companies are created in the online sector. Apple may be worth \$1 trillion, but that doesn't mean the world is going to end, it just means that the world is changing, and probably for the better.

HMR





# The Legalization of 3-D Printed Guns

David Puckowitz

In July 2012, Cody Wilson founded Texas Defense Distributed, a non-profit organization determined to bring 3D-printed guns to the masses. It was only a matter of time before they succeeded in their first blueprint, and thus, the Liberator, a single shot pistol, and the first ever 3D-printed gun, was successfully created and shot on May 5, 2013. Texas Defense Distributed, which has as its core tenet making wiki for 3D-printed gun blueprints, posted their findings online, only for the Obama administration to step in. The Obama administration claimed that Wilson and his company were exporting weapons without a license. Wilson claimed that barring him from posting his findings was a violation of his First Amendment right of free speech. This alleged violation led Mr. Wilson to attempt to sue the Obama Administration for their actions, however most court rulings were against him. It was

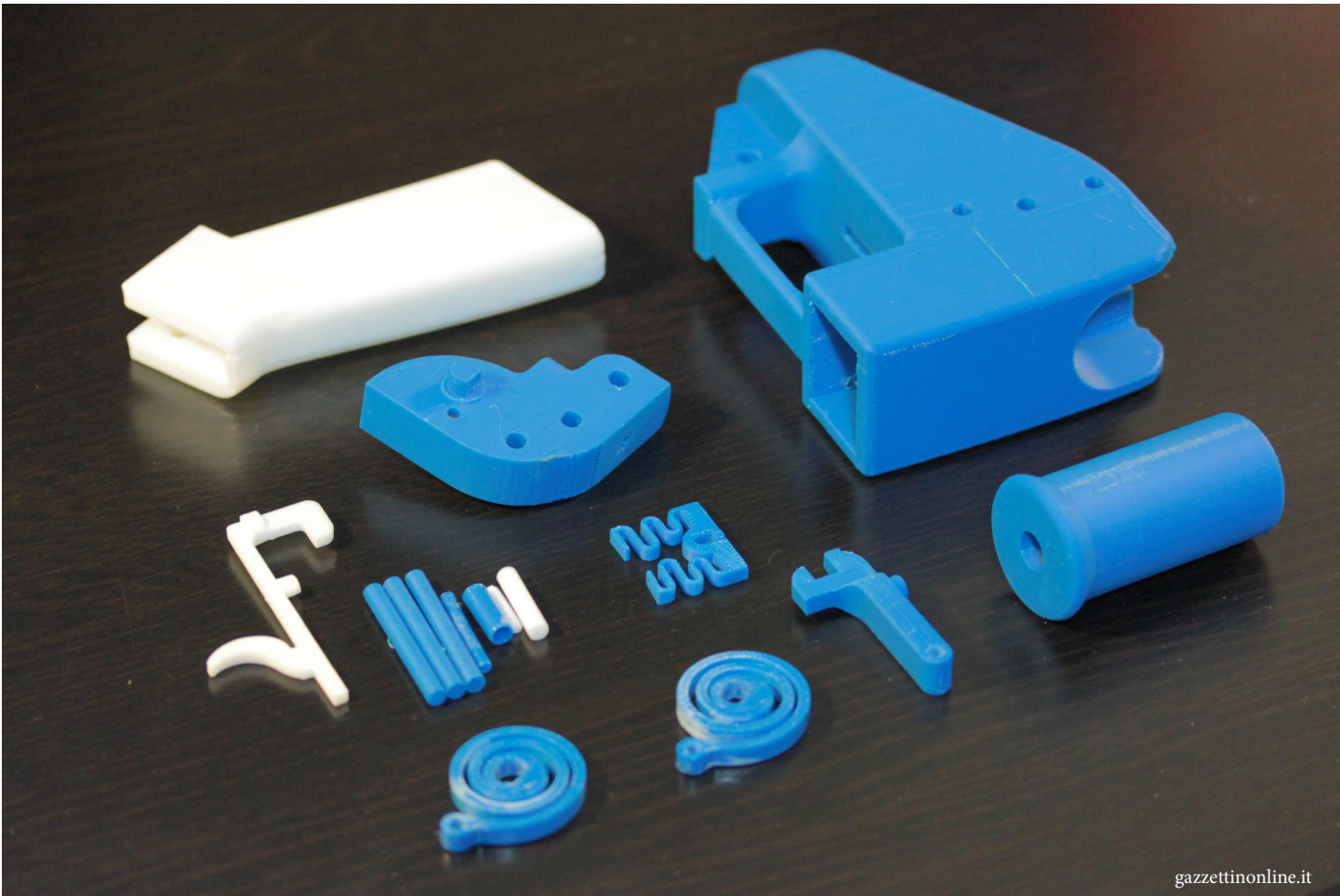
expected that his ideas would be further crushed when Hillary Clinton came into office, as her plan was to further crack down on firearms. However, the polls were misleading, and Trump ended up winning the presidency. Trump released the Obama Administration’s previously tight grip, which is the first reason that the discussion of 3D-printed guns is running rampant right now. The other reason is the progression of technology and its price, the fact that the printers that make the guns are constantly becoming more affordable to the public. That means more people buy the printers, more people own the printers, and more people are using the printers to make guns. Now, the first question that may be entering your mind is: “well, do they work?” Well, technically plastic guns do work, but not nearly to the standard of metal, and while metal printers are available and could be used to make guns, they cost upwards

of \$100,000, making their availability very limited. The only plastic gun currently available is the Liberator, and from police testing it does not look promising. When the Australian police printed the Liberator, it exploded upon being fired. While this could be propaganda to reduce the fear of 3D-printed guns and deter anyone interested in trying to print one of these guns, or improper instructions or use of plastic, it is most likely due to the flimsy nature of plastic, and that using a flimsy gun barrel cannot withstand the explosion when fired. On top of the Liberator’s already questionable performance, currently there is only one blueprint. This may change in the future, but as of now the only available option is an apparently lackluster pistol. Thankfully this gives time for Congress to debate and decide the limitations that need to be placed on the distribution of 3D-printed guns. While the only working 3D-printed gun

may not function as well as a standard firearm, the implications associated with a plastic gun are scary. 3D-printed guns have no serial number, and as such are almost impossible to track. This is why they are commonly given the term “Ghost Guns.” These non-identifiable firearms are dangerous as someone with malicious intent could obtain them before the government knows such and cause harm. Looking at the properties of plastic, the melting point of 3D-printed guns is also of concern, as it is lower than that of normal metal guns (212°F for plastic versus 2750°F for iron and 2500°F for steel). This is a problem because it gives criminals an easier way to dispose of firearms. Instead of throwing it away, with the possibility that it can be found, they can heat the gun they were using into completely indistinguishable melted plastic. Finally, obtaining a 3D printer is easy. You just have to buy one, there are no background checks. That means someone who could previously not get a gun (because of age, criminal history, sanity, etc.) suddenly can have access to a powerful weapon, whether or not it is as functional as its standard counterpart. Another important conversation is that

3D-printed plastic guns can violate the Undetectable Firearms Act. The Undetectable Firearms Act is a law stating that all weapons must be detectable by metal detectors. To make the 3D-printed gun legal however, a block of metal is applied so that it can be identified. There is also a metal firing pin. However, the metal block is non functional and removable, meaning the gun could be used without it and still function. The gun could also use a ceramic firing pin instead of metal, meaning that the plastic guns could be unidentifiable to metal detectors. The horrible result: it easily provides people with the ability to get an undetectable firearm/weapon. Probably one of the most dangerous parts of 3D printed guns is that they continuously improve with technology, while at the same time becoming less expensive. These fast-paced improvements include lower prices of 3D printers and the blueprints available to make each gun. 3D-printers could soon be a household item for the majority, making the printing and possession of these plastic guns even more common and accessible. Currently, 3D-printers capable of making plastic guns cost only

\$1700, making them obtainable to a large majority, and this accessibility is only going to get greater. There is also the possibility of semi-automatic or automatic assault rifles making their way to 3D printers, as right now the only thing holding them back is time and technological advancements. 3D-printed guns are potentially catastrophically dangerous for American everyday life. Censorship of these blueprints presents issues as it contradicts the First and possibly the Second Amendment, the right to free speech and possibly the right to bear arms. Outside the United States there are similar concerns with the danger presented by 3D-printed guns. In countries where citizens have especially limited access to guns, such as Britain, Australia, and Japan, the impact of 3D-printed guns suddenly flooding the market could be even worse. Congress and governments around the world need to find solutions to the dangers of 3D-printed guns, and what actions to take and how to go about them is up for debate. **HMR**







# Polygenic Scores

Gloria Khafif

A recent scientific breakthrough means that humans can now receive an individualized predictive genetic assessment that can indicate a predisposition for a disease or even a possible IQ range. The evaluation yields a polygenic score, and new availability of information and research means that these scores are becoming increasingly accurate. A polygenic score is an algorithm that combines every single piece of your unique DNA, namely the ones that contribute to a given trait, behavior, or disease, and adds up the weight of each to determine the probability of a specific genetic expression. This could include common conditions such as diabetes or heart irregularities, behaviors such as smoking or drinking, and physical traits such as height. Other tests for rare genetic ailments, such as that for the BRCA breast cancer gene or the mutation that causes sickle-cell anemia, are only valid for genes that can be singled out, but because more than one identifiable gene causes other dis-

eases, diagnoses for other disorders based on genetic testing are harder to come by. That is why these polygenic - “poly” meaning based on thousands of genes, rather than just one - scores can be useful to predict a person’s chance of developing a much more full range of common disorders. The compilation of every single component that contributes to a trait allows scientists to come up with the likelihood that the trait will be expressed, which can open many doors when it comes to preventative medicine and proper treatment. Each polygenic score can provide a lot to the understanding of a patient’s health and increase a doctor’s ability to find possible issues outside of the typical check-up information, which would include age, weight, and habits. There have never been more data and samples at the disposal of genetic scientists before. For example, large databases such as the UK Biobank have over 500,000 updated medical records and DNA samples from volunteer participants across Britain.

Their primary goal is to be able to provide the resources necessary to further research and give tons of opportunities to find treatment for a range of illnesses. Scientists can register to access the bank and use it to help promote their studies. The latest research to isolate the genetic pattern that causes insomnia involves 1,310,010 people. Using these broad sets of data for analysis, scientists can study genetic patterns as it applies to a much more extensive range of people. These patterns were unable to be detected before, when the number of people limited the breadth of any study conducted. In 2006, the current head of the National Institutes of Health, Francis Collins, predicted that there were about 12 genes involved in common diseases such as diabetes. This was a common hope of scientists all throughout the research community, as it would have made isolating those 12 genes much simpler. It would have meant that any drug designed to treat a disease, whether common or not, would have a

clear target. The reality, which now widely understood, is that about 400 genes are involved in diabetes. Though this makes it more difficult to isolate a gene and gear treatment to target it directly, the amount of data is making it easier to predict. By comparing the genetic makeup of a broad set of people, they can determine how a variation in genetic codes affects someone’s likelihood of disease. Based on large-scale studies, scientists can identify the different locations in human DNA associated with specific conditions, and the variants in each location are studied to find what genetic code is likely to express that illness. By compiling all the data, an algorithm based on what scientists have concluded about the genes can process one individual’s DNA to find the risk score that indicates how likely it is that the person has that illness. Even if each position has a small impact on the overall trait, they contribute a piece to a larger picture, so once scientists combine the minute effects of different changes in positions, the sum translates to the polygenic score, a unique number that represents the person’s genetic potential for that trait. People who are at a much higher risk for a particular illness can be picked out from these large studies and treated accordingly. With standard metrics, this is not possible. The compiled genetic picture also helps scientists be able to isolate environmental factors and finally determine whether a given trait is hereditary or adopted, also known

as nature or nurture. For social scientists, this possibility is promising, as it can be used to isolate the impact of different life events on a person’s development, as the genetic code is known. Someone in the 10th percentile for intelligence or educational reception could be predicted to graduate high school and not continue, while someone in the 90th percentile could continue onto additional schooling. The scores have the potential to be used to determine the impact of factors such as different learning styles, good versus bad teachers, and quality of schools. In this case, intelligence or academic advancement is known to be based on genetics, as they determine brain development and central nervous system function, but it is equally possible that the way genes affect the same trait is because of how others treat a person based on physical features. If a student was bullied, discriminated against, or judged by others during school because of their appearance, this could cause psychological changes that would affect their performance in school, and this could be further examined independently of genetic predispositions. Genetic tracing through ancestry and family roots is becoming more available with services like 23andme, which has about 5 million users. The service charges around \$100 to analyze customers’ saliva samples to interpret their ancestry and genetic health risks. With interest in these kinds of genetic studies increasing, the

data is present for these genetic scores to be calculated for a variety of outcomes. People can use their own data, and even if a disease to which they are vulnerable is untreatable, they can make plans and know more about themselves. It would be a push to care more about health than about treatment. The more accurate the scores get, the more people will know about themselves and how to manage their habits. Though the scores can be positive - they help people know more about themselves and their genetics - there is some danger to the vast amount of knowledge people can derive from them. What has concerned some scientists is that the use of IVF could lead to people being able to pick and choose their embryos. Parents who can afford to can not only screen their embryos for diseases like Huntington’s or Tay-Sachs, but also for their predicted IQ, height, or athletic ability. This artificial selection is dangerous and can change the world in future generations as the effects ripple out over time. Testing newborns or toddlers could also be a reality of the future. The results could be overinterpreted to presumptively make school plans or manipulate an environment around the prediction. Whether potentially productive or possibly dangerous, the studies coming about from polygenic risk scores and the effects they may have are something to watch in the years to come. **HMR**







# Public by Default, Venmo’s Data Vulnerability

Pratham Gandhi

This past July, a project conducted by a Berlin-based researcher brought to light news about how private data about users’ money transfers within Venmo is exposed and readily available. The news trails right on the heels of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica debacle, and, as such, brings forth important questions about security and identity in this increasingly digital age. While there has been much analysis and opinions surrounding Facebook’s story and Mark Zuckerberg’s testimony in Congress, awareness about this “scandal” concerning Venmo is fairly limited. Before diving deeper into this fiasco, it is important to first understand what exactly Venmo is, how it functions, and what types of data the service handles. Venmo, a subsidiary of popular publicly traded online-payments company PayPal, is a peer-to-peer service which enables the transfer of money between individuals. An important component of the service is the social feed, baked right into the application, which allows you

to follow your friends’ activities with their public funds. Venmo is currently the third largest service of its kind, trailing behind its parent company PayPal, which facilitated the movement of approximately \$33 billion in the second quarter of 2018, and Zelle, a consortium of 7 major banks, which moved \$28 billion in the same quarter. Venmo has moved an estimated \$14 billion in the same quarter. Venmo currently controls around 18% of the peer-to-peer payments market. New users can sign up for Venmo using only email or Facebook accounts, bypassing the need for a bank account entirely, and control their currency transfers via an iOS or Android app. Venmo uses the email or Facebook account to suggest people to invite to use Venmo with the user. Once everything is set up, the user is able to collect money directly into their Venmo account, and not their bank account, and to make payments to others by connecting their bank account. When making a payment or creating a payment request, the user is

prompted to enter the amount being sent, the person the money is to go to, the reason for which the money is being sent, and immediately a receipt of the transaction is generated. The reason which was entered is shared with everyone in a given user’s social feed, regardless of whether the user was the sender or recipient of the money. As mentioned earlier, a core component of the Venmo flywheel is the sharing of payments information with all members of a social feed, friends, and family. This, however, brings forth certain privacy implications as well. A Berlin-based coder, privacy researcher, and Mozilla Fellow named Hang Do Thi Duc has recently completed a project called Public by Default. In 2017, according to Do Thi Duc, Venmo users sent and obtained 207,984,218 public transactions. By visiting a public URL, she was able to see every name, date, and message most recently sent through Venmo. Unless a user manually changes the settings, all of that user’s activity is publicly visible, and

any ordinary person can easily dig into the company’s public application program interface (API), a tool which companies often build to allow people to easily query and understand their data and understand what they’re up to. That includes usernames, comments on transactions, and the date and time of the transaction. All of this is possible due to the default setting in which Venmo enables sharing the transactions and the following specific transaction details and user details with the public: payment ID, sender ID, sender first and last name, sender Facebook/Venmo profile picture, receiver first and last name, receiver Facebook/Venmo profile picture, date, and memo. All of this data allows outsiders to very easily paint pictures of Venmo users. In fact, Do Thi Duc was able to piece together very intricate details about people’s lives. For example, she was able to tell that a married couple, whose names and addresses she found but redacted in her study, living in Orange County, CA, owned a dog, took it to a specific vet consistently, did grocery trips to a specific Walmart, ordered takeout dinners from the same Asian and German food establishments, and even when they took Ubers and Lyfts to and from LAX airport. Additionally, Do Thi Duc was able to track the movements and transactions of a cannabis retailer in Santa Barbara, California, an extremely successful Mexican food cart at the University of California Santa Barbara, an arguing couple in Las Vegas, Nevada, a seemingly happy couple in Houston, Texas, and a fresh-out-of-college young adult near Mexico City. All of this easily accessible data creates three main issues. The first is that the default option is to make all the transaction details public. Venmo could and should have easily switched this setting in favor of user security if they were concerned with it. Secondly, all transaction

details are available through means of publicly accessible APIs, meaning anyone can pull data from the system, which could be fixed with a simple restructure of the API and additional credibility authentication when attempting to access the data. Finally, even if Venmo has purposely allowed all of their customers’ data to be publicly accessible, they exhibit no control of the usage of the data, in that anyone can customize their query in order to retrieve large data sets targeting a specific user and understand that single customer’s usage pattern, posing large security threats to individual users. Now that Venmo’s functionality as a platform has been defined and its security flaws discussed, their significance to consumers around the globe and in the context of other internet and data security events and legislation concerning it can be effectively discussed. Financial data such as that which Venmo exposes, poses large security threats to many individuals in our country. For example, the data could be used to track the geographical movements of individuals, sold to advertising firms, or used by political campaigns to target certain demographics of individuals unfairly. Apart from Venmo restructuring its data handling approach, legislative corrections by the government can also be taken in order to decrease the chances of such faults happening in the first place. As a country, America has enacted strong privacy regulations in various areas such as health care and banking; however, no widespread data-protection law has been passed. Sizeable chunks of today’s online economy are fueled by data which consumers have let go of without thought or knowledge of doing so. For example, earlier this year, it was revealed that data on around 87 million Facebook users has been passed to political-campaigning firms. This business mod-

el, though, often results in identity theft, which, by some estimates, costs American consumers more than \$16 billion every year. It is evident that there is a growing gap in American legislation concerning nationwide data protection, and the need to fill it is growing constantly. If no national legislation concerning the matter is created, America runs the risk of having several overlapping, conflicting, and inconclusive different state laws, which potentially just create more loopholes for individuals with malicious intent to exploit. The European Union swiftly took action following the breaking of the news about Facebook’s data scandal, creating rules to harmonize data-protection laws, in an effort to allow firms to conduct business across Europe more easily, and protect the private information and data of citizens. America, however, is moving in the opposite direction, splitting opinions between states and creating varying laws across the country. States which already have noticed a greater need for privacy legislation have begun drafting their own laws. For example, California has pending legislation which would establish a data-protection authority to regulate how the growing technology firms based in California use Californians’ personal data. If the United States fails to enact stricter and more unifying legislation regarding the collection, sale, and use of digital data, not only the privacy of its citizens but also the long-term health of its firms will rapidly decline, resulting in the decline of its increasingly digital-centered economy. America’s data economy has thus far thrived independently of other industries and organizations with hardly any rules, and caused problems across the board, and this must be stopped. **HMR**





