



QUARTERLY JOURNAL

The Alliance for Citizen Engagement (ACE)



In this journal:

Outstanding Brief(s)
in each Research
Area

Audience Choice
Awards

Excellent In-Depth
Research Awards

ANNOUNCING THE ACE QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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Criminal Justice

Introduction to the United States Prison System

By Noreen Ali

Historical Roots of Incarceration

Prior to the American Revolution, a majority of colonies used confinement in [prison dungeons and jails](#) to house criminals awaiting trial. Once a verdict was delivered, a prisoner was punished in one of the following ways: [fine, public shaming, public chastisement, or death](#). In 1790, the [Pennsylvanian Quakers](#) established the first American prison, Walnut Street, which became used as a form of punishment rather than temporary confinement. Due to the success of the Walnut Street prison, New York reduced capital crimes and built the [Auburn prison](#). While the Walnut Street prison prohibited inmate interaction, the Auburn prison congregate system allowed inmates to work alongside one another silently during the day and confined them to solitary confinement at night. Critics of both prison systems argued against the lack of inmate interaction. This caused prisons to revoke the ban on speaking [by the 1850s](#).

After the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, [the 1860s](#) saw a disproportionate number of black prisoners in the south. Newly freed slaves became victims of [convict leasing](#), a legal way to arrest criminals, sentence them to labor, and then lease that labor to private establishments. In the 1871 case, *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, the Virginia Supreme Court declared an inmate a “[slave of the state](#)” with rights only given to them by the state. Convict leasing [was outlawed](#) in 1928.

Until the late 19th century, prisons were run solely by state governments. However, after the [Three Prisons Act of 1891](#), the United States authorized three federal prisons to run with limited oversight by the Department of Justice. In 1930, the Bureau of Prisons was created to “assume oversight, management, and administration” of all federal prisons at the time. They now operate [122 federal prisons](#).

Alternatives to Incarceration

Known as the “Irish system,” [indeterminate sentences](#) provide a range of imprisonment for certain criminal offenses. In the 1800s, inmates who maintained good behavior and hard work were released sooner and those who did not had prolonged sentences. In 1907, New York established the concept of parole after indeterminate sentences proved to be successful in decreasing crime. In the current system, an inmate may be [released under the supervision](#) of a parole officer if they have observed the rules of the prison, are not a danger to the public, and are unlikely to commit future offenses. The creation of parole established more alternatives to incarceration:

1. Probation releases a criminal defendant into society with restrictions set forth by the court, and under the supervision of a probation officer, in place of imprisonment. If the offender violates their probation, they may be sentenced to imprisonment.
2. Community service is unpaid work designed to benefit the community that has been harmed by the offender's actions. Community service is commonly sentenced alongside other forms of punishment.
3. Home Confinement, commonly known as house arrest, requires offenders to wear an ankle monitor that ensures they remain at home and in certain pre-approved areas for the duration of their sentence.
4. Fines require the offender to pay a fee depending on income and seriousness of the offense while restitution requires the offender to pay for a victim's costs as a result of the crime.
5. Treatment programs are court-supervised health programs that provide services relating to mental health and drug dependency. Sex offenders are commonly placed on probation and ordered to complete sex offender treatment.

War on Drugs

After Nixon declared a "war on drugs" in 1971, many reform acts were established in order to reduce illegal drug use and trade. The [1984 Sentencing Reform Act](#) abolished federal parole, reduced good time, and established determinate sentences. The [1986 Anti Drug Abuse Act](#) established minimum sentences for criminal drug offenses and raised funding for drug enforcement. As a result of the "war on drugs" reform acts, the incarcerated population ballooned, leading to higher costs and overcrowding. To solve the overcrowding problem private prisons were created in the 1980s. Now, the United States has begun to pass reform acts to reverse the effects of the late 20th century "war on drugs." [The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010](#) reduces the penalties for crack cocaine offenses. [The First Step Act of 2018](#) shortens the mandatory sentences for minor drug offenses and requires the federal "three strike rule" to impose a 25-year sentence instead of a life sentence after three convictions.

Democratic Governance

Electoral Systems Around the World

By Sara Garfield Sebert

An [electoral system](#) is a set of rules governing elections, determining how votes are counted in order to determine which candidate(s) wins the election. There are lots of ways electoral systems can vary, including how many votes are needed to win the election, whether you vote for a single candidate, party's list of candidates, or you rank several candidates, and whether the district

elects one representative or several, among others. Together, different combinations form different electoral systems.

There are also separate criteria that can be used to evaluate each system as a whole. Each criterion is best understood as a spectrum, but there is not necessarily a correct or incorrect end of the spectrum, rather all of these criteria can be good or bad depending on the context.

- [Proportionality](#): how closely the system translates votes won into seats won. This is most often related to what percentage of the votes is needed to win a seat. [Wasted votes](#) are votes that do not help elect a candidate.
- [Geographic accountability](#): how accountable a specific elected representative is to voters of a defined geographic region. This can shape how easy it is for voters to influence policy, get help with local services and issues, and remove an unsatisfactory politician from office. In general, the more representatives per district, and the larger the district, the weaker the connection.
- [Party system](#): the number and size of major political parties in the nation's legislature, and different electoral systems can create stronger/weaker party systems from the same public opinion. The most common party systems are two-party and multiparty systems, both frequently found in democratic nations, and single-party systems more common in authoritarian or weak democratic states.
- [Complexity](#): how much effort, knowledge, and education does it take for a voter to be informed? How many candidates or parties must a voter form an opinion on to make an informed vote?
- [Representation of minorities](#): does the system encourage parties to run minority candidates or a diverse list of candidates, or does it encourage parties to run a candidate who must appeal to the majority of the district, who is likely not a minority member?
- [Tactical/strategic voting](#): when a voter supports a candidate or party other than their most preferred candidate in order to prevent their least preferred candidate from getting elected.

The electoral system utilized in a country is often a product of its history. Many former colonial nations use electoral systems adapted from their colonizers, for instance [many former British colonies](#) use the First Past the Post system used in the UK. Additionally, once an electoral system is in place, it can be very difficult to change.

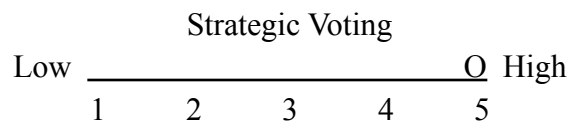
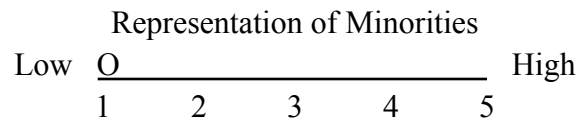
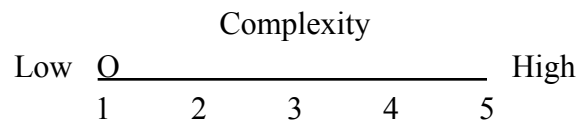
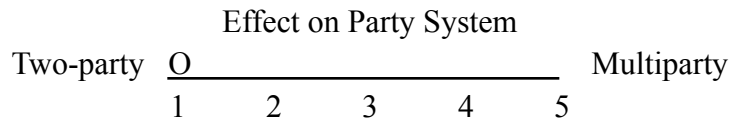
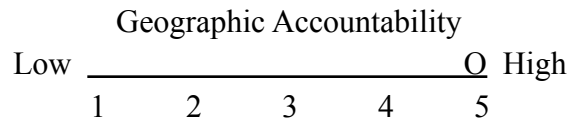
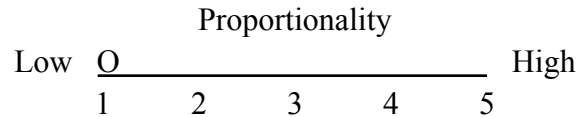
Electoral Systems

First Past the Post (FPTP)

In [First Past the Post](#), electoral districts are relatively small and each only elects one representative (called a single-member district). To win a seat, a candidate needs more votes than any other candidate in the election (a plurality), which is not necessarily a majority of votes. It is

possible for a party to win most or all of the seats with a much lower percentage of the vote. FPTP systems [tend to develop two-party systems](#), because there is no benefit for coming in second (or later places), only parties that can reliably win elections survive, cutting out third parties. [Voters also see](#) the lack of success of third parties and turn away from them, exacerbating their problems.

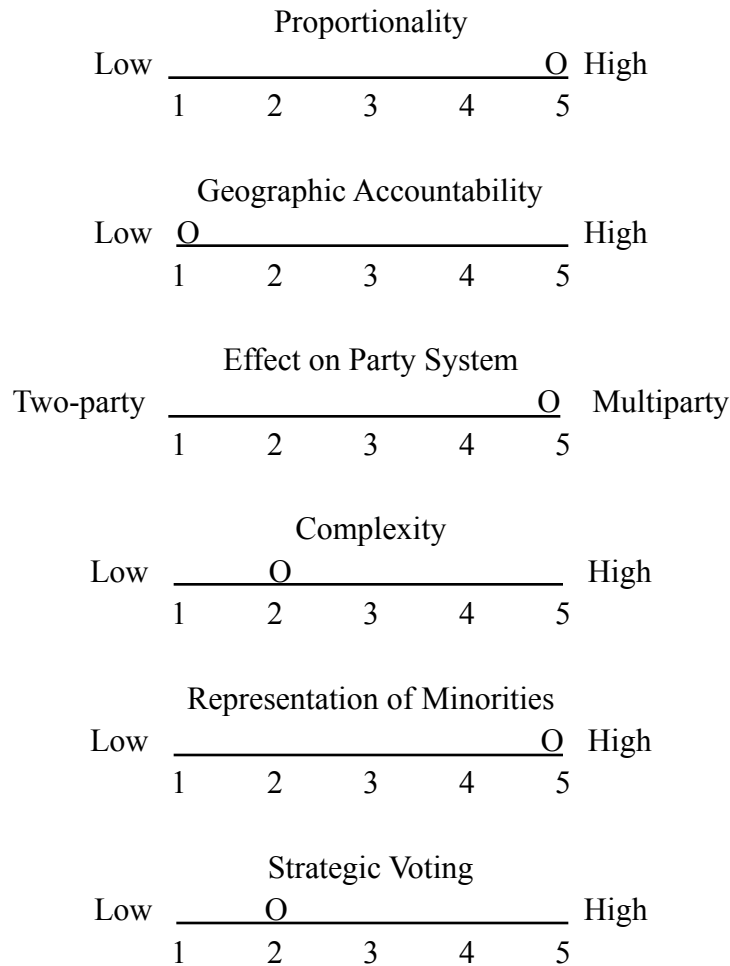
Canada uses the FPTP system, and the [most recent federal election](#) was in 2019. The Canadian House of Commons has 338 districts called “ridings”. Because many ridings had several of Canada’s larger political parties contesting the election, in some ridings the winner did not get a majority of the vote. At an extreme, in one riding the winner only earned 28.5% of the vote. Some parties' representation in the House of Commons were more proportional than others; for instance the Conservative Party won 34.4% of the national vote and 121 ridings, which is nearly the same percentage of the House of Commons. While the New Democratic Party won 15.9% of the national vote this only equated to 24 ridings, or 7% of the House of Commons.



Proportional Representation (PR)

In [List PR](#), electoral districts are typically larger, but elect more representatives than any one district does in FPTP. Parties run a list of candidates in each district, and voters vote for a party list rather than individual candidates. Parties win the number of seats proportional to the percentage of votes they earned. If a party wins X seats in a district, the top X candidates on their party list are elected. Because a party does not need a plurality of votes to enter the legislature, there will often be many, smaller parties in the legislature, forming a multi-party system. However, there can be a minimum percentage of the vote needed to earn a seat.

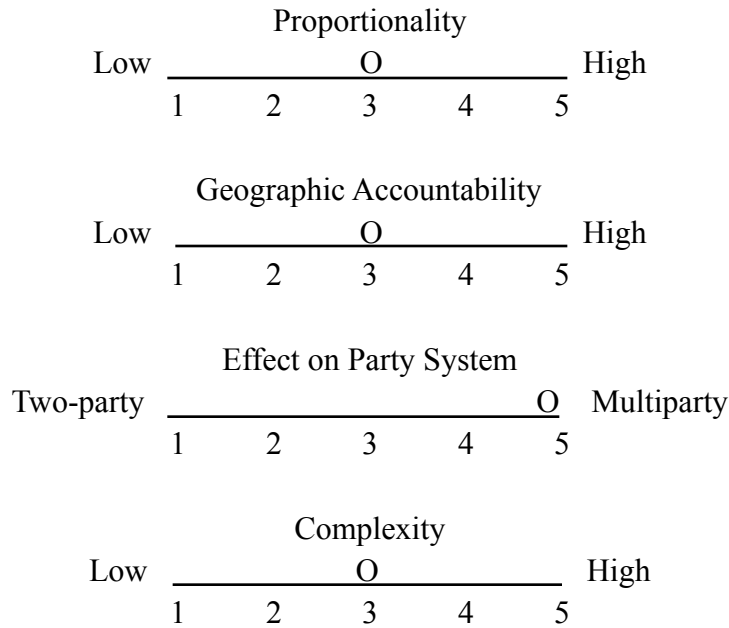
The European Parliament is one of the governing bodies of the European Union and is [directly elected](#) by the citizens of EU member states. Each member state elects Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and the number of MEPs is dependent on population, currently ranging from [6-96 MEPs](#). [Most states](#) use the list PR system described above, though another system, single transferable vote, is also allowed.



Parallel Voting

[Parallel Voting](#) is one way to combine plurality/majority systems and PR. Voters cast two votes, one in a plurality/majority election (most typically FPTP but others are possible), and one vote in a PR election. How many seats a party wins in the plurality/majority election does not affect the number of seats that party wins in the PR election, or vice versa.

One nation that uses Parallel Voting is Italy. Italy’s Chamber of Deputies (lower house) has [630 seats, 233 \(37%\)](#) of which are elected by FPTP, while the other 397 seats are elected by PR elections in [regional, multi-member districts](#).

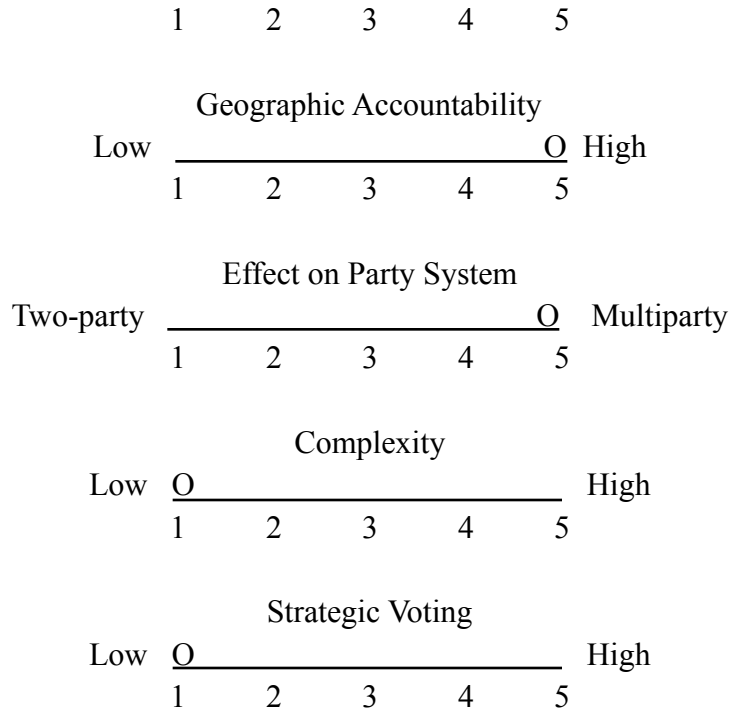


Two Round System (TRS)

Under [TRS](#), each district elects one representative, and an absolute majority of votes is required to win, rather than a plurality as under FPTP. If no candidate initially wins more than 50% of the vote, another round of elections is held, traditionally between the top two candidates. This runoff is usually held a few weeks after the first round of elections.

France uses TRS for both its presidential and parliamentary elections. In the French 2017 presidential election, [five candidates](#) received more than 5% of the vote in the first round, with Emmanuel Macron (24.01% of the vote) and Marine Le Pen (21.3%) leading the pack. In the runoff between the two, Macron won with [66.1%](#) of the vote, compared to Le Pen’s 33.9%.

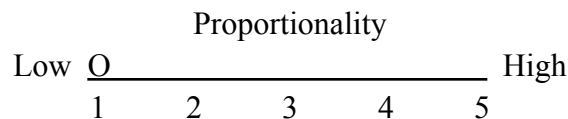


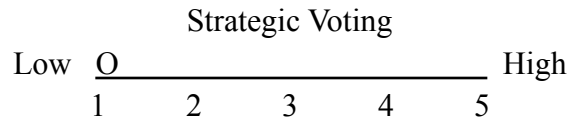
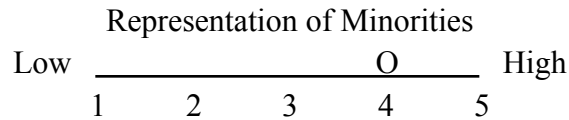
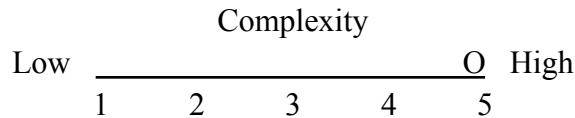
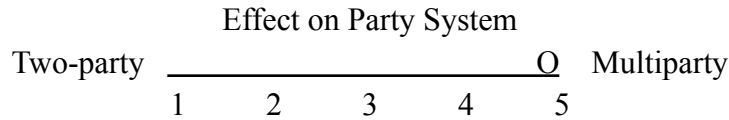
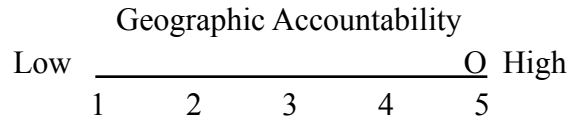


Preferential Voting

[Preferential voting](#) is also known as [alternative voting](#) or ranked choice voting in the US. Like FPTP, preferential voting elects one representative per district, but unlike FPTP, voters indicate their preferences by ranking the candidates. Voters have a first preference vote, second preference vote, etc. Some nations require voters to rank all candidates, while others do not. To determine the winner, all first preference votes are counted. If a candidate has a majority of votes, that candidate is elected. If no candidate has a majority, then the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded, and that candidate’s votes are distributed according to the voters’ second preferences. This continues until a candidate has a majority (more than 50%) of the votes and they are declared the winner. This process is also known as an instant runoff, as opposed to the more time-consuming second round of elections in TRS.

Australia uses preferential voting, and it has [gained traction in the US](#) in recent years (under the name of ranked choice voting.) In Australia’s 2019 federal election, [46 seats](#) were decided on the first preference vote, while the other 105 seats were decided on later preference votes. In twelve elections, the eventual winner was not in first place after the first round of preference votes, and ten of those elections went to the Labor party.





Economic Policy

The Poverty Line in the U.S.

By Jamie Davis, Ziye Guo

The **poverty line**, or poverty threshold, is the minimum amount of income that a family needs for food, clothing, transportation, shelter, and other necessities, once a year. It represents the border between poverty and non-poverty for administrative and statistical purposes. In many countries, such as the United States, this statistic is adjusted yearly for inflation. An example of the U.S. poverty line in the year [2021](#) is shown below. The poverty line varies according to the number of persons in a household.

2021 POVERTY GUIDELINES FOR THE 48 CONTIGUOUS STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Persons in family/household	Poverty guideline
1	\$12,880
2	\$17,420
3	\$21,960
4	\$26,500
5	\$31,040
6	\$35,580
7	\$40,120
8	\$44,660
For families/households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,540 for each additional person.	

Source: Department of Health and Human Services

There are two versions of the poverty line in the United States:

- The [poverty thresholds](#) are the original version of the federal poverty measure. They are updated each year by the Census Bureau. The thresholds are used mainly for statistical purposes. For instance, preparing estimates of the number of Americans in poverty each year.
- The [poverty guidelines](#) are the other version of the federal poverty measure. They are issued each year in the *Federal Register* by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The guidelines are a simplification of the poverty thresholds for use for administrative purposes. For instance, determining financial eligibility for certain federal programs such as Project Head Start.

Methods of Evaluating Poverty

One of the methods to calculate the poverty line in the U.S. is the Gallup Poll. The national survey has regularly asked people to report what is the least amount of income a family needs in order to get along in their community. However, it is possible that some interest groups may ask people to [inflate](#) their answers with the expectation of higher benefits.

The other popular method to evaluate poverty is through counting calories. The relationship between hunger and poverty remains strong, and many countries calculate poverty lines by [calculating](#) how much it costs to obtain enough food. Such calculation meets a calorie norm of around 2,000 calories a day, which is recommended by nutritional experts at the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations.

Calories can be [converted into money](#) by looking at what people spend and finding the income level at which, on average, people get 2,000 calories. This can be done by plotting what is called the “calorie Engel curve.” For example, in the United States, the poverty line was set by starting not from a calorie norm but from an economic food plan recommended by the Department of Agriculture.

Poverty Classification

- [Relative](#) poverty is identified as the inability to participate in society. Relative measures of poverty are often constructed by using poverty lines that move with average income, so that the minimum acceptable income is tied to what other people get. To some people, poverty also means lack of access to education, healthcare, or even entertainment. Relative poverty is a much more complicated concept. This concept of relative poverty is often used in developed worlds.
- [Absolute](#) poverty is simply not having enough to eat or enjoy good health, a severe lack of access to basic human needs. The basic living standards are consistent over time and globally, for example all humans need the same caloric and water intake no matter where they live.

The 2001 poverty line in the United States for a family of two adults and two children was \$18,000 a year, more than ten times as much as the international “extreme poverty” line of \$1 per person per day used by the World Bank and the United Nations.

The poverty line is used today to decide whether the [income](#) level of an individual or family qualifies them for certain federal benefits and programs. There are numerous United States policies regarding the poverty line, such as the recently passed American Rescue Plan by the Biden Administration. President Biden’s healthcare proposal [aims to expand the Affordable Care Act](#) so that 97% of Americans are insured, and will cost \$750 billion over 10 years. It would include a public health insurance option like Medicare, which will be available premium-free to individuals in states that haven't expanded Medicaid and to people making below 138% of the federal poverty level. It would also eliminate the 400% [federal poverty level](#) income cap for tax credit eligibility and lower employees' maximum contribution for coverage to 8.5%. Many federal programs, such as the [National School Lunch Program](#), are created and adjusted based on the poverty line. These programs are made as an effort to make food more accessible for those below the poverty line guidelines each year. The National School Lunch Program was created initially in 1946, with about 7.1 billion children participating that year. The program has grown dramatically, with 30.4 million children participating in 2016. Depending on family income, students can receive reduced or free meals.

Some critics argue that measuring poverty in the United States based solely on the cost of food ignores other significant factors that may influence a household or individual’s wealth. For instance, there are a multitude of factors, such as health conditions or access to transportation,

that could impact how much someone could earn or how much they must spend. If an individual has a medical condition which their insurance does not cover, their spending will be higher than an individual without such a condition, even if they have the same incomes and spending habits.

Economic Policy

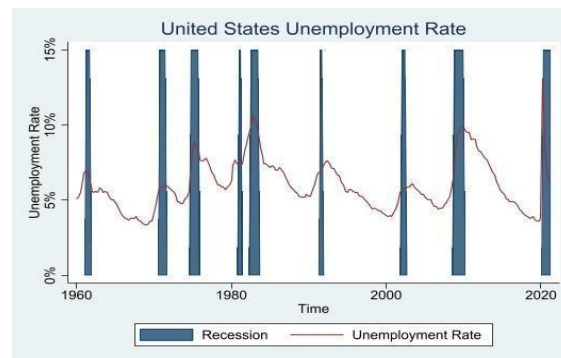
Understanding Unemployment and Business Cycles

By Simon Gilbert

The business cycle is the fluctuation of total economic activity over time. Recessions occur when total economic output, measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), grows at a negative rate for at least two quarters in a row. These downturns occur after the economy reaches its peak. Once GDP growth becomes positive again, the economy rebounds from a trough and begins expansion. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) [Dating Committee](#) is the most accepted resource for dating recessions.

Unemployment moves through a cycle within expansions as well. After the economy adds jobs consistently during the beginning stages of an expansion, it approaches full employment. Once full employment is reached, [real wages tend to increase](#). Real wage growth typically ends in two scenarios: when inflation reduces workers' purchasing power, or when the economy hits its peak, starting the business cycle once more.

We can visualize how unemployment changes with GDP growth over time in Figures 1 & 2. Figure 1.



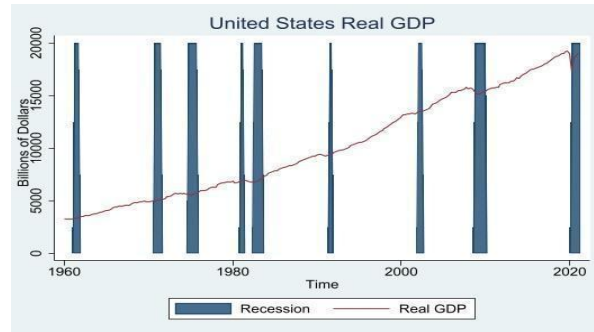


Figure 2

Source for both Figure 1 & 2: [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.](#)

Dips in GDP growth correspond with higher unemployment, and unemployment tends to be at its lowest at the end of an expansion period. Macroeconomists term this relationship Okun's Law after the American economist Arthur Okun who first observed this relationship. This relationship [has held up empirically](#) since it was first proposed in 1962. Figure 3 demonstrates this relationship's consistency.

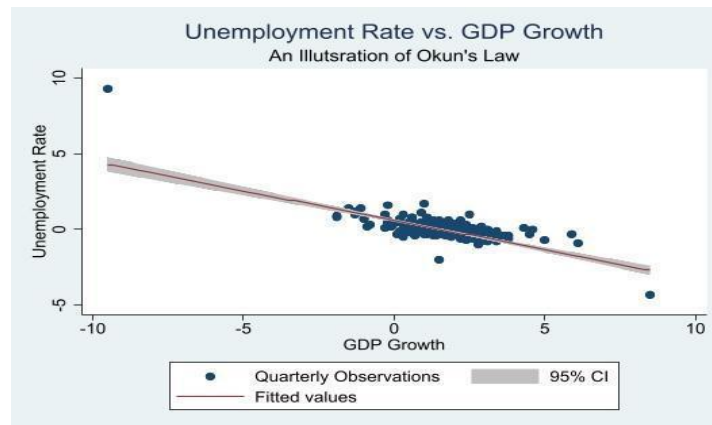


Figure 3

Source: [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.](#)

The nature of the business cycle has not remained constant in the long term. When the United States economy was consistently growing at upwards of 3% annually, [the economy](#) went through the business cycle in shorter, more volatile intervals. However, after a recession in the early 1980s, the business cycle became less acute and more predictable, with expansions lasting longer than in previous economic eras. This dynamic is termed [the Great Moderation](#), as economic growth also moderated with the business cycle. In fact, [the two longest expansions](#) in United

States history have occurred within the last 20 years, even though year-over-year growth decreased relative to pre 1980s levels. The lengthening of expansions becomes clear when we visualize each expansion in Figure 3.

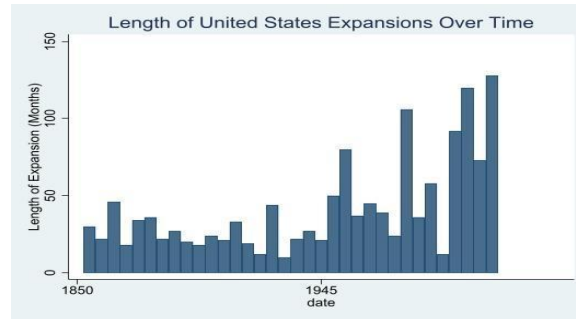


Figure 4

Source: [NBER Dating Committee](#).

Reflection Questions:

- How have business cycles affected me and my community in the past?
- If we are currently at the beginning of an expansion, what type of macroeconomic trends should I expect?
- Which is preferable: longer expansions with smaller year-to-year growth, or shorter expansions with higher growth, more similar to pre-Great Moderation business cycles?
- How does the business cycle affect the way I vote?

Environmental Policy

Introduction to Environmental Justice

By Clarisse Goetzen, Sarah Ganz

Introduction

Environmental justice is concerned with the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and costs/damages amongst different social groups. “Environmental justice” typically refers to 1) the body of research aimed at identifying and understanding such inequalities, or 2) the social movement seeking to extend equal social participation in decision making processes to ensure all communities are able to have a say on activities that impact their environment. Environmental justice is an intersectional concept, combining notions of social justice with environmental advocacy, and holds that we are unable to care for the planet and combat climate change until we address the human lives that are put at risk from environmental degradation.

Environmental justice only became a mainstream movement in recent years. As a result, generations of impoverished individuals and/or people of color have faced disproportionately large ecological risks, often resulting in [property loss](#), [problematic health conditions](#), and/or [death](#). In recent years, environmental justice has become increasingly relevant as climate change has exacerbated and created [new environmental challenges](#) which impact communities across the Country. By bringing these communities to the forefront of conversations about climate change and natural resource extraction and use, advocates hope to create a more inclusive and equitable environmental movement. Though the merits of environmental justice are refuted by some, who tend to dispute the existence of climate change or the ways in which communities of color are disproportionately impacted by policy failings, proponents highlight how discussing past and present instances of environmental injustices are critical in moving towards a more environmentally equitable future.

Factors which led to the Environmental Justice Movement

Issues of environmental injustice within the United States date back to some of the earliest appearances of European settlers. For example, European colonizers [removed indigenous peoples](#) from their land and forcibly relocated them onto unfamiliar, relatively unproductive territory. Settlers engaged in strategic buffalo killings, slaughtering them to near-extinction as a way to [limit Native Americans' food supplies](#), and European Americans consistently [silenced indigenous peoples](#) during attempts to speak out against their mistreatment and the mistreatment of the environment. Anti-indigenous sentiments held by the earliest European settlers still carry into the present day, as many Native Americans remain subjected to some of the [worst environmental and health conditions](#) in the nation. The 20th century in particular brought unique challenges for various vulnerable peoples. Urban planners placed the [majority of waste incinerators](#) in marginalized communities, leaving residents with harmful respiratory illnesses. Uranium mining companies created [hundreds of mines on Navajo territory](#) which greatly increased their lung cancer rates. Chemical plants were built in [historically black and/or low-income neighborhoods](#), polluting their drinking water.

Though the environmental justice movement did not emerge as a coherent discourse until the 1980's, these historical injustices fueled [civil rights movements](#) in the 1960's which emphasised the continuing public health dangers faced by communities of color. In 1968, African Americans organized the [Memphis Sanitation Strike](#) to obtain better working conditions for Memphis garbage workers, largely considered one of the first attempts to advance issues of environmental justice within the US. This momentum carried through to 1982, when civil rights activists attempted to stop North Carolina from dumping 120 million pounds of PCB-contaminated soil (a persistent organic pollutant) into a county overwhelmingly [occupied by African Americans](#). While the protest was ultimately unsuccessful, it led to [several high profile prosecutions](#), and is seen to be the catalyst for the Environmental Justice Movement.

Arguments For Environmental Justice

Proponents of the Environmental Justice movement, specifically those directly impacted by environmental degradation and those who understand the urgency for climate action, seek societal and governmental change to rectify historical injustices and prevent the continued harming of marginalized communities. Government intervention is considered necessary because many of the problems occurring from injustices arise from federal and state policy failings or omissions. The growing threat of climate change is expected to [disproportionately impact disadvantaged communities further](#).

- Inequalities in the ability to recover from wildfires worsened by global warming will leave many [lower-income individuals homeless](#).
- The placement of low-income and minority [housing in floodplains](#) will cause them to experience higher death tolls under severe sea level rise.
- Disparities in [emergency preparedness](#) mean marginalized communities will face disproportionate risks as hurricanes become stronger and more frequent.

Overwhelming capitalist interests, systemic racism, class discrimination, and more, effectively devalue the worth of certain human lives over others and contribute to such environmental injustices.

Advocates argue that without adequate societal, cultural, and political changes, those bearing the brunt of the climate crisis will continue to be the country's most vulnerable individuals. Marginalized communities already face discrimination and exclusion in various forms, putting them at a [severe social, cultural, economic, and political disadvantage](#). More specifically, because marginalized communities have less time, resources, and political power to resist unequal environmental conditions, improving public awareness and motivation to tackle environmental injustices is an important first step. Not only does the power to address environmental injustices lie with policymakers, wealthy company owners, government agencies, etc., it lies with informed and democratically-engaged citizens. Whether through participating in citizen groups and [activist organizations](#), [voting](#) for certain political candidates, or [reaching out](#) to elected officials, everyday citizens can create tangible differences in their communities, their states, and beyond.

Arguments Against Environmental Justice

The Environmental Justice Movement [faces criticisms](#) from those who believe that increasing government intervention is unnecessary, and simply gives politicians more power to control and harm American citizens. They claim the stricter rules and regulations following environmental justice advancements would inadvertently [prevent the creation of jobs and reduce economic output](#). One example cited by environmental justice critics is the EPA's 1998 blockage of the

construction of a new plastics factory in Convent, Louisiana. What may have brought economic prosperity and 2,000+ jobs to a poor, predominantly African American town was instead halted by supposedly unfounded cancer concerns. Additionally, while many Americans can agree that pollution is an issue, some critics believe that the effects of pollution on the health of marginalized communities are negligible, citing behaviors such as increased smoking rates and drug usage as reasons for reduced minority community health.

Overview of Environmental Justice Policies

Since the 1980's, local, state, and federally elected officials have attempted to address environmental injustices via legislation and policy changes. On the federal level, the [National Environmental Policy Act](#) (NEPA) requires federal agencies to take environmental justice into consideration when engaging in governmental activities. [State involvement](#) in tackling environmental justice issues vary widely, with some states establishing strong environmental justice policies, and other states such as Oklahoma and Arkansas having none at all. Among some of the most important state regulations regarding environmental justice are the policies outlined in the [Virginia Environmental Justice Act](#), the goals set forth by the [California Environmental Protection Agency](#), and the protections codified by [New Jersey's 2020 Environmental Justice Legislation](#). Policies on environmental justice can also [differ at the local level](#), with some cities such as San Francisco choosing to consider the environmental justice implications of land use development in contrast to other areas of California, or Atlanta's focus on public health implications.

While such policies have had some successes, a number of policies have limited and reversed attempts to address EJ issues. For example, [the Trump administration's first proposed budget diminished the EPA, including funding cuts to environmental justice programs](#). Scott Pruitt, the EPA Administrator under President Trump, marked a significant change for the Agency because Pruitt was well known as an adversary of the EPA who, as Oklahoma Attorney General, repeatedly sued the EPA in opposition to environmental regulation and openly advanced the energy industry's agenda. President Trump also issued an executive memorandum directing the Secretary of the Army to take all legal steps consistent to approve permits necessary to complete the Dakota Access Pipeline. At a global scale, the Trump Administration's rejection of climate science and repudiation of the Paris Agreement represents a conscious refusal to take steps to prevent and protect against climate change impacts.

With a new presidential administration, [many policy changes are already being discussed](#) regarding environmental justice. The Biden administration is expected to implement environmental justice across all federal agencies, especially the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The new EPA Administrator, Michael Regan, seems inclined to incorporate environmental justice as well. He created an Environmental Justice and Equity Board during his

time as Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), which made beneficial changes including a community mapping system used to inform agency decisions by considering demographic and health information—and which could serve as a model for EPA decision-making. Additionally, the Biden administration is expected to withdraw the Department of Justice’s current prohibition on Supplemental Environmental Projects (“SEPs”). These are voluntary projects with environmental or public health benefits which were previously used as a component of enforcement settlement actions. Although they were considered to be a valuable tool in the Obama-led Department of Justice, they were nixed by the Trump administration due to administrative cost concerns. To proponents, not only are these a valuable compliance tool, they frequently contain a public accountability component which makes them even more effective and responsive to community needs. SEPs are expected to return as a component of EPA settlements in 2021.

In spite of widespread EJ implications from the Trump Administration’s heavy environmental protection and public health setbacks, state and local movements towards a more equitable future are gaining traction. While the federal response to addressing issues of environmental justice is historically poor, local communities have still had numerous successes. [San Diego County’s](#) overwhelming approval of an Environmental and Climate Justice Office, [Michigan’s](#) creation of the Office of the Environmental Justice Public Advocate, and the 2021 [Massachusetts](#) climate law prioritizing environmental justice are only a few recent examples of strong local efforts to ensure the health and safety of vulnerable residents. Such achievements are a testament to the changing attitudes and growing support towards environmental justice issues.

International Impacts

There is much work to be done before all communities experience equal distributions of environmental benefits and costs, especially on a global level. For example, the continued extraction and use of fossil fuels has astronomical impacts on the natural environment, as oil sand drilling, fracking, arctic drilling, and deep water petroleum sources contaminate fresh water, devastate marine systems, cause seismic activity, and exacerbate global warming. Another example is the implications that arise from fisheries around the world. Because of these fisheries, fish stock is decreasing causing concern of overuse and fish shortages. Small-scale fishing communities are reclaiming their rights for access to and control over aquatic commons. Some examples are the ones by [intensive fish farms in Turkey](#) or in [Chile](#), big port projects in [India](#) and polluting industries in [Ecuador](#). Climate change is a global problem which requires collaboration with other countries to find effective solutions.

Environmental Policy

Introduction to the Green New Deal

By Lelia Durand and Tallulah Lloyd

There is a growing movement in the US and around the world arguing for the need to combat the growing threat of climate change. The United States has been the [largest outputter of greenhouse gas emissions](#) (GHG) cumulatively, and has the most powerful economy globally with a track record of technological and scientific innovation. Because of these two factors, many see the US as an essential leader in the global transition to net-zero GHG emissions. The Green New Deal (GND) has been proposed as a progressive framework to drive this transition while also addressing other systemic injustices such as economic, regional, racial, and environmental inequality.

Although the concept of a Green New Deal has existed since the early 2000s, the movement gained momentum in 2019 [when a resolution was introduced](#) in the House of Representatives calling for the federal government to address climate change and related issues. This policy brief uses [H.R. 332](#), the proposal reintroduced in 2021, as the basis for discussing the Green New Deal. It is a non-binding proposal, meaning that it will not result in legislation if passed, but instead outlines goals and ideas which would be put into effect in ensuing bills. The concept of a “New Deal” comes from the economic and social reforms passed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt responding to the Great Depression in the 1930s.

Ultimately, the resolution is likely to meet strong opposition in Congress from Republicans as well as some establishment Democrats, since it calls for an expansive, government-led initiative to address a wide range of environmental and social issues. However, its themes of economic and environmental justice are echoed in recently introduced policies from Democrats, including the Americans Jobs Plan.

Policies in GND

H.R. 332 comes from the perspective that the US needs to take urgent action on climate change, and that this presents an opportunity to address related environmental and social crises. It builds off previous energy investments under the [Obama administration](#).

[The resolution](#) sets the goal of supplying 100% of US power needs through renewable energy sources through a ten year national mobilization plan. Additionally, it states that the world needs to reduce GHG emissions by 40-60% (of 2010 levels) by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, though it does not provide goals for the US individually. H.R. 332 outlines several policies which would directly address climate change, including building infrastructure to mitigate the effects of climate change, improving the efficiency of US buildings, and making the public transportation system cleaner and more accessible. It also plans to increase clean manufacturing within the US and work with the agricultural sector to decrease pollution and emissions.

The GND also frames heavy investment in energy infrastructure as an opportunity to create a progressive policy which addresses systemic injustices while providing aid to frontline and vulnerable communities. This includes creating more affordable healthcare, higher education, and low-income housing for all people within the United States.

Supporters

The GND is strongly supported by progressive Democrats because it addresses climate change and many other progressive issues in a single cohesive package. Figures such as [Bernie Sanders](#) and [Elizabeth Warren](#) call for the fastest transition to renewable energy possible and greater economic equality nationwide. The GND embodies many progressive goals by calling for radical changes to the current US economy through a transformation of the energy sector and expansion of social services.

[Supporters](#) argue the long-term effects of climate change pose a threat to the American economy, and the costs will be greater than the investments called for in the GND. The [vast majority of the scientific community](#) agrees a transition to renewable energy is needed to keep the effects of climate change within relatively safe boundaries. Supporters of the GND believe that government mobilization is the most efficient way to reduce emissions and keep global temperatures [from rising beyond 1.5°C](#) of pre-industrial levels. They also argue that the economic downturn caused by the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) makes implementation of the GND even more crucial as the GND could help the economy bounce back through the creation of new jobs.

Moderate Democrats typically support many of the GND's goals without calling for major economic and social changes. [President Biden](#), for example, expressed support for the “framework” of the GND during his presidential campaign. This middle stance, which affirms the importance of environmental action without calling for social changes—like universal healthcare—is common among establishment Democrats. They also see the GND as energizing a class of younger, more progressive voters who are key for electoral victory.

Opponents

Libertarians and Republicans tend to oppose the H.R. 332 because it calls for extensive government oversight to drive the transition to renewable energy. These groups generally prefer market-based solutions to climate change, focusing on technological innovation and nuclear energy instead of federal mobilization. [Senator John Barrasso](#), Representative from Wyoming, expressed this idea by writing that “innovation, not new taxes or punishing global agreements, is the ultimate solution.” Supporters of the GND argue that market-based approaches will not [reduce emissions](#) fast enough, and relying on technology such as carbon capture is dangerous and unrealistic.

Republican House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) also criticized the Green New Deal as a “[job-killing proposal](#)” that will make American energy more expensive. In April 2021, [House Republicans](#) unveiled their [climate plan](#) which calls for tax breaks to help encourage the

development of carbon capture technology but does not cut the use of fossil fuels. This emphasizes the common belief among Republican politicians that climate change is a [less urgent](#) issue than many Democrats believe.

Some further argue that climate change can be dealt with in the [future at a lower cost](#), and that slower changes are enough to manage the issue. The GND has developed a reputation as radically [progressive](#), and the social goals outlined alongside climate-related ones also [decrease support](#) among some Republican voters.

Cost

It is difficult to quantify the costs of a Green New Deal, as estimates vary widely and depend on whether they include costs for social and institutional changes, such as universal healthcare and food security, which substantially increase its immediate cost. A [recent analysis](#) by Wood Mackenzie, an energy research and consultancy firm, estimates that converting the entire US power grid to 100 percent renewable energy in the next decade would cost \$4.5 trillion. The [American Action Forum](#), a center-right policy institute, estimates the cost for a low-carbon electricity grid and net-zero emissions transportation system to be between \$6.7 and \$8.1 trillion. Rep. Ocasio-Cortez stated in June 2019 that the GND would cost at least [\\$10 trillion](#). She acknowledged that this is a high price, but believes the cost of the GND should be compared to the cost of climate change itself, which the [National Resources Defense Council](#) (NDRC) estimated to exceed \$800 billion annually within the US alone.

H.R. 332 does not discuss the source of funding for the projects it outlines, and opponents worry about higher taxes and US debt. Supporters of the GND believe the pandemic and subsequent recession make the GND even more urgent and the bill would eventually pay for itself by creating new jobs and minimizing climate change related costs. Opponents argue that after spending trillions on pandemic stimulus bills, the US should focus on economic growth and recovery rather than going further into debt with new and expensive projects. They point out that the debt-GDP ratio has reached [roughly 130%](#), relative to a decade ago when the ratio was roughly 80% after the end of the recession.

Other Bills

Congress has not yet voted on the H.R. 332, though some members have introduced bills that encompass similar themes. President Biden proposed the [American Jobs Plan](#) as an infrastructure package that would invest \$2.3 trillion into modernizing and repairing US infrastructure, which would be the first step in investing in energy infrastructure needed to get the US to net-zero emissions. In late April 2021, Biden announced a new target for the US to reduce emissions by [50-52%](#) from 2005 levels by 2030. This is a more ambitious goal than the [Obama administration's](#) reduction target of 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2025. In April 2021, Senate Republicans unveiled a \$568 billion infrastructure framework to serve as an alternative. Democrats are currently negotiating with Republicans, with the hopes of obtaining bipartisan

support for the American Jobs Plan. They primarily disagree on the definition of infrastructure and how the bill would be paid for.

Other proposed bills include the Build Green Act ([H.R. 2038](#)), intended to jumpstart the transition to electric transportation and modernize infrastructure, and the Federal Jobs Guarantee Resolution ([H.R. 145](#)) which guarantees a job that provides good wages, strong benefits, union protections, and safe working conditions to every American who is willing and able. Additionally, the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act ([H.R. 2307](#)) has been proposed as a market-based approach to reach net-zero emissions.

Conclusion

Although these policies are unlikely to be implemented in their entirety, the GND describes one vision for the future of the US and a path to overcome the worse effects of climate change. There are many unanswered questions, and positions on the bill are likely to differ depending on whether one believes government-led projects are the most practical and efficient way for the US to address climate change, the extent to which the GND should attempt to address issues beyond the immediate impacts of climate change, and whether these goals make the GND a more complete vision for a prosperous and stable future, or alternatively, whether they slow down climate legislation and decrease the ability to generate bipartisan support for countering climate change.

Foreign Policy: Asia

Introduction to the Belt and Road Initiative

By Myles Gibbons

The Belt and Road Initiative is a large-scale infrastructure and economic development project that was launched by China in 2013. Xi Jinping, China's new president, initially coined the name "One Belt, One Road," but recently the official translation became "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The BRI includes two parts, the "Silk Road Economic Belt," which is meant to encompass much of Central Asia by way of highways, railroads, and economic interconnectivity; and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," which is meant to develop ports and free trade around the Indian Ocean. China's vision for the completed BRI is a vast network of railways, highways, and ports open to trade—largely built and funded by [Chinese companies](#)—that would support economic development and integration across the dynamic Central Asian region. Such a network would also vastly increase the international usage of China's currency, the Renminbi (RMB).

China has defined [five priorities](#) for the project: policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and connected populations. Beyond these stated goals, China also has many deeper motivations to complete the project. The western regions of China, in particular [Xinjiang](#), remain largely undeveloped and have been sources of popular and occasionally violent separatist movements. China hopes that the BRI will improve infrastructure and economic development in these regions. China has also been plagued in recent years by a [production surplus](#) that has harmed Chinese companies' profits. By exporting its infrastructure and technological capabilities via the BRI, China hopes to create a profitable market for its excess production. Another key goal of the BRI is securing its access to [energy resources](#)—the country relies heavily on imports from the Middle East. An important part of the BRI is investments in pipelines and energy flows that, critically, the US Military cannot interfere with.

To date, though the project is still in its early stages, the BRI has more than 60 participant countries, and several more have participated in the Chinese-created Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Thus far, the largest BRI-affiliated project is the [China-Pakistan Economic corridor](#), a network of projects designed to link China to Pakistan's Gwadar port on the Arabian sea. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has already cost an estimated \$60 billion, and analysts estimate that by 2027 the total expenditure for BRI projects could total [\\$1.3 trillion](#). However, since around 2018, investments in BRI projects have slowed somewhat amid international criticism and with Chinese officials prioritizing more "solid" investments.

Critics of the initiative have pointed out the dangers in allowing China-led development in a dynamic, high-growth region. Among the largest concerns is China's "[debt-trap diplomacy](#)," wherein countries and potentially corrupt leaders sign on to predatory loans for infrastructure development, and are later forced to pay with resources, territory, or other economic privileges. Other criticisms leveled against the projects have been their [opaque bidding processes](#) and apparently preferential treatment given to Chinese firms. In [Malaysia](#) in 2018, the newly elected Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad cancelled \$22 billion worth of BRI projects, criticizing both the projects' costs and the corrupt business practices of his predecessor. Other countries, including Kazakhstan and Kenya, have taken a more cautious approach to BRI projects. However, overall debt to China among BRI countries has soared since 2013, approaching nearly [20% of GDP](#) in some countries.

Foreign Policy: Central & Latin America
The Downfall of the Venezuelan Petrostate

By Emily Hudson

Venezuela, notorious in the global energy arena for its possession of the [Western Hemisphere's largest reserves of light and heavy crude oil](#) along with [the world's largest reserves of extra-heavy crude oil](#), has experienced both the blessings and the curses associated with such resources. The Venezuelan economy became dependent on these natural resources, as is the case with many developing nations. The resulting phenomenon in which a country's government has become overly dependent on natural resource exports and thereby neglecting to invest in other, arguably less lucrative, sectors has been coined "[Dutch Disease](#)." Reliance on the revenues from fossil fuels has [earned Venezuela the status of being a petrostate](#). Typical characteristics of petrostates include [an elite minority concentrating power, corruption, and weak political institutions](#), which are reflected in Venezuela's current political climate. This brief provides an historical overview of the current political, economic, and humanitarian crises.

Striking Black Gold

Venezuela's major oil reserves were tapped into in the early 1900s, and [commercial scale oil drilling began in 1917](#). Following the end of World War I, [American and British multinational oil companies](#) became interested in Venezuelan oil reserves and traveled to [Lago de Maracaibo](#). The discovery of oil in [Venezuela's Maracaibo Basin in 1922 by Royal Dutch Shell](#) sparked the beginning of the nation's oil trade on an international scale. Consequently, by the [1930s](#), well-known companies like [Royal Dutch Shell, Gulf, and Standard Oil](#) had become so heavily invested in such endeavors that they ended up controlling approximately [98% of the Venezuelan oil market](#). Following the [death of Venezuelan President Juan Vicente Gómez](#) in 1935, a tug-of-war ensued between [foreign oil companies and the Venezuelan government](#) in regards to issues such as [taxation, regulation, and ownership](#). In an effort to reassert control over its own natural resource, Venezuelan lawmakers passed the [Hydrocarbons Law of 1943](#), ultimately requiring foreign companies operating in Venezuelan territory to give [half of their oil profits to the Venezuelan state](#).

Political Transition, Economic Boom, and Nationalization

Venezuela established its [first stable democratic government in 1958](#). The oil industry, the most lucrative sector of the economy, had a great impact on the government. In the process of establishing its new government, leaders from the country's three major political parties signed the [Punto Fijo Pact](#), which guaranteed state jobs and oil rents would be allocated to each party in proportion to the voting results. The goal of the punto Fijo Pact was to [limit political infighting](#) and ensure the majority of oil profits went to the state.

Venezuela was the [top exporter of petroleum from 1929 to 1970](#). The Venezuelan Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons, [Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo](#), began advocating for a plan to enable top oil-producing countries to have greater control over their oil in [1959](#). In the following year, Venezuela joined Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to form the [Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries \(OPEC\)](#). This gave the world's leading petroleum producers the ability to [coordinate oil prices](#) and possess greater [control over their national industries](#).

Venezuela established its [first state oil company](#) and increased oil company taxes to [65% of profits](#) in [1960](#), in an effort to assert further control over its natural resources. Demand for Venezuelan oil grew in the 1970s when the Gulf states [briefly limited oil exports](#) due to a political crisis with Israel, and the Iranian Revolution disrupted oil exports. At this time, Venezuela's per-capita income was [the highest in Latin America](#). In [1976](#), President Carlos Andrés Pérez [officially nationalized Venezuela's oil industry](#), culminating in the creation of *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)*. PDVSA oversaw all aspects of the oil industry and foreign companies were only allowed to partner with PDVSA if PDVSA held [60% equity in joint businesses](#). While the 1970s were characterized by positive economic strides, the global marketplace in the 1980s began to experience [falling oil prices and high inflation rates](#), culminating in Venezuela accruing massive foreign debt as the nation [purchased foreign oil refineries](#) that were previously held by [Citgo](#) and other well-known oil companies.

The Blunders of the Chávez Presidency

In the 1990s, Hugo Chávez gained popular support with a [socialist platform](#), and became president in 1998 with the promise that he would use the wealth generated from oil reserves to [reduce poverty and inequality](#). Upon becoming president, Chávez kept his promise by [expanding social services and reducing poverty by 20%](#). However, many of the president's decisions came at the detriment of the oil industry. [As a means of increasing oil prices, Chávez decided to cut production](#), meanwhile [PDVSA hoped to increase oil production so that the heavy oil fields could be further developed](#). PDVSA officials argued against increased political control over the institution. They claimed that taking revenues from the oil industry without reinvesting funds in infrastructure and exploration of other avenues would be detrimental. This would prove to be true as the reduced profit reinvestment led to a [significant decline in the country's petroleum production](#). [Countless oil workers went on strike, many of which were fired by Chávez](#), resulting in the [loss of crucial managerial and technical expertise](#). As is common with the resource curse, investment in other sectors of the economy lagged because of a focus on oil.

At the same time, Chávez worked to further promote Venezuelan oil on an international scale. The Venezuelan president hoped to strengthen OPEC and increase international oil prices. In addition, Chávez hoped to expand business endeavors to other regions, particularly in the Caribbean through the [2005 PetroCaribe Alliance](#). This alliance provided countries in the region, including [Cuba](#), with [crude oil and refined products under more favorable terms](#). This agreement

aimed to [promote regional economic cooperation and counterbalance US influence in the Caribbean](#).

Chávez's Legacy and The Rise of Maduro

Chávez's presidential reign came to an end in [2013](#) when he died of [cancer](#); however, his decisions would prove to have long-standing consequences. During his presidency, Chávez [paved the road toward authoritarianism](#) for his successor, Nicolás Maduro, by ending term limits, controlling the Supreme Court and the press, as well as nationalizing private businesses and foreign owned assets.

Foreign Policy: Eurasia

Primary Actors in the Ukrainian Conflict

By Jack Corso

Since the Russian Federation's annexation of [Crimea](#) through military action in March 2014, Ukraine has been a state plagued by conflict. The conflict now involves the region of Donbas, consisting now of the two separatist People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk, in addition to Crimea. It has drawn in actors including the European Union and the United States, in addition to groups in Ukraine and the governments of both Russia and Ukraine.

Why did Russia annex Crimea?

Russia has a historical relationship with the territory of Crimea; it was part of Russia for more than one hundred and fifty years, and [was transferred to Ukraine in 1954](#) when both countries were part of the USSR. Russia's actions were precipitated by several factors, including [Ukraine-wide protests](#) which forced Ukraine's Russian-aligned President Yanukovich to step down, and concerns that Ukraine was [developing stronger ties](#) to the European Union.

Next Steps and Peace Agreement

Not long after the annexation, pro-Russia separatists seized multiple government buildings across Eastern Ukraine and declared themselves the heads of independent states; these seizures effectively represented the start of the conflict in the Donbas. After a few months of fighting, [Russian military forces](#) formally entered Ukraine to provide support to the separatists. The [Second Minsk Agreement](#) was signed by then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2015. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and then-French President Francois Hollande provided diplomatic assistance and mediated the negotiations. The agreement sought to establish an immediate ceasefire and security zone. However, the

agreement's goals were not achieved, and fighting continued sporadically—most of which was attributed by outside conflict monitors to Russian and separatist forces.

Since the failed 2015 agreement, fighting has remained sporadic with western actors, specifically the United States, offering [lethal aid](#) to the Ukrainian government in 2017. This decision signaled a significant change in the United States' policy towards Ukraine, which had only offered nonlethal, economic assistance to that point. There appears to be no clear victor or path to peace in the Donbas. March of 2021 signaled a [renewed intensity](#) as, after a relative calm, the conflict escalated once again with an increase in casualties.



Image source: [Council on Foreign Relations](#)

Pro- Ukrainian Actors

The Ukrainian side of the conflict involves [both the Ukrainian national military and volunteer civilian battalions](#). The primary goals of the military—and by extension, the state—are to maintain territorial integrity and defend the Ukrainians living in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Unofficial civilian battalions are motivated more by an ultra-nationalist sentiment and Ukrainian patriotism. The fervent nationalist views exhibited by volunteer battalions sometimes coincide with extreme far-right positions, the most notable far-right battalion being the [Azov Battalion](#).

Pro-Russian Actors

The Donbas region has two main economic centers, Donetsk and Luhansk, and a significant proportion of both these cities' residents identify with Russia either ethnically or linguistically. Russian is widely spoken as a first language. Separatists and their supporters see themselves as distinct from the rest of Ukraine despite their shared national origin. Pro-Russia and separatist forces represent the [Donetsk](#) and [Luhansk People's Republics](#) in Eastern Ukraine, both of which declared independence in 2014. The primary goals of these actors are to achieve independence from Ukraine and strengthen their ties with Russia. Despite operating within the territorial boundaries of Ukraine, these groups are considered pro-Russian actors.

As the other prominent state actor, Russia has a vested interest in the outcome of the conflicts. The Donbas and Crimea situations make it unlikely that Ukraine can join NATO, because an attack on one NATO state must be treated as an attack on all. Therefore, Ukrainian membership would severely escalate the risk of armed conflict between NATO and Russia, at a time when the goal for the US and many European governments is to de-escalate tension. The conflicts also make EU accession unlikely for the foreseeable future. A western-aligned Ukraine would damage the close economic, political, and cultural ties the two countries share and that Russia values highly. Were Ukraine to become a member of either or both organizations, Russia would see this as an encroachment by western states on its perceived sphere of influence. Thus, by actively backing the separatist and deploying its forces in Ukraine, Russia can forestall encroachment, despite the threat of further sanctions by the international community.

Foreign Policy: Eurasia

Expansion of the EU and NATO into the Former Soviet Union

By Charlie Bluestein

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) coordinate closely and often operate with similar strategic goals in mind. The two alliances also uphold similar requirements for membership. Essentially, they each require member states to have democratic institutions of government, functioning market economies, and general respect for human rights within their country. Historically, NATO has been oriented towards issues of defense and collective security, whereas the EU focuses more on economic integration and trade. These Western alliances and their respective institutions expanded in recent decades into Eastern Europe and the territories of the former Soviet Union.

NATO and EU expansion has had two main components: diplomatic and military expansion. Diplomatic expansion is the process of incorporating new member-states into the alliances.

NATO has conducted eight rounds of [enlargement since 1949](#), and the [EU has grown from six to twenty-seven members since 1951](#). Military expansion involves more ambitious defense agreements and coordination with additional countries. This includes, most notably, the revamped military strategy of NATO's Allied Land Command or LANDCOM. Since the Warsaw Summit in 2016, this military branch has adopted the [Enhanced Forward Presence \(EFP\)](#) initiative which created a more active security apparatus in Eastern Europe. The EU does not retain standing army units like NATO. Instead, the [EU relies on member contributions and networking with regional entities](#) to execute military operations when necessary.

Member states in NATO and the EU are often supportive of expanding the alliances. The alliance charters established open-door policies towards aspirant countries for the sake of regional security, should they meet the general requirements. [NATO](#) states the *"enlargement process poses no threat to any country (...) [it] is aimed at promoting stability and cooperation, at building a Europe whole and free, united in peace, democracy and common values."* Several nations are currently working towards membership. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine are potential candidates for NATO membership, while Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Turkey are being considered for EU accession. Ultimately, NATO and the EU see eastward expansion as an opportunity to strengthen the organizations and promote Western-democratic reforms.

NATO was originally formed by the United States as a bulwark against Soviet power, so Russia remains wary about the intentions of the Western coalition. In recent years, the Kremlin has viewed expansion as a direct threat to its security strategy and key regional interests. NATO membership for Ukraine and Balkan states could decrease Russian influence in those countries. The Kremlin's aversion to expanding Western alliances is thus rooted in legitimate fears of geopolitical isolation. A [2017 report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) states: *"The Kremlin charges that the West is conducting hybrid warfare through a combination of military and other means, particularly democracy promotion activities in and around Russia. From Moscow's perspective, these activities encircle Russia with Western agents of influence, create opportunities for Western intervention, and empower groups inside Russia opposed to the Russian government."* The Russian security establishment remains entrenched in this view, making strategic concessions highly unlikely.

Similarly, leaders in NATO and the EU remain committed to diplomatic expansion and enhanced security initiatives. The prospects for improved relations between Russia and the alliances, therefore, seem bleak in the immediate future. Ukraine continues to make increasingly legitimate strides towards NATO accession, a move that [Russia has declared it would view as a "Red Line."](#) It remains to be seen what developments will take place with regard to new member states, in addition to how far Russia is willing to go with a direct or indirect response. It is certain,

however, that the role of alliances like NATO and the EU will continue to be a source of conflict in relations between Russia and the West.

Foreign Policy: Transatlantic

The Euro and its impact on the European Union

By Francesca Reynolds

History

Although it took until 2002 for the Euro to become a physical currency, the idea of a common currency alongside a united monetary and fiscal policy was an ambition of the [European Union from very early on](#). The purpose of the common currency was to support economic activity between states, stabilize economies, and enhance options for consumers.

The Euro is now the currency of 19 nations, leaving only 8 EU countries that use an alternative currency (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden).

The European Central Bank (ECB) was established simultaneously in order to coordinate monetary policy (policies relating to interest rates and money supply, used by central banks to influence the level of demand in an economy e.g. management of interest rates) between countries. This necessary measure also further integrated the economies of many EU countries, leaving national governments with only fiscal policy (policies relating to the amount spent by a government e.g. levels of taxation) to manage their country's economy.

Benefits

- The Euro enables trade to operate far quicker by removing the need and risk of currency exchanges when operating across Eurozone countries. Currency exchanges cost money to complete and are a risk to businesses as fluctuations in rates lead to uncertainty about the cost of the exchange. Therefore, by removing this barrier, [trade has flowed easier](#) between countries.
- In theory, a combined currency should also [incentivise countries to support each other](#) and generate greater stability. There are a few reasons for this. First, countries with larger economies tend to be more stable as they are able to spread risk. For example, a natural disaster in a small country can ruin their economy and currency. Whereas, a natural disaster in one US state will likely have an insignificant impact on the currency. Second, more successful countries have an incentive to help out the less successful. This is

because the value of the currency impacts all countries using it, so if countries want to prevent harmful impacts to their own country, they need to support others. This benefit was realized during the 2020 Coronavirus Crisis. Although there was initially insufficient support for a collective measure, the ECB consistently bought debt in severely impacted countries to keep interest rates low. Eventually, the [NextGenerationEU recovery plan](#) was put in place. It is the largest stimulus package ever from the EU and is worth around €750 billion.

The eurozone

The 19 countries that use the euro as their national currency



Image

Issues

The most significant issue facing the adopters of the Euro is the coordinated monetary policy that often fails to fit local economic conditions. The economies of the countries currently using the currency vary significantly. Germany is the [world's third largest exporter](#) but has to use the same monetary policy as Lithuania whose export value is 67th globally. Without tailored monetary policy for each economy, countries can struggle to solve issues impacting their populations, as was the case during the Eurozone Sovereign Debt Crisis.

Future

- There are frequent reports of the potential collapse of the Euro, however, at least in the near future this seems unlikely. The Euro was able to survive in Greece despite both the

economic and political crisis after the 2008 financial crisis, so it seems likely to continue through comparatively steadier times.

- The number of countries using the Euro could be set to increase. Since 1991 any country joining the EU has had to join the Euro and meet certain “[convergence requirements](#)” (excluding Denmark). With a number of countries in the pipeline to joining the EU, it is possible the number adopting it could increase. However, states joining is not inevitable—many countries have been on the path to EU accession for many years.

Housing Policy

Zoning Policy and Affordable Housing

By Jacob Pentz

High housing costs and inadequate supply are [not a natural outcome of market forces](#), but the result of policy choices. In the U.S., public housing development relies on private developers who are bound by restrictions on the location, size, and funding for new projects. Zoning laws determine the purposes for certain lots of land, and ultimately where new developments can be built. Each zone’s purpose and rules are determined by local governments, making zoning an essential factor in the creation of affordable housing.

Context

- The [Faircloth Amendment](#) of 1937 sets a limit on the number of public housing units a Public Housing Agency owns, assists or operates, with federal funding. The current limit was established in 1999 in reaction to the perceived failure of the public housing program. PHAs are organizations that oversee and maintain public housing complexes. They often do not reach their Faircloth limits due to a lack of federal funding.
- An economically efficient housing market should have [high-density housing near public transit and in areas with good schools, low crime, etc.](#), as a high number of units on an expensive lot of land results in a lower cost per unit and can accommodate more households.

Inclusionary Zoning

Zoning laws can be helpful in creating opportunities for affordable development and economic mobilization. Inclusionary zoning requires and incentivizes a certain percentage of units in new developments to be affordable, and [ties the development of affordable housing to the development of market-rate housing](#) and guarantees that benefits are accessible to households along a range of incomes. Projects that implement inclusionary zoning near public transit and job

centers can expand economic opportunity for low-income households. In addition, local zoning regulations can enable [vulnerable communities to push back](#) against projects that would harm them, such as urban renewal or highways.

Exclusionary Zoning

On the other hand, zoning laws can also be socioeconomically exclusive and societally inefficient. Those in favor of zoning reform argue that changing the rules of housing development to require moderately priced housing in high-opportunity areas is essential for more equitable, resilient, and thriving communities. For instance, zoning that does not mandate affordable development in high-value areas, especially places with good transit, leads to [higher costs of living for the lowest-income households](#). This also causes negative externalities such as [worsened traffic and harmful environmental impacts](#).

Impact on Developers

In many cases, zoning is a barrier for developers who want to create affordable housing. When left to local jurisdictions, cities tend to only subsidize projects in specific areas [where the need for affordable housing is most significant](#). This limits [location options for developers](#) who want to use housing subsidies, such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, which is essential to the development process. Local governments also have complicated development processes that favor community preferences over affordable expansion which prevent low-cost, high-density development, [especially in affluent neighborhoods with high land values](#). In desirable markets, developers are often faced with [community opposition](#) to new development or rezoning. In the end, the high costs associated with land acquisition and construction make catering to affluent renters [the best opportunity for developers to make a profit](#) which has caused affordable development to be neglected in many U.S. cities.

Impact on Homeowners and Renters

When restrictions force affordable housing away from high-value land areas with good transit, high economic opportunity and low crime, poorer households are kept from advancing economically. Limited housing near job centers leads more workers to [undertake long-distance commutes](#), which is infeasible as [many households may not own cars](#). Many low-income workers rely on public transportation, which is not accessible away from city centers. Exclusionary zoning practices such as redlining have also caused [racial and economic divides](#) in cities.

Reflection Questions

- How can local governments balance the preferences of their community with inclusive practices?
- How can your community include and promote more affordable development?

- How can federal, state, and local funding ease the affordable construction process for developers?
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Housing Policy

Promoting Home Ownership or Supporting Renters?

By Emily Anderson

A source of debate within U.S. housing policy is whether the federal government should favor policies that promote homeownership or policies that support renters. In the United States, homeownership and renting are targeted by our existing housing policies, but which area should be favored by policymakers? With a limited amount of federal funding available, policymakers must weigh the benefits and drawbacks of investing in homeownership or rental as they make policy.

Supporting Homeownership

Recent federal budgets have spent [twice as much](#) on programs supporting renters than those supporting homeownership. Policymakers have traditionally favored policies that build homeownership such as [guaranteeing mortgage payments](#) to lenders through the Federal Housing Administration and the [mortgage interest deduction](#) because owning a home is the [main form of wealth building](#) in the United States. Homeownership can help American families purchase property that is likely to steadily increase in value over time and that can be passed down to the next generation. The passing of wealth through generations gives future Americans a financial step up and creates upward economic mobility. Ideally, this generational cycling of wealth will give the future family the financial means to purchase their own home, invest in businesses, or use it to attend college. Owning a home does not only increase the wealth of the owner themselves, but also has long term economic impacts on society. Making homeownership more accessible to more people can improve the wealth of present and future households and benefit the U.S. government through increased tax revenue, a more educated population, and decreased use of social welfare programs.

Supporting homeownership policies also has short term economic benefits for other households seeking to purchase a home. The federal government runs two publicly owned enterprises called [Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae](#) that sell government assisted mortgages to private lenders and then reinvest the profit in federal housing programs. These programs [actually turn a profit](#) for the federal government who then uses that profit to support more Americans in purchasing a home. There is no comparable economic multiplier when it comes to programs supporting renters where the government can recover the money spent on renters.

Those in favor of prioritizing homeownership in housing policy also see these policies as a way to address the wealth gap in the United States between White and Black households. As Black households were [often excluded from past government efforts](#) to build homeownership, White households gained wealth over time while Black households did not have the same opportunity for economic mobility. Today in the United States, there is a [30 percent gap](#) between the homeownership rate of White households and Black households. A gap [of this size](#) has not occurred in the U.S. since racial discrimination in housing was outlawed by the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Government investment in policies that increase the homeownership rate, especially the homeownership rate in communities of color, can build generational wealth in communities that were historically excluded from government support in wealth building through homeownership. Given that homeownership is the [main form of wealth building for most Americans](#), assisting Americans in achieving homeownership could be a policy choice for policymakers interested in wealth and income equity.

Supporting Renters

Proponents of increasing funding for federal policies that support renter households point to several economic trends that have made homeownership an unrealistic expectation for every American household. Median home prices [increased 121 percent nationwide](#) since 1960, but the median household income only increased by 29 percent. Owning a home is no longer affordable for many American households as they simply do not have the income to support a down payment, monthly mortgage payments, and home repairs. The Millennial generation of Americans [are 8 percent less likely to own homes](#) compared to other generations at the same age. The generation that is at the prime age of entering homeownership is instead staying in the rental market because of cost, [decreasing the U.S. homeownership rate](#) for the first time in decades. The lackluster growth in household income has kept millions of households in the rental market. Investing in policies targeting renters can support households that do not have the economic opportunity to own a home as that trend becomes more common. Policies targeting homeownership would eat up money as homes become more expensive, making rental-based policies seem more reasonable to policymakers.

Renters are more likely to be low income households, while homeowners [are more likely to be](#) middle or high income. Many feel that government programs should prefer aiding low income Americans to middle or high. In 2019, the median household income for households that owned their homes [was around \\$84,000](#), whereas the median household income for households that were renting was around \$46,000. Equity advocates also point to the fact that renting households are [disproportionately households of color](#). These are households who may have not had access to generational wealth to own a home in the first place and they rent because it is their only option. Without generational wealth to support a down payment, additional investment, or higher education to earn a higher income, many renter households will not be able to transition to homeownership without significant financial aid. In the short term, it would be more equitable to subsidize their rent than try to entice them with current homeownership programs that still

require participants to be able to put up a down payment on their own and mortgage payments without a subsidy that accounts for their low-income. Investment in renter-focused policies will help low-income households and households of color secure quality affordable housing rather than give subsidies to high income households.

Moreover, renting can still provide families with safe, quality, affordable housing while being realistic about the hidden costs of homeownership. Also, even if the federal government helps low-income Americans access mortgage loans with better terms that fit their income, there is no government intervention for necessary repairs, which are more likely to happen to homes priced in the range of what a low-income household could afford, and improvement costs to maintain the home's value. Even if a low-income household becomes able to purchase a home, that home will most likely [not build as much equity](#) as a home owned by a high income household, repeating the cycle of poverty as low income homeowners do not recoup their investments and deal with hidden costs of homeownership.

In addition to inequities in homeownership in terms of income access, there are also large racial inequities in the valuation of homes owned by Black households. For Black households that do purchase a home, they can also face a smaller appreciation of home value because of how homes are appraised. Homes in majority-Black neighborhoods [were valued on average \\$48,000, or 23% less](#) than those with few or no Black residents, even when controlling for differences in schools, crime, and other neighborhood characteristics. In some cases, low income and/or Black households will be able to purchase a home, but they still may not reap the benefits of homeownership that homeownership policies are intended to create. They are less likely to [build generational wealth through homeownership](#) compared to white and/or high-income households, and so, the federal government should instead be more realistic about homeownership as a panacea to all housing and income inequality issues in the United States. Supporting renters acknowledges the reality of the U.S. housing market and existing inequities in homeownership while still helping Americans attain quality, affordable, and stable housing.

Questions to Consider:

- Currently, there is limited funding appropriated for housing policy. Should the federal government focus on increasing access to homeownership or supporting renter households? Which is a better use of federal money?
 - Which policies seem more realistic given past and current trends in housing?
 - Which policies are more equitable and will help address existing disparities in the United States?
 - Which policies would be more politically popular and thus more likely to receive support from policymakers?
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Immigration

US Response to the Rohingya Crisis

By Leshan Loonena

[The Rohingya people of Myanmar](#) are a majority-Muslim ethnic group native to the coastal Rakhine State in Myanmar. Before the mass migration of Rohingyas, there were an estimated 1.5 million living in Myanmar.

Despite making up only 2% of the entire Myanmar population in 2014, the Rohingya people have been subject to numerous human rights violations such as having their right to vote and citizenship stripped away in [1974](#) and [1982](#). As a result, the Rohingya people have been subject to state-sponsored, violent crackdowns such as [Operation Dragon King](#) in 1978, [Operation Clean and Beautiful](#) in 1991, the 2012 Rakhine State Riots and the recent Refugee Crisis.

The [current refugee crisis](#) began on August 25th, 2017, when a group of militant Rohingya Muslims attacked police bases in northern Myanmar. The army retaliated by burning villages, killing civilians, and raping women. More than 420,000 Rohingyas have crossed the border into Bangladesh, thereby making them stateless refugees.

In September 2019, the [United Nations-backed International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar](#) found that the 600,000 Rohingya remaining in Myanmar “may face a greater threat of genocide than ever.” Although some news sources have dubbed the state-sponsored violence a genocide, the UN and other state authorities such as the United States government have yet to officially declare it a genocide.

The Rohingya Crisis has sparked an international backlash from the global community, particularly regarding the military’s actions and the failure of the governing Aung San Suu Kyi administration. Suu Kyi’s government [has repeatedly failed to condemn the attacks](#) and avoided mentioning the Rohingyas by name, claiming that no violence or village clearances had occurred. Her reaction to the event has resulted in criticism from the media and sparked discussion around revoking her 1991 Nobel Laureate award. However, as of 2021, no actions have been taken to do so.

The United Nations condemned the crisis, and the [UNHCR](#) launched a Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, calling for US\$951 million to continue delivering lifesaving assistance from March to December 2018. As of early August 2018, the JRP remains just 32 per cent funded.

Under the administration of Donald Trump, the United States denounced the actions of the Burmese government, with [former Vice President Mike Pence](#) calling the situation a “historic

exodus” and a “great tragedy.” Vice President Pence also noted the situation could, “sow seeds of hatred and chaos that may well consume the region for generations to come and threaten the peace of us all.” The United States State Department issued a statement condemning the issue and applauding the efforts of the neighboring Bangladeshi government to provide aid and refuge to fleeing Rohingya.

In 2018, the U.S. Government responded to the Rohingya by imposing [sanctions on the Myanmar military](#) over the Rohingya crackdown. These sanctions were imposed [on top Myanmar generals](#), police commanders, and two army units, accusing them of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims and widespread human rights abuses. Since August 2017, the [United States](#) has provided humanitarian aid amounting to more than \$760 million to the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. This aid was allocated to the UN bodies working in the area to establish refugee schools and provide necessary food, shelter, and other resources. The Biden administration is yet to give an official response concerning the crisis, but has continued former President Donald Trump’s sanctions on key military generals involved in engineering the crisis.

International Organizations & Agreements

Failures and Successes of the UN

By Katelyn Balakir

Introduction

76 years and [half a trillion dollars](#) later, the international community is divided on the effectiveness of the United Nations. Overall, the UN has a [positive international image](#) but the partisan divide over supporting the UN has widened, particularly in the United States. The United States’ perception of the UN is important since the United States is the largest donor to the UN and accounts for roughly [20%](#) of the UN’s collective budget.

Successes

1. [Material assistance](#): the United Nations provides a lifeline to millions of people across the world. The World Food Program provides food and cash assistance to over [80 million](#) people. The United Nations provides aid to nearly [69 million](#) displaced people who fled their home due to persecution, conflict, or human rights violations. Furthermore, UN agencies supply [45%](#) of the world’s children with vaccines, saving an estimated [2 to 3 million](#) lives each year from preventable diseases.

2. [Human rights](#): the United Nations established the first comprehensive framework for human rights law. The organization defined human rights through the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the subsequent [International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights](#) and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). Together, these documents defined the rights to equality, free movement, education, religion, and asylum, along with many others. The UN also established mechanisms to promote and protect the rights it outlines. The Human Rights Council, composed of 47 representatives, conducts a review every four years where it assesses the human rights record of all UN member states and presents nations with recommendations. The Council recently came under scrutiny for allowing China to become a member following [reports](#) of flagrant human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights coordinates the oversight bodies which are responsible for enforcing treaties after they are ratified. Although it is unclear whether recommendations and oversight result in legislative changes, the UN's efforts at the very least create an international standard for nations to strive towards.

3. [Decolonization](#): when the UN was founded in 1945, [750 million](#) people lived in territories controlled by a colonial power. Less than [2 million](#) people live under colonial rule today. A key feature of the human rights framework of the United Nations involves every nation's right to sovereignty and self-determination. The General Assembly passed multiple resolutions on decolonization, including its landmark Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and four International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism resolutions. The Special Committee on Decolonization regularly reviews the list of non-self governing territories and invites representatives from these territories to issue statements at its annual sessions. The UN played a major role in decolonization efforts following WWII and continues to provide a forum to discuss international objectives like decolonization.

Limitations

1. [Enforcement mechanisms](#): a recurring criticism of the UN is its inability to effectively enforce mandates. The UN is only as effective as member states allow and members go to great lengths to ensure national sovereignty. Therefore, General Assembly resolutions are typically considered to be [recommendations](#). The Security Council is able to enforce its resolutions by means of sanctions or military force, but any one of the fifteen council members can veto a bill so harsh mechanisms are not frequently used.

2. [Security Council inaction](#): the Security Council is tasked with taking action to maintain international peace and security, however the veto poses an obstacle to action. P-5 nations ultimately determine what conflicts constitute actionable threats to international peace and security by exercising their veto power. Unsurprisingly these nations have advanced their national interests since the Council's inception. Following the political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, the P-5 nations were in a [deadlock](#). The United Kingdom, United States, and France

presented a resolution declaring the Venezuelan election illegitimate and calling for new elections. Russia and China proposed a resolution condemning outside intervention in the election process and called for dialogue in Venezuela. Both resolutions failed and the deadlock delayed the delivery of critical aid. P-5 nations [disagree](#) on how most conflicts should be handled causing frequent inaction in the UNSC.

3. **Western domination of UN institutions**: despite its mission emphasizing inclusion and representation, the UN is typically viewed as a Western-oriented organization. From the UN's inception, European and American interests have prevailed. One example is developmental aid. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are primarily responsible for coordinating economic development efforts while the UN provides guidelines for sustainable development and oversight. Together, they implement the UN's economic development framework. Both the IMF and World Bank [condition loans](#) on neoliberal features like trade liberalization, private enterprise, and an overall reduction in public spending (i.e. the size of government). These practices were especially controversial during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when the IMF [conditioned loans](#) on tight austerity measures like reductions in public health spending and unemployment benefits.

Peacekeeping: The Intersection of Success and Failure

While the UN has successfully led a number of peacekeeping missions and promoting peace and security is integral to its mission, it failed to intervene in a timely manner and prevent genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia. Institutional shortcomings contributed to grave UN peacekeeping failures in both Rwanda and Bosnia. First, UN peacekeepers are held to a strict [mandate](#) to only use force in self-defense or to help evacuate foreigners. Second, the UN [failed to train](#) peacekeepers to negotiate with perpetrators of violence against civilians. Similarly, there existed a [cultural disconnect](#) between the training peacekeepers received and the reality of local communities.

More generally, peacekeeping is limited in that intervention [requires](#) the consent of the host government and other parties to the conflict which makes swift action more difficult.

Future of UN Operations

The UN is currently facing large financial constraints in light of the pandemic and the growing number of individuals in need of assistance across the globe. As of September 2020, member states only paid [60%](#) of their contributions to the UN's general budget. As a result, some UN-appointed human rights experts who work under the Human Rights Council were [unable to carry out their mandate](#) to monitor and address human rights abuses. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees operated with [47%](#) of its \$9.1 billion budget and cut back on programs providing emergency shelter, water, and food to refugees. UN operations as we know it are at risk if nations fail to bolster financial support for the organization.

Furthermore, the UN is still recovering from Trump's presidency characterized by an isolationist approach to foreign policy. During the Trump era, the United States left the Human Rights Council, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), threatened to withdraw from the World Health Organization, and ended its commitment to numerous international agreements like the Paris Climate Accords. The UN heavily relies on the United States for funding and assistance with key programs. Although President Biden recommitted the United States to the UN, US reliability and credibility [took a hit](#).

Nuclear Nonproliferation

Intro to Nuclear Related Sanctions Against Iran

By Michelle Hung

The international community implements sanctions against Iran to discourage their development of nuclear technology. These sanctions mainly target the Iranian economy and individuals involved in Iran's nuclear development program. Sanctions come from three major actors: the United States of America, the United Nations and the European Union. In international diplomacy, [sanctions](#), especially economic ones, are utilized by countries or organizations to coerce, deter, punish or shame other international actors that might endanger their own interests or violate international norms of behavior. Iran has become the target of economic sanctions since they were suspected of developing uranium enrichment in violation of the [Nonproliferation Treaty in 1967](#).

United Nations Sanctions

The United Nations led the first set of sanctions related to Iran's development of nuclear technology. The UN adopted [Resolution 1737](#) in 2006, which prohibited countries from transferring nuclear and missile related technology to Iran and required all countries to freeze the assets of Iranian organizations and individuals involved in Iran's nuclear and missile programs. Sanctions were levied after Iran refused to suspend uranium enrichment activities after warnings from the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#). The UN Security Council further expanded its sanctions against Iran in 2008 by adopting [Resolution 1803](#), which required UN member states to actively prevent Iran from acquiring sensitive nuclear or missile technology and added thirteen people and seven entities to the UN blacklist. The additional resolution was adopted because [Iran continued to oppose IAEA inspections of their nuclear facilities](#). In 2010, [Iran, Brazil and Turkey came to a joint agreement](#) to provide fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor. In reaction, the UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 1929](#) which tightened proliferation-related sanctions and banned Iran from carrying out nuclear-capable ballistic missile tests. The resolution also added an arms embargo on the transfer of major weapons systems to Iran. In 2016 the UN

acknowledged Iran had complied with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and [passed a new resolution](#) which lifted some sanctions.

European Union Sanctions

Similar to the UN, the European Union levied sanctions to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. In a [2007 measure](#), the EU froze the assets of individuals and entities related to Iran's nuclear and ballistic-missile programs. Further measures like visa bans, frozen assets, and actions against Iranian trade, financial services, energy and transport were [implemented by the EU in 2010](#). The EU [lifted their sanctions in 2016](#) when Iran signed onto the JCPOA and began adhering to those regulations.

United States Sanctions

Compared to the UN and the EU, the United States has a more complicated history of sanctions against Iran. The US began to [impose sanctions on Iran in 2009](#) in response to then-Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's stated aim to build 10 uranium enrichment facilities. The [U.S. House of Representatives passed sanctions](#) on foreign companies that helped supply gasoline to Iran.

In 2011, the IAEA released a report detailing how Iran's current nuclear program could lead to the development of a nuclear weapon. Following this report, the [US designated](#) the Government of Iran and all financial institutions in Iran as entities of money laundering concern and warned global financial institutions that doing business with Iran was risky. That same year [President Obama sanctioned the Central Bank of Iran and other financial institutions](#) for processing transactions related to oil and petroleum products on behalf of Iranian companies and the government. Despite continued talks between Iran and the international community, negotiations for an agreement fell through as both sides were unwilling to make concessions. In 2012, the [US signed into law the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act](#) which banned insurance, reinsurance, and other shipping services involved in nuclear proliferation. Congress further [limited Iran's oil exports and access to foreign currency reserves](#) in 2013. [President Obama added sanctions](#) against foreign financial institutions that conducted transactions with Iranian currency or had accounts outside of Iran. When the JCPOA was implemented in 2015, the US slowly began [to lift sanctions](#). However, President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA and brought back all previous nuclear-related sanctions against Iran. Similar to the previous set of sanctions, these new sanctions were made against the Central Bank of Iran and required U.S. companies to sever contracts with Iran within 180 days.

Impact of Sanctions

Sanctions have greatly affected Iran's economy but failed to deter Iran's development of nuclear technology. Before the JCPOA, Iran's [GDP decreased by 20%](#) and [unemployment rose](#). Oil exports [decreased from 2.5 mbd \(thousand barrels\) in 2011 to 1.1 mbd in 2014](#) and [Iranian](#)

[currency depreciated](#). The economic sanctions [discouraged international banks and firms](#) from engaging in commercial and financial transactions with Iran. With the return of sanctions and withdrawal from the JCPOA during the Trump presidency, similar economic consequences have impacted Iran's economy. The reimplementing of sanctions have further damaged the oil industry in Iran with oil exports plummeting in mid-2020. Even with the new sanctions, the Iranian government refuses to slow down their nuclear development. Citing Trump's backing out of the JCPOA, [the Iran government sees the JCPOA as useless and believes it is in their right to push for higher uranium enrichment](#). As a result, Iran has begun to [develop new centrifuges to accelerate uranium enrichment](#) and has placed [restrictions on the IAEA's ability to inspect Iranian nuclear facilities](#).

Nuclear Nonproliferation

The Nuclear Umbrella and North Korea

Claire Christensen

Nuclear umbrellas have been a central part of US nonproliferation policy for most of American nuclear history. A nuclear umbrella, also known as extended deterrence, is when one nuclear armed country, officially says it will use its nuclear weapons to protect a non-nuclear ally, i.e. the United States guaranteeing it will retaliate against North Korea if it strikes an allied country, such as Japan. The extended deterrence policy in the [United States is called an extended nuclear deterrence \(END\) guarantee](#). The US began using nuclear umbrellas during the Cold War to prevent European countries from pursuing weapons programs, and have continued to be implemented up to the present day. An END guarantee can also cover conventional forces stationed in that country. It is a comprehensive way for the US to use its military power to both protect another country and avert their need to invest in military or nuclear weapons, furthering the US goal of nonproliferation.

Nonproliferation has been the main goal of the United States since World War II. Extended deterrence became a tool to reach that goal in the 1950s when the United States [officially offered its nuclear umbrella to South Korea](#) for protection against Russia. This policy ended with the end of the Cold War, as Russia was no longer the biggest nuclear threat to South Korea. However, with [North Korea withdrawing from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\) in 1994](#), a new threat emerged towards both South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Nuclear umbrellas were one of the only reasons many European countries [did not pursue nuclear weapons](#), despite many countries having both the technology and resources to make a weapons program a viable defence option. More recently, this policy has been enacted in East Asia, [to](#)

[deter North Korea from attacking South Korea or Japan](#). Because of the number of countries now relying on the US nuclear program for deterrence, the US is continuously upgrading and renewing its own nuclear program.

For nuclear umbrellas to be effective, South Korea and Japan must trust that the United States would be willing to risk a counter strike from North Korea. Would the US be willing to sacrifice Washington to save Seoul? This is the key question to answer for any country that is offered extended deterrence. In the case of protection against North Korea, the general consensus is that it is. While credibility was not as certain during the Cold War era of extended nuclear deterrence, currently North Korea's minor nuclear capabilities [render it unlikely that they could launch a second strike against the United states successfully](#). This means the United States does have to sacrifice as much to offer South Korea and Japan extended deterrence. However, the more capability North Korea obtains, the less credible the extended deterrence will be. Increased North Korean capability would throw off the balance the United States has been able to find in the region.

Public Health

Operation Warp Speed

By Daniel Gaines

The Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most challenging public health crises the United States has contended with in over a century. During a state of emergency, the benefits of creating effective vaccines and the risks of delaying their release are extremely high. Vaccinating the population as soon as possible decreases loss of life and allows economic activity to resume, but the vaccine approval process must be completed diligently with particular attention paid to the statistical rigor of the clinical trials. If a vaccine is released that lacks adequate efficacy, the relaxed behavior that occurs in people who are vaccinated could lead to the [paradoxical result of more infections](#). If a vaccine is released that has a high occurrence of unpleasant and/or deadly side effects, [vaccine hesitancy may negatively impact the number of people who choose to get vaccinated](#). These realities caused a dilemma for public health authorities—every month the Covid-19 vaccines delayed cost tens of thousands of lives, but prematurely releasing the vaccine could have caused just as much, if not more, damage. In response to this historic pandemic, the federal government and biomedical research companies cooperated to develop effective vaccines in just under a year, a speed that is historically unprecedented.

Coordinated efforts by the United States to develop a Covid-19 vaccine began with the [announcement of Operation Warp Speed](#) (OWS) on May 15th 2020. OWS was a private-public

partnership between the United States Federal Government and pharmaceutical companies with the goal to “produce and deliver 300 million doses of safe and effective vaccines with the initial doses available by January 2021, as part of a broader strategy to accelerate the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics”. OWS was an interagency program which consisted of several components of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), and the Department of Defense (DoD). BARDA functioned as the leadership and financial interface between the federal government and the biomedical industry, providing funding for research and manufacturing to the companies that produced the most promising vaccine candidates. OWS received nearly 10 billion dollars of initial funding, 6.5 billion of which went towards medical countermeasure development and the other 3.5 billion towards NIH research. As clinical trials progressed, OWS funding was expanded to over 18 billion dollars. Six vaccine candidates (out of over one hundred) received substantial funding from OWS.

Rather than pursuing a Biologics License Application (BLA), the standard licensure requirement for distributing vaccines to the general public, pharmaceutical companies were able to acquire Emergency Use Authorizations (EUA). The federal government established the use of EUAs as a means to quickly produce and distribute unproven but potentially life-saving drugs to the general public following the declaration of a public health emergency by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Once a state of emergency was declared, the FDA published several guidelines for issuing EUAs. By pursuing an EUA as opposed to a BLA, pharmaceutical companies were able to expedite vaccine research, clinical trials, and mass production. The Covid-19 EUA also standardized the clinical trial protocols that pharmaceutical companies had to follow. Standardizing the clinical trial protocols ensured that all of the vaccines met the same efficacy and safety standards. Due to the dangers of releasing ineffective vaccines, the FDA required certain efficacy standards.

While the Covid-19 vaccines had to comply with the same safety criteria as every other preventative vaccine for an infectious disease, certain parts of the process were shortened. Normally the periods between phase 1 and 2, and phase 2 and 3 of the clinical trial have six month observation periods to observe if any side effects develop. This six month observation period was reduced to two months in the EUA, with the rationale being that 95% of adverse reactions occur within 6 weeks.

Another way that the Covid-19 EUA expedited the process was by encouraging pharmaceutical companies to engage in financially high-risk vaccine development. In normal situations, vaccine development is not a highly profitable endeavor. Pharmaceutical companies spread out the financial risk over a longer period of time by completing each step sequentially in the development process. In the standard paradigm, the process usually occurs as follows;

1. In vitro laboratory research,
2. In vivo animal studies,
3. Phase 1 clinical trial,
4. 6-month observation,
5. Phase 2 clinical trial,
6. 6-month observation,
7. Phase 3 clinical trial and manufacturing scale up,
8. Manufacturing process and product validation,
9. Biologics License Application (BLA) approval (standard licensure requirement for distributing vaccines to the general public),
10. Production at a commercial level

This entire process can take anywhere between 5-15 years, and given that less than 10% of vaccine prototypes end up acquiring a BLA, spreading out the steps is a financially smart decision. If a vaccine were to fail in the early clinical trial stages, the financial losses would be minimized since little investment was made towards manufacturing. In financially high-risk vaccine development, however, many of the steps occur simultaneously. In vivo animal studies and phase 1 of the clinical trial are often merged, as well as phase 2 and 3 of the clinical trial. This reduces the clinical trial time substantially without undertaking significant safety and efficacy risks since all of the steps that would have occurred in a normal biologics license application trial have still occurred, albeit in a merged or overlapped manner. Most importantly, manufacturing scale up and commercial manufacturing of the vaccines [occur simultaneously](#) to the clinical trial. This is a financially high-risk strategy since significant investments are made into manufacturing before knowing if the vaccine is safe and effective. In this case, the federal government provided funding for the large manufacturing scale up, removing the financial-risk from the pharmaceutical companies.

Although this was an expensive and financially high-risk strategy, it led to vaccines being created, tested, and distributed in an unprecedented timeframe. Covid 19 vaccines were available to the first qualified members of the general public in just under a year, significantly faster than the normal 10-15 year timeframe. Of the six vaccines that received research funding from OWS, just two vaccines (Moderna and Janssen Pharmaceuticals) received an EUA from the FDA. The total funding for the other four vaccines that did not receive EUAs amounts to nearly five billion dollars. Two of the vaccines (Astrazeneca and Merck) have been either paused or terminated, and the other two vaccines (Norovax and GlaxoSmithKline) are still in development. Although OWS did not fund research for the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, an EUA was granted following submission of data from their phase 3 clinical trial and two billion dollars worth of vaccines were pre ordered.



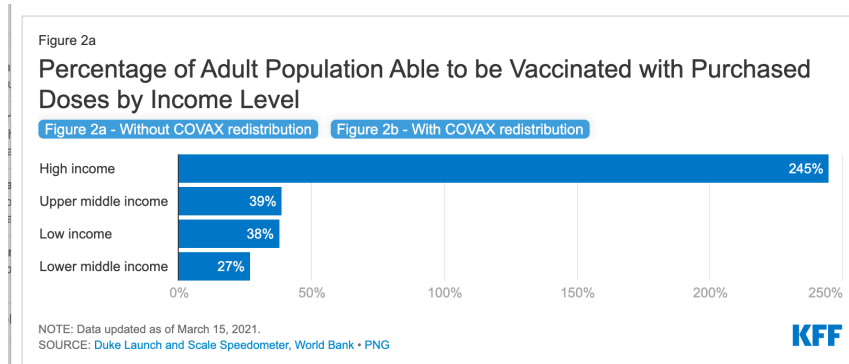
Public Health

The COVAX Initiative

By Katrina Freeman

Introduction

COVID-19 is a rapidly transmissible virus which has shut down the global economy for the past 15 months. In the past six months, vaccine production and distribution has ramped up, but [vaccine nationalism](#)—the hoarding of vaccines by countries for their own populations—is threatening to [prolong](#) the pandemic for several years. The [COVAX](#) Initiative seeks to close this vaccination gap by distributing vaccines to low and middle income countries who otherwise wouldn't have access to them—an essential step to end the acute stage of the pandemic.



Wealth inequality is the root of the current global vaccine access disparity. As of [March 2020](#), “High-income countries, representing just a fifth of the global adult population (~20%), have purchased more than half (~54%) of all vaccine doses.”

As shown by this [figure](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation, high income countries have enough doses to fully vaccinate their adult populations twice over, while lower income countries can only vaccinate around a quarter of their population. This poses risks for the spread of [global variants](#), as well as a slower global economic recovery.

Countries hoard vaccines because they are prioritizing domestic economic recovery and aim to reach herd immunity (with 70% of their citizens vaccinated) within their borders. However, this ideology could end up [hurting them more than helping them](#) as [variants](#) mutate among the unvaccinated and spread as countries ease lockdowns. This would hinder public health progress and slow economic recovery. Therefore, the COVAX initiative is essential to [combat vaccine nationalism](#) by distributing vaccines to low and middle income countries which do not have the same ability to purchase vaccines in bulk.

The COVAX Initiative

The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Initiative is an [international partnership](#) led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Health Organization (WHO) to close the vaccination gap between high income countries (HICs) and lower-middle income countries (LMICS). It fulfills the vaccine pillar of the [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#), which was created in April 2020 to ensure that all countries, regardless of GDP, would have access to needed COVID-19 response resources.

COVAX seeks to achieve:

1. Doses for at least 20% of countries' populations
2. Diverse and actively managed portfolio of vaccines
3. Vaccines delivered as soon as they are available
4. End the acute phase of the pandemic
5. Rebuild economies

COVAX uses international infrastructure to coordinate equitable vaccine distribution and relies on multiple actors in multiple sectors in order to reduce gaps in vaccination coverage. COVAX aims to [provide](#) 2 billion COVID-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable citizens in all participating countries through the [COVAX Facility](#), which is a “global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.” This initiative seeks to combat vaccine nationalism by recognizing that no country or single population will be protected from the virus if populations in low and middle income countries remain unvaccinated.

COVAX and US Policy

Changes in U.S. administrative policies on COVAX reflect different ideologies about the United States' role on the world stage. The Trump Administration [did not join or support](#) the COVAX initiative while in office. However, the Biden Administration is now a vocal supporter of the program and has [pledged \\$4 billion dollars](#) to COVAX. They have also supported [waiving](#) intellectual property patents on COVID-19 vaccines. This is consistent with the Administration's foreign policy strategy of rebuilding alliances and repositioning the U.S. on the world stage as a global leader.

Criticisms and Critiques

While COVAX is certainly an essential step in the right direction, many organizations feel it is not effectively meeting the needs of the moment. [The People's Vaccine Alliance](#) argues that the COVID-19 vaccines must be seen as a public good and readily available to all those in need, and that COVAX is not the right tool to enable this paradigm shift. These concerns reflect a disconnect between the profit motive of vaccine manufacturers and the imperative to vaccinate as many high risk individuals as possible. In addition, some feel that vaccine hoarding is justified because governments must put the lives of their own citizens before those in other countries.

While this does not explain hoarding enough vaccines to vaccinate citizens twice over, it is a main reason why not all countries are ready to give away a portion of their domestic vaccine supply.

Audience Choice Award

Russian Economics - Domestic and International Developments, and the United States

By Jack Corso

Overview of Russian Economic Picture

Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, a state marked by its centrally planned economic system, the modern Russian state transitioned to a market-based economy. However, Russia's economy is still significantly influenced by a powerful conglomerate of policymakers and oligarchs.

Economic Status of Russian Citizens

[Russia](#) ranks 70th internationally in quality of life of citizens. Low wages are a large part of the problem; the [average yearly income](#) is roughly \$11,260. Although the financial standing for the average Russian has improved over the last thirty years, 12.6% of Russian live below the [poverty line](#). In addition, the average Russian [pensioner](#) receives a monthly stipend of \$59. Because of this, many pensioners have to supplement this stipend by growing their own food. [Russian currency has depreciated](#) over the last few years. In 2020, 74 Russian Rubles were equal to 1 USD or 0.85 Euros. However, the Russian government provides free [healthcare](#) and [public school education](#) to every citizen. Thus, the average Russian is not burdened by these expenses, and can use their income for other essentials. While Russia has experienced some economic growth since 1991, there is still much to be done to improve the living standards for the average citizen.



Image Courtesy of The Moscow Times

Population Decline

Due to lower birth rates and increased emigration, compounded with the Covid-19 pandemic, [Russia's population](#) is expected to decrease significantly. Between 2021 and 2024, Russia's population is projected to decrease by roughly [1.2 million people](#). This potential population decrease would have a disastrous impact on Russia's already limited labor force, and the inability of [immigrants](#) to enter the country to work due to the pandemic has only exasperated this problem.

Imports and Exports

Although Russia is quickly transitioning to a service-based economy, it is still a prominent exporter of raw materials. In 2019, Russia's primary [export partners](#) were China (14%), the Netherlands (10%), Belarus (5%), and Germany (5%). Of these exports, wheat, iron, and especially natural gas and petroleum to western Europe were most significant. Russia must import technology from more technologically developed states to keep up. It relies on imported car and vehicle parts, medicine, computers, and aircraft technology from [China, Germany, and Belarus](#), each state accounting for 20%, 13%, and 6% of Russia's total imports in 2019, respectively.

Europe relies heavily on Russian natural gas and oil, and a new pipeline called Nord Stream II is currently under construction. The [Nord Stream II](#) project will stretch from Ust-Luga, Russia, to Northeast Germany. The pipeline will strengthen the European Union's natural gas supply security and streamline the delivery of Russian gas. The [new pipeline](#) is predicted to add 2.7 billion euros to the Russian GDP and create roughly 144,000 full-time pipeline-related jobs.

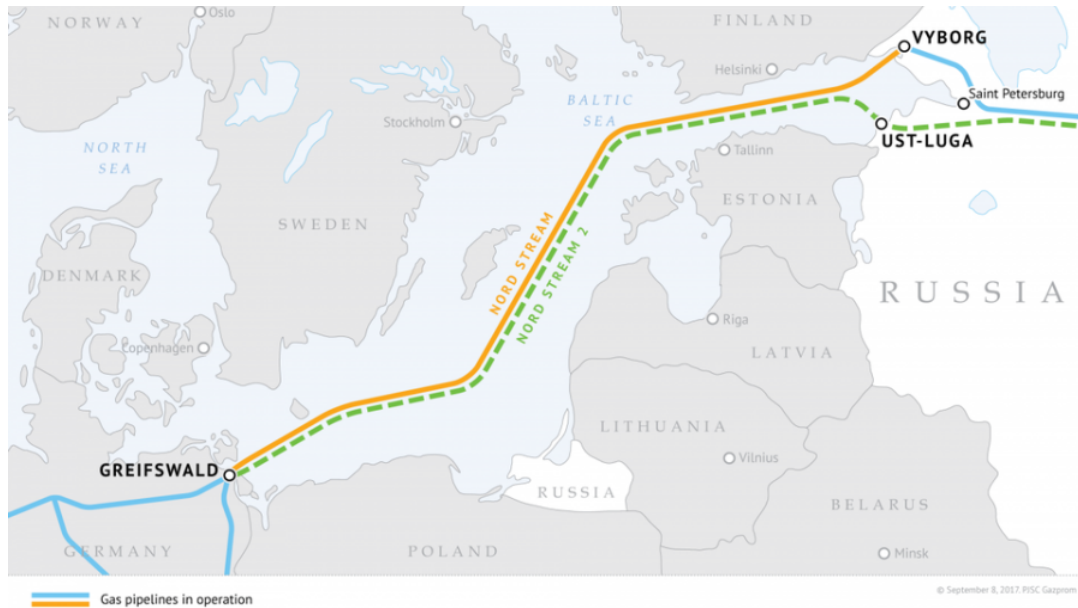


Image Courtesy of bne IntelliNews

Despite the tumultuous relationship between American president Biden and Russian president Putin, the former seems to have little objection to the European Union furthering its reliance on Russian energy. [President Biden](#) elected not to sanction the company behind the project, Nord Stream AG, even though engaged in sanctionable behavior, because the pipeline was almost complete. Sanctions would have a damaging effect on the United States' European allies, who stand to benefit significantly from the pipeline.



Image Courtesy of The New York Times

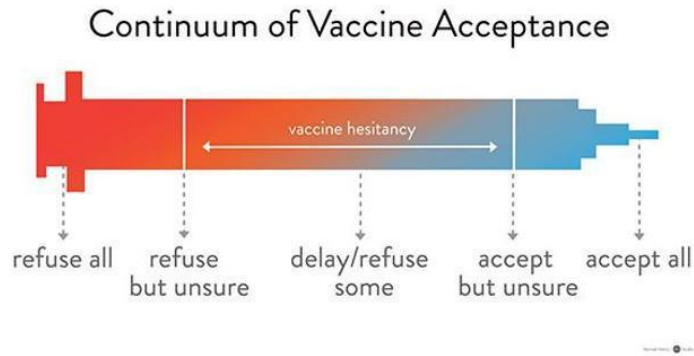
The United States has become increasingly reliant on Russian energy as well. Given the sanctions on Venezuelan crude oil and the reduced shipments from OPEC states, Russian oil and petroleum products have supplemented the United States' energy needs. In 2020, [Russian oil and refined products](#) accounted for a record high 7% of American oil imports and surpassed imports from Saudi Arabia. [Valero and Exxon Mobil](#) imported roughly 55 million and 50 million barrels of Russian oil in 2020, respectively.

Audience Choice Award

Intro to Vaccine Hesitancy

By Isabel Gerondelis

Vaccines are a [simple, safe, and effective way to protect people from harmful diseases](#) by using your body's immune system to build resistance. However, a large portion of people in the United States are hesitant to receive vaccines for various and complex reasons. Vaccine hesitancy is a term used to refer to the [reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines](#). Hesitancy exists on a wide spectrum, as the image below illustrates.



Vaccine hesitancy is different from anti-vaccination. People who are anti-vaccination, or anti-vaxxers, are people who [believe vaccines are unsafe and an infringement on their human rights](#). Vaccine skepticism originated in the 1970s when groups began to organize against the smallpox vaccine. There was concern about the [efficacy of the vaccine, religious objections, and concerns over personal liberty](#) as the government began mandating vaccines in certain contexts. In 1998, a study published by Andrew Wakefield in the reputable scientific journal *The Lancet* claimed that the MMR vaccine was linked to autism. It was later [revealed to be faulty](#), but the study heightened vaccine fear and concern.

Today, the main reasons for vaccine hesitancy can be grouped into 3 C's: confidence, complacency, and convenience.

- **Confidence** - refers to a [lack of trust in the safety of vaccines and in the healthcare system](#), such as the reliability of healthcare professionals and policy makers.
- **Complacency** - refers to a [low perceived risk of vaccine-preventable diseases](#), leading to the notion that vaccines aren't necessary. This is becoming more common as better technologies and healthcare continuously improve health.
- **Convenience** - refers to the [accessibility, affordability, language and health literacy](#) that is needed to understand information about the vaccine and to receive the vaccine.

These 3 C's and data about COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy can be used to explore the complex reasons behind vaccine hesitancy.

According to the [COVID-19 vaccine poll](#), what race/ethnicity group (Latinx, Black, AAPI, Indigenous, White) is most hesitant to get vaccinated?

Black people are the most hesitant, with [41% of poll respondents reporting hesitancy](#) about the COVID-19 vaccine. This is due to both confidence and convenience issues. There is a long history of [medical abuse](#) of Black bodies from slavery to the present day, ranging from the [Tuskegee Syphilis Trials](#) to everyday racism as Black peoples' symptoms are [continuously not](#)

[taken seriously](#). As a result, confidence in the healthcare industry is understandably lacking. Additionally, convenience is an issue as [many Black people work frontline jobs](#) and often can't take time off to get vaccinated. This is why it's important for employers to give paid time off to allow employees to receive vaccines. There is also still some confusion about who is eligible to receive the vaccine. According to the [KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#), lack of information about the vaccine, including eligibility, is still a determining factor of whether Hispanic adults get vaccinated or not.

What political party affiliation (Democrat, Republican, Independent/Other) is the most hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Republicans are the most hesitant, with [44%](#) indicating so when polled. This is seen as a result of vaccinations becoming politicized. Counties with the most vaccine-hesitant people generally also [voted for Donald Trump](#). Concerns are mostly around confidence and a sense of complacency. There's [uncertainty about side effects](#) and whether the vaccine is effective. Some also [don't think COVID-19 will impact them](#) and thus don't see a need for getting the vaccine. Confusion about mask mandates at the beginning of the pandemic helped spread misinformation about the virus and vaccine mandates are being pushed against with concerns over individual rights.

What age group (18-34, 35-59, 60+) is the most hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

The 18-34 age group is the most hesitant. According to KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor, around [¼ of 18-29 year olds want to wait and see](#) how the vaccine is working. Furthermore, a lot of information has been circulated about how harmful COVID-19 is to older adults. Complacency is part of this, as [less concern about younger generations](#) leads to thinking that vaccines aren't necessary for younger age groups. As a result, young adults are more receptive to the vaccine if friends have taken it, so peer networks play a large role. Lastly, a lack of public messaging about the vaccine on [social media](#), where Gen Z and Millennials get most of their information, is a missed opportunity to spread important information about vaccines to younger age groups.

What income bracket (<\$50,000, \$50,000-\$79,000, \$80,000+) is most hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

According to the poll, people who make less than \$50,000 are the most hesitant. This is mainly due to convenience issues. People with lower income brackets often don't have the time to go to a vaccination site. They often also have poorer access to transportation, which is needed to get to a vaccine center or doctors office. Some people also have [health issues, disabilities, and experience language barriers](#) which, combined with jobs and family duties, makes getting vaccinated a daunting ordeal. These lower-income jobs are also not as flexible and typically

remained in person throughout the pandemic, limiting the time that could be used to receive the vaccine.

Are urban, suburban, or rural residents generally more hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Rural residents are the most hesitant. About [60% of rural residents](#) in the poll said they already got the vaccine or were going to as soon as possible, compared to 71% of urban residents. This hesitancy falls into the complacency and convenience categories. For rural residents, getting the vaccine is [more of a personal choice](#). [39% say they aren't worried](#) about someone in their family getting COVID-19, compared to 23% of urban residents. Additionally, rural communities tend to have a [high percentage of people who are older](#), who lack health insurance, and who have limited access to healthcare facilities, which can all be barriers to vaccination.

Are college or non-college graduates more hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Non-college graduates are more hesitant, with [43% reporting hesitancy in the poll](#). Adults with a bachelor's degree or higher see the vaccine as safer and more effective. The Understanding America Study, found that people with less than a college degree believe in a [higher risk of a serious side effect](#) from the vaccine. Adults with college degrees are also more likely to know someone who is vaccinated, which helps to encourage their own vaccination.

How should we continue the conversation about vaccine hesitancy? It's important to listen to people's concerns and not shame those who are vaccine hesitant or anti-vaxx. Correcting misinformation about vaccines and possible side-effects is also very important. Personal healthcare providers are who the [majority of people turn to for advice about vaccines](#) so they are at the forefront of communicating accurate information. Speaking in a nonbinary dialogue, rather than limiting it to people who get vaccines versus people who don't is imperative in order to understand the broad continuum of vaccine acceptance. A person doesn't have to and likely won't go from skepticism to acceptance right away but any shift along the spectrum towards vaccine acceptance is still valuable. It's also important to recognize the role that medical institutions have played in historic racism to gain a better understanding of how Black and Brown people have been mistreated and why it results in hesitancy and skepticism today. Lastly, perhaps 'vaccine hesitancy' is the wrong phrase to use as accessibility, convenience, and institutional problems in the healthcare field are huge contributors to why people don't get vaccines.

Excellent In-Depth Research Award

The Northern Triangle

By Emmanuel Orozco Castellanos

The Northern Triangle Part 1: Introduction

The "Northern Triangle" comprises the three Central American nations of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Despite their small size, these countries have played an outsized role in U.S. foreign and domestic politics due to their strategic location in the Western Hemisphere. It is estimated that the U.S. has directly or indirectly intervened in Central America [nineteen times between 1898 and 1994](#). Traditionally, the U.S. has had a military presence in the Northern Triangle, particularly during the Cold War, as Washington supported counterinsurgency campaigns in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.



Source: [Europa](#)

In recent years, American involvement in the region has shifted to encompass a wider range of interests such as protecting trade, promoting human rights and economic growth, reducing emigration, combating drug-trafficking and corruption, and containing Chinese influence in the region. As a result, the U.S. has a uniquely intertwined relationship with the Northern Triangle, to the extent that the economic and political conditions in the U.S. have a major impact on the region and vice versa. Increasingly, emigration is shaping this relationship, as Central Americans escape violence and poverty. [With more than 3.5 million Central Americans living in the U.S.](#), the Northern Triangle economies heavily rely on remittances from abroad. [They make up 21% of the region's economic output](#). In addition, the number of Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans who migrate to the U.S. [has averaged 311,000 annually in recent years](#). The recent—and unprecedented—number of Central Americans seeking asylum in the U.S. attests to

the reciprocal relationship these countries have, and this interconnectedness will likely intensify in the upcoming years.

The most recent U.S. approach to migration from the Northern Triangle has been a combination of changes in immigration law combined with conditional development aid. The Trump administration placed an emphasis on reducing migration. After a spike in the number of migrants and asylum-seekers, President Trump demanded that the governments of northern Central America deter its citizens from embarking upon their journey to the U.S. and [signed "Third Safe Country" agreements](#) that obliged these countries to receive U.S. deportees. He also [dramatically reduced aid](#) to the region. Although the Biden administration has rescinded the asylum agreements, it has upheld this deterrence approach while increasing investment to ["address the root causes of migration."](#) President Biden recently [approved a \\$4 billion plan to reduce migration](#) by combating corruption and drug-trafficking and implementing development projects.

The Northern Triangle Part 2: Guatemala

Fact sheet

- Population: [17,422,821 \(July 2021 est.\)](#)
- Capital: Guatemala City
- System of Governance: [Presidential Republic](#)
- President: Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei
- Majority Language: Spanish
- Majority Religion: Roman Catholic
- GDP Per Capita: [\\$11,433](#)
- Global Freedom Score: [52](#)

Brief History with the U.S.

According to the Department of State, relations between Guatemala and the U.S. have been close, but are occasionally strained by human rights and military issues. The United States [established diplomatic relations with Guatemala in 1849](#), after the latter gained its independence from Spain and seceded from the Central American Federation. [In 1954](#), Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz put forward a comprehensive land reform, expropriating a portion of the land owned by the American United Fruit Company. Having close family ties to United Fruit, Allen Dulles, the Head of the CIA, and John Dulles, the then-Secretary of State, [devised a plan to destabilize Arbenz's government](#), which the Eisenhower administration believed to be a communist influence in the region and, consequently, carried out a successful coup.

In the 1960s and onwards, rebel activity against the Guatemalan government initiated a thirty-six-year long civil war. The insurgents were inspired by the success of Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba. During the Guatemalan civil war, the U.S. [provided military aid and training](#) to the Guatemalan government as it executed a counterinsurgency campaign against the rebels. American military and financial support for anti-communist regimes and proxy wars became more common in Central America as U.S. policy-makers became increasingly concerned with what they perceived as Soviet influence in Latin America. In 1977, U.S. President Jimmy Carter [suspended aid to the Guatemalan government](#) because of its alleged role in human rights violations. Congress became more restrictive with aid, requesting human rights improvements from recipient countries. However, [in 1982, President Ronald Reagan decided to continue the transfer of military aid to Guatemala.](#)

Three decades of civil conflict led to economic devastation and political instability. The death toll caused by the war is estimated to have amounted to [200,000 deaths, mostly indigenous Guatemalans, and thousands of people internally displaced](#), with the government [being responsible for 93% of the human rights violations](#). Many fled and moved to Mexico and the U.S. The Guatemalan population living in the U.S. [rose during the civil war from 13,785 in 1977 to 45,917 at the peak in 1989.](#)

In 1993, the United Nations sponsored a truth commission to put an end to the strenuous conflict, but the war left endless devastation. The commission found that the army was responsible [for the majority of the human rights abuses](#), and that indigenous peoples had [suffered the most](#). Historic peace accords were signed in 1996, finally ending the decades-long conflict. Nevertheless, the war-torn Guatemalan economy, coupled with the legacy of violence, pushed many to migrate to the U.S. seeking security and economic opportunities. By 2010, Guatemalans [were the 10th largest foreign-born population in the US.](#), and, in 2017, the number of Guatemalans in the U.S. surpassed [1.4 million](#).

In recent years, U.S. policy towards Guatemala has focused on curbing migration through development aid, economic integration, and anti-corruption initiatives. Since 2001, the U.S. government has provided [\\$2.6 billion](#) in foreign aid to Guatemala, which has been used to fund development and crime prevention projects implemented by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Inter-American Development Bank. The U.S. has opted for economic integration as a strategy to promote economic growth in Guatemala. In 2006, Guatemala joined the [Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement \(CAFTA-DR\)](#), exponentially strengthening the economic links between the two nations. In terms of governance, the U.S. was a critical supporter of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) (discussed below). Yet, the past two administrations have been involved in corruption scandals and mismanagement, which has undermined the U.S.-funded development programs. Guatemala's current president, Alejandro Giamattei, has been embroiled

in several corruption scandals. He was himself imprisoned as a result of [a CICIG investigation into extrajudicial killings](#). In addition, Giammattei's [approval of budget cuts for healthcare and education fueled violent demonstrations](#), just a few days after the hurricanes Eta and Iota hit the country in December of 2020.

Strategic Interests

- **Economic cooperation:** Since the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) went into effect, U.S. exports to Guatemala have [increased by 107%](#). The products that the U.S. imports from Guatemala [amount to almost \\$2 billion, making it one of the largest agricultural suppliers](#). Although the commercial balance used to favor Guatemala, the U.S. [has enjoyed a trade surplus in recent years](#). Guatemala is the United States' [43rd largest](#) trading partner.
- **Migration management:** Approximately [1.5 million people](#) living in the U.S. claim Guatemalan ethnicity. The migration of Guatemalans to the U.S. accelerated during the civil war and continued in the 2000s fueled by lack of economic opportunity, natural disasters, and family reunification. Guatemalans, unlike their neighbors in El Salvador and Honduras, have not been granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS). In response to the [2014 record surges in immigration from Guatemala](#) and the rest of Northern Triangle countries, the U.S. began to fund ambitious development projects that aimed to reduce emigration to the U.S. During his administration, President Donald Trump [prioritized security over the United States' traditional development agenda](#) by pressuring the Guatemalan government to deter Guatemalans from migrating to the U.S. and to accept repatriation flights. The current American Vice President, Kamala Harris, visited Guatemala this past June, promising to combat corruption in order to tackle migration and [told Guatemalans publicly not to come to the U.S.](#)
- **Drug-trafficking:** It is estimated that [1,000 megatons of cocaine are smuggled through the country each year](#), primarily destined for the U.S. market. According to the State Department, in 2017, Guatemala arrested [106 high-profile drug-traffickers](#). The current government fiercely opposes legalization of illicit drugs and has [doubled the budget](#) allocated to counternarcotics. In exchange, the United States [provides technical assistance](#) and supports capacity-building of the Guatemalan police forces and judicial institutions.
- **Anti-corruption and governance:** Since 2001, the U.S. [has worked to support](#) Guatemala's post-conflict democracy. The U.S. was a key sponsor of the U.N.-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), [providing crucial diplomatic and financial support \(\\$44 million\)](#) to this initiative since its inception in 2007. This anti-corruption commission was highly successful, contributing to the [conviction of several high-ranking officials, including former President and dictator Efraín Ríos Montt](#) for the crime of genocide committed against the Mayan peoples during the civil war. Guatemala became the first country to ever convict a former leader of genocide. The CICIG also brought corruption charges against former President Jimmy

Morales, who responded with attempts [to curtail the corruption investigations multiple times](#). The CICIG operated for twelve years until its collapse in 2019, when the Trump administration withdrew U.S. support in exchange for tougher migration restrictions, and Jimmy Morales refused to renew the commission's mandate.

- **Human rights:** The U.S. and U.N.-backed CICIG [investigated human rights violations that took place during the civil war](#), including sexual violence committed by the military. The commission also revealed that the military was involved in multiple disappearances during the armed conflict. More recently, [U.S. embassy officials have voiced concerns](#) about the Guatemalan government's refusal to work with specific sectors of civil society, in particular human rights activists, protectors of human trafficking victims, and advocates for the LGBTQ+ community and the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. In 2018 alone, [over 200 attacks](#) against human rights defenders were reported.

The Northern Triangle Part 3: El Salvador

Fact sheet

- Population: [6,528,135 \(July 2021 est.\)](#)
- Capital: San Salvador
- System of Governance: [Presidential Republic](#)
- President: Nayib Armando Bukele
- Majority Language: Spanish
- Majority Religion: Roman Catholic
- GDP Per Capita: [\\$4,187 \(2019\)](#)
- Global Freedom Score: [52](#)

Brief History with the U.S.

The United States first established diplomatic relations with El Salvador [in 1963](#). In 1979, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (abbreviated as FMLN according to its Spanish name) [emerged as a prominent guerrilla organization and entered a twelve-year long conflict](#) with the government of El Salvador. During the 1980s, the U.S. government [spent 4 billion dollars in military aid](#), funding the Salvadoran government's counterinsurgency campaign against the FMLN. The U.S. also trained the Salvadoran military and provided weapons for the war effort.

In similar fashion to the case of Guatemala, it became increasingly clear to the U.S. public that the Salvadoran government was engaging in egregious human rights violations. The most emblematic case was [the assassination of four American nuns](#) at the hands of Salvadoran forces. In 1992, [the U.S. supported a U.N.-mediated peace treaty](#), which ended the hostilities between

the Salvadoran government and the FMLN; the latter became a political party that still exists today. It is estimated that the civil war [led to 75,000 casualties](#), most of whom were civilians.

Many Salvadorans, overwhelmingly single males, fled the civil war and emigrated to Mexico and the U.S. in the 1980s. Many [formed their own criminal organizations](#) in southern California, such as the Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 gangs. Years later, the U.S. government deported them, unknowingly expanding these criminal webs to the Northern Triangle. This, coupled with El Salvador's war-torn economy and poor governance, bred unprecedented violence and crime. These conditions accelerated the migration of Salvadorans to the U.S.; consequently, [at least 20% of El Salvador's population lives abroad](#).

After decades of military rule and civil conflict, El Salvador managed to establish a relatively stable multi-party democracy. [Despite recurring tensions](#), the U.S. worked with two consecutive FMLN administrations; however, many challenges persist. In 2015, [El Salvador recorded a high rate of 105 murders per 100,000 people, the highest in the world](#) at the time. These staggering levels of violence, which continue to prompt millions to migrate to the U.S. every year, have been a main concern for U.S. policy-makers. [From 2013 to 2018, the U.S. allocated \\$496 million dollars](#) to support El Salvador's security, economic development, and governance. One of the primary goals of U.S. aid is to address the push factors that encourage Salvadorans to migrate north. Besides implementing development projects through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. government has invested in combating poverty and stimulating growth with the Millennium Challenge Corporation, [which amounts to \\$277 million dollars](#).

El Salvador's current president, Nayib Bukele, [has proven to be a reliable ally and has aligned his country's foreign policy with the U.S.](#) However, his occasional disregard for El Salvador's Supreme Court and Congress, as well as [his strategy to increase El Salvador's diplomatic proximity with China](#) have raised alarms in Washington.

Strategic Interests:

- **Trade:** The United States is El Salvador's main trading partner. El Salvador was the first country to sign the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). In 2019, the United States amassed [an \\$889 million trade surplus](#) with El Salvador.
- **Migration:** Migration has been at the forefront of U.S. relations with El Salvador. As of 2017, some [1.4 million](#) Salvadoran citizens lived in the United States, and [roughly half of them were undocumented](#). In addition, the Temporary Protected Status for Salvadorans is part of the current debate on immigration reform.
- **Corruption:** Major obstacles to the success of U.S. development aid are institutional weakness and corruption. Modeled after the CICIG in Guatemala, El Salvador

[established the International Commission Against Impunity in El Salvador \(CICIES\) in 2019](#). Supported by the U.S., CICIES prosecutors brought charges against three Salvadoran presidents and a former attorney general. It is estimated that [they stole more than \\$750 million dollars](#). Despite such an achievement, the CICIES is underfunded and lacks autonomy. In addition, there are concerns that Bukele, the current president, [has engaged in an under-the-table deal with gang leaders](#).

- **Combating Drug-trafficking:** Similar to Guatemala, El Salvador is a strategic passage used by narco-traffickers to trade narcotics. In 2019, former President Trump designated El Salvador as a ["major drug-transit" country for the ninth consecutive year](#).
- **Human Rights:** El Salvador's Supreme Court [overturned a 1993 amnesty law](#) in July 2016, so Salvadoran authorities [have recently begun to investigate mass atrocities](#) committed during the civil war (1980-1992), including the well-known massacre of El Mozote, where [U.S.-trained military forces killed almost 1,000 civilians](#). Since 2012, the U.S. government has tried [at least four former Salvadoran officials](#) for their involvement in human rights abuses during the civil war. In recent years, the government has turned to a ["mano dura" or "tough-on-crime" approach to counter gang activity](#); however, [critics point out](#) that these tactics have resulted in [overcrowding of prisons](#) and led to [human rights abuses](#) committed by law enforcement, and perpetrators are [rarely investigated](#). Lastly, President Bukele [has taken actions to restrict](#) the presence of journalists and human rights activists in El Salvador.
- **Diplomacy:** Under President Bukele, El Salvador has grown closer to China. In December of 2019, Bukele accepted a [\\$56.8 million donation](#) from Beijing during a presidential trip to China and severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan soon after. [U.S. State Department officials](#) note that ["China continues to push its Belt and Road Initiative in El Salvador."](#) The [Belt and Road Initiative](#) is an ambitious, long-term infrastructure plan to increase Chinese trade with the rest of the world. As a response, the U.S. publicly signaled disapproval for El Salvador's realignment with China, and [promised to invest \\$1 billion](#) in a new natural gas power plant in the country.

The Northern Triangle Part 4: Honduras

Fact sheet

- Population: [9,346,277](#) (July 2021 est.)
- Capital: Tegucigalpa
- System of Governance: [Presidential Republic](#)
- President: Juan Orlando Hernández
- Majority Language: Spanish
- Majority Religion: Roman Catholic
- GDP Per Capita: [\\$2,574.912](#)

- Global Freedom Score: [44](#)

Brief History with the U.S.

The U.S. established diplomatic relations with Honduras [as early as 1853](#); however, it was not until [the 1980s that Honduras became a critical ally for U.S. policy in Central America](#). Honduras was encircled by two countries swept by civil wars. Nicaragua, Honduras' southern neighbor, [entered into a violent revolution](#) between the revolutionary Sandinistas and the dictator Antonio Somoza. Similarly, in the southwest, [El Salvador experienced clashes](#) between the revolutionary Martí Front for National Liberation, also known as *Frente Martí para la Liberación Nacional* in Spanish (FMLN), and the U.S.-backed government. As Roberto Suazo Córdova, an outspoken anticommunist, assumed the Honduran presidency, [the country became a strategic ally for U.S. policy in Central America](#). It was in Honduras' [territory where the U.S. trained](#) "the Contra" forces (guerilla fighters), who attempted to oust the left-wing Sandinista government, as well as Salvadoran forces in their effort to dissolve the FMLN insurgency. In 1983, the U.S. military unit known as [the Joint Task Force Bravo settled in Honduras](#), which played a critical role for U.S. counterinsurgency activity during the Cold War. Eventually, this model of military coordination was interrupted in the late 1980s, when [Costa Rica mediated peace talks](#) that aimed to quell the armed conflict in Central America by restricting Contra activity and reducing U.S. presence in Honduras.

Historically, migration has been a defining feature of the United States' relationship with Honduras. The migratory flows from Honduras that the United States has witnessed recently can be traced back to 1998, when Hurricane Mitch, [one of the worst storms to ever strike the Western Hemisphere](#), resulted in [more than 11,000 deaths](#) and [displaced 1.1 million](#) people in Central America, with Honduras at the forefront of the devastation. The U.S. government responded in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch [by increasing development aid and establishing the Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\) for Hondurans](#). Today more than [79,000](#) Hondurans are TSP holders. The widespread poverty and devastation occasioned by Hurricane Mitch and staggering levels of gang violence have pushed Hondurans to migrate to the U.S.. [In 1996, after a change in immigration law, the U.S. exported street gangs to Central America](#) causing gang violence in Honduras [to increase](#). From 1995 to 2010, [crime rates nearly tripled](#). In 2012, Honduras broke records and led the world with the highest crime rate. In that year, [90 people were murdered for every 100,000 inhabitants](#).

Since the onset of the twenty-first century, the U.S. has pursued ambitious efforts to promote stability in Honduras, hoping to prevent migration. Honduras was one of the first countries to join the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which provided the government [with \\$215 million in aid to support economic development](#). A year later, Honduras entered the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). Both of these

initiatives were designed and funded by the U.S. government as [part of a strategy to address migration by promoting economic development and stability](#).

U.S. relations with Honduras [were strained during the country's severe political crisis in 2009](#). The two parties [backed a military coup](#), in which former President Manuel Zelaya was forcibly sent into exile in Costa Rica after he attempted to revise the constitution to allow him to run for a second term. The United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) [were quick to denounce the military coup](#) and demanded the return of Zelaya to power; however, the U.S. State Department opted for calling for new elections and refrained from using the word "coup," ultimately weakening [trust in the bilateral relationship](#). Since 2014, President Juan Orlando Hernández has been leading the country. In 2017, the U.S. government controversially sided with Hernández once again and backed his re-election, despite the opposition from the [OAS electoral observers and some members of the U.S. Congress, who declared the election to be fraudulent](#). In exchange, Honduras [has remained on board with contentious U.S. foreign policy positions](#), such as the transfer of the U.S. Embassy to East Jerusalem. The steady support the U.S. government continues to provide to the Hernández presidency, despite the disputed election, as well as credible accusations of corruption and drug trafficking, [has undermined the credibility of the U.S.-backed initiatives in Honduras](#).

More recently, the Hernández administration has been challenged by slow economic growth, high rates of crime, and rising migration. Recent U.S. efforts to reduce migration, tackle local crime, and promote development in Honduras [include CARSI \(The Central America Regional Security Initiative\), the Strategy for Central America Engagement, and the Alliance for Prosperity](#). More recently, the U.S. Agency for International Development [has invested \\$8.9 million dollars in assistance to respond to health, educational, and economic effects of the pandemic](#). There is disagreement over how successful U.S. aid has been, and U.S. development agencies [have been accused of failing to provide "meaningful metrics to measure progress."](#)

Strategic Interests:

- **Trade:** The total amount of trade between the two countries amounted [to \\$10.3 billion dollars](#). The U.S. is Honduras' main trading partner [and has run a trade surplus with Honduras since 2007](#).
- **Anti-corruption and governance:** The National Anti-Corruption Council, a recipient of aid from USAID, [estimates that corruption during the Hernández administration has cost Honduras \\$10.5 billion](#)—nearly the government's annual budget. President Hernández [cooperated with the U.S. and the Organization of American States \(OAS\) in the creation of the Support Mission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras or MACCIH](#), as it is known from its initials in Spanish. This anti-impunity commission was modeled after Guatemala's CICIG but with [a much weaker structure](#). Still, the MACCIH [managed to bring charges against 360 politicians, including President Hernández](#). Threatened with

conviction, many members of the Honduran Congress passed a law that [blocked anti-impunity efforts](#), which effectively overturned the charges in October of 2019. In 2020, President Hernández [decided not to renew the MACCIH's mandate, bringing about the commission's collapse in January 2020](#).

- **Drug-trafficking:** Honduras is a major transit country for illicit drugs. In 2016, [roughly 53% of South American cocaine bound for the U.S. was shipped through Honduras](#). Honduras has willingly cooperated with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in the establishment of anti-narcotic units and has supported aerial interdictions conducted by the U.S. Additionally, since Honduras signed an extradition agreement with the U.S., the Department of Justice has brought at least 25 Honduran narco-traffickers to justice, including President Hernández's brother, who was accused of "[state-sponsored drug trafficking](#)" for allegedly working with Mexican, Colombian, and Honduran cartels.
 - **Military cooperation:** Today, the Joint Task Force Bravo in Honduras remains crucial for U.S. intelligence operations in Central America. It [is comprised of 500 U.S. military officers and more than 500 American and Honduran civilians](#). Current operations focus primarily on disrupting drug trafficking, preventing gang violence, providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, and monitoring military operations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.
 - **Security:** USAID has designed local programs that focus on crime prevention. [According to recent assessments](#), communities where USAID implemented these programs reported 43% fewer murders.
 - **Migration management:** In 2018, a caravan of Honduran migrants caught the world's attention. It became a symbol for the massive migration waves that would follow. In 2019, [for example, apprehensions of Hondurans along the U.S. border reached a record high, representing 3 percent of Honduras' population](#). The U.S. government has made the reduction of migration from Honduras one of its top priorities, particularly during the Trump Administration, which [suspended development aid and demanded that Honduras deter its citizens from traveling to the U.S.](#) Hernández's government [signed a "Safe Third Country Agreement"](#), which the Biden administration rescinded. President Biden [has resumed disbursing development aid](#) but has upheld the deterrence approach in Honduras.
 - **Human Rights:** The U.S. government [has emphasized human rights promotion in Honduras since the 1980s, though some analysts argue that this goal has been subordinated to U.S. military interests](#). More recently, the U.S. has allocated an average of [\\$6 million per year](#) to the defense of human rights in Honduras, emphasizing the protection of human rights defenders, environmental activists, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.
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Excellent In-Depth Research Award

Historical Context for U.S. Housing Policy

By Samuel Kleven

Historical Context for U.S. Housing Policy Part 1: The New Deal Era

The HOLC and the FHA

The core pieces of legislation that make up current American housing policy began in the New Deal era. The wreckage wrought by the Great Depression led to widespread poverty and foreclosures. The moment was right for major steps to alleviate suffering. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt entered office on a tide of Democratic power, spawned by widespread agreement that the Hoover administration was to blame for the regulatory mistakes which caused the Depression. In 1933, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) [was established](#) to bail out defaulting home buyers by trading government bonds for delinquent mortgages.

The HOLC was accompanied by a set of federal agencies which were created to stimulate the housing market, the foremost of which was the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Created in 1934, the FHA provides mortgage insurance for loans that adhere to an established set of requirements, effectively [protecting against default, encouraging longer terms, larger sums of money, lower interest rates, and stricter construction standards](#). The FHA joined and was bolstered by the mortgage interest deduction, or the MID, which came into being in 1913, not to spur homeownership but as part of a general policy allowing businesses to deduct interest payments from loans.

With the introduction of [“mass tax” in the mid-1930s](#), the MID began to make an enormous impact. Joined by the HOLC and the FHA, it allowed homeowners to deduct vast amounts of money from their taxed income—money that they were pouring into expensive new mortgages. Without federal insurance, it would make little financial sense for banks to offer loans on such a scale because of the high costs of developing and maintaining housing. Additionally, the MID allowed homeowners to [accumulate vast amounts of equity](#) on their homes over the 25 years or so that they committed to pay off their mortgage. Moreover, homeowners could refinance their mortgage to extract equity to finance further purchases, thus operating as a forced savings mechanism that accelerated wealth at unprecedented rates.

When speaking of “generational wealth” in this country, the MID is the key mechanism at work. However, the benefits of the three-pronged support provided by the MID, the FHA, and the HOLC were not enjoyed by everyone. [Numerous historians](#) have documented the myriad ways in which a combination of FHA policy (which has come to be known as “redlining”) and localized racism excluded Black Americans from good mortgages in up and coming neighborhoods. Under

the ostensibly profit-driven justification that Black Americans were uniformly at “higher risk of default,” the FHA maintained mortgage underwriting standards that described "[the infiltration of inharmonious racial or nationality groups](#)" as a central factor in creating unstable neighborhoods.

The MID is currently by far the largest government subsidy directed at homeowners. It is also highly popular and enjoys support from a wide constituency, particularly business class elites and people who hold political sway. This is not surprising, as the subsidy applies only to homeowners who itemize their deductions, which is primarily middle- and high-income households; thus, rich families accrue the majority of the subsidy. Many advocates for the MID argue that it encourages homeownership, which has been shown to have numerous positive "[spillover effects](#)" through its creation of stable neighborhoods of consistent socioeconomic status.

G.I. Bill

As the MID and FHA programs began to gain traction with the American public, a second major policy initiative developed in Congress. The G.I. Bill of 1948 welcomed World War II veterans home from war with a sweetened version of the mortgage subsidy offered to other Americans. There was widespread consensus among policymakers that veterans returning home should receive political priority. The American Legion, a conservative and patriotic organization, introduced a set of proposals to Congress which included medical care, unemployment insurance, four-year college education, furlough pay, and home, and farm mortgages.

Once passed, the G.I. Bill enabled lengthy mortgages with even smaller interest rates and no down payments. The program ultimately fell under the jurisdiction of the Veterans Administration (VA), which, with veterans' interests in mind, instituted broad safety nets for default and foreclosure. Each year from 1950 to 1960, an average of [200,000](#) first time homebuyers were financed through the GI bill, which exceeded the number financed by the booming FHA program. The GI bill helped to create a stable and well-housed middle class, primarily located in suburbs and in urban neighborhoods composed of predominantly single-family homes. The policies were also friendly to banks and developers who were able to proceed with reckless abandon—buoyed by the sturdy backing of the federal policies. Absent a racial lens, the GI bill registers as a resounding note of success. However, recent attention has been given to racially discriminatory policies in the bill. Black Americans returning home from Europe were [systematically denied](#) entrance into the mortgage program—a move which is often contextualized as a necessary compromise with stingy Southern Democrats in Congress. While operating to improve the quality of life for many Americans, the GI Bill further expanded the gap between White and Black Americans by denying Black Americans a valuable wealth building tool.

Historical Context for U.S. Housing Policy Part 2: Public Housing

The US public housing program originated in 1937, as one of the last pieces of legislation included in the New Deal. Like the HOLC and the FHA, public housing was [initially aimed](#) at solving the problem of widespread homelessness and housing insecurity created by the Great Depression. Public housing had the additional virtue of allowing for large-scale construction in a single place, and was therefore wielded as a tool for infrastructure growth and jobs creation. For this reason, many of the initial public housing developments were [located near, and in service of, major construction projects](#). Public housing projects were managed and run by local housing authorities but funded entirely through federal capital grants. Rent collections from tenants were expected to cover operating expenses and future maintenance.

From the outset, political compromise and concessions created challenges for public housing. Rigorous lobbying from real estate interests and their conservative constituencies—mostly Southern Democrats—led to the agreement that public housing must be [markedly inferior](#) to private developments, both aesthetically and functionally. To ensure that these public developments would not compete in the private market, the federal government set low ceilings on construction costs. Additionally, public housing projects were [blatantly segregated based on race](#); developments preserved for White people were located closer to job sites and were given more funding to attract skilled workers. The Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in White developments enforced strict standards for residents, ensuring that they maintained orderly living spaces and stayed out of trouble with the law. For White people, the early years of public housing, though not luxurious, were a far cry from the current perception of derelict high-rises, ridden with crime.

Following the end of World War II, and the gains in White, middle-class homeownership generated by the G.I. bill, Congress commenced a period of accelerated public housing construction—set into action by the Housing Act of 1949. As generous mortgages and federal subsidies [built the suburbs](#), low-income Americans faced a shortage of affordable housing in urban areas. To address this problem, the 1949 Act authorized the construction of 810,000 public housing units over the next six years. It was during this time that many of the high-rise developments—such as the [infamous Pruitt-Igoe](#) in St. Louis—were built. These buildings are [famously deficient](#): devoid of decoration or amenity; set back from the streetscape; shoddy construction and dull architecture. Many current advocates argue, however, that the widespread publicization of public housing failures presented an inaccurate and grossly exaggerated account. They further argue that many developed units were smaller—mostly row houses and smaller apartments—and that the image of unsightly high-rises contributes to a stigma against public housing.

Stigmas aside, public housing has never been socially desirable. With the growth of FHA-insured mortgages, those who could afford to move did so (except for Black Americans), often to suburban developments. This meant that public housing residents gradually became [poorer and](#)

[less White](#). The median income of tenants fell consistently in the decades after public housing's conception. The promulgation of upper income limits and the eviction of middle-class tenants meant that by 1970, most tenants earned [less than 20% of the national median](#). Public housing gradually became synonymous with lower-class, harboring pockets of concentrated poverty. In addition, a Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled in 1935 that the federal government does not have the power to acquire local property through eminent domain. A lack of federal control afforded localities ample room to keep public housing out of desirable areas—whether that be by opting-out of funding for construction altogether, choosing construction sites near environmental hazards, or [strategically locating](#) sites in accordance with racial segregation.

In 1973, President Nixon issued a moratorium on the construction of new public housing, calling it "[monstrous, depressing places—rundown, overcrowded, crime-ridden](#)". Nixon effectively declared public housing a policy failure, prompting Congress to refuse to provide sufficient funding for upkeep and modernization.

This top-down declaration quickly morphed into consensus. In 1993, the federal government launched the [HOPE VI](#) to demolish and redevelop more than 150,000 public housing units. HOPE VI rode a wave of changes to the policing system known as the "broken windows theory" which argues that higher quality living environments, in which amenities are durable and repairs are made promptly (repairing broken windows, for example) reduce crime and engender socially-positive behaviors. In this vein, HOPE VI [sought to replace distressed public housing with mixed-income developments](#) with more aesthetically minded features designed to blend in with surrounding developments. Additionally, HOPE VI buildings had shallower subsidies and stricter tenant eligibility that took into consideration poor credit histories, the existence of a criminal record, and other applicant characteristics. HOPE VI marked the end of highly-concentrated public developments.

There are a few enduring themes to keep in mind when considering the history of the public housing program. The first is the question of concentrated poverty and its externalities. Even though the central aim of the public housing program has always been to serve low-income and housing-insecure Americans, it has long been understood that homogeneously low-income developments are harmful to the interest of residents. Concentrated poverty [gives rise to more violence, poorly maintained facilities, and other negative forces](#) that are endemic to poverty. The tension for policymakers is therefore between prioritizing the neediest citizens and improving life-outcomes for those served. A second and related tension has to do with a leniency in tenant behavior. While leniency—poor behavior and late payments—strikes many as the morally charitable stance, it can also give rise to harsher conditions. Public housing has operated, in effect, as a safety net for low-income Americans, and thus has had to tolerate many of the adverse behaviors that come with living in entrenched poverty. If unruly residents were given the boot, as would be needed to maintain an orderly environment, where would they go?

Historical Context for U.S. Housing Policy Part 3: The Fair Housing Act

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s cast light on the various sites of racism and discrimination imposed on Black Americans. Housing was no exception. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 was a turning point in the battle to ensure equal provision of housing benefits for all. From a legal standpoint, The Fair Housing Act prohibited housing discrimination in sales and rentals, outlawed Blockbusting, and enlisted the newly-created Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, in the task of enforcing these rules. The United States' sprawling Federalist system of local, state-level, and federal government—along with poor design—meant that the Fair Housing Act had relatively weak enforcement mechanisms, but it played an important role in elevating housing to a level of moral and legal concern, which opened the door for more federal intervention in the future.

The Fair Housing Act bloomed out of the Committee to Rebuild America's Slums which was established by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967 and aimed to eliminate substandard housing. It set a high production goal—the production or rehabilitation of 26 million over the next ten years—but fell into conflict over whether the housing would be provided through public or private means. The compromise that followed created Section 235 of the National Housing Act, which enabled HUD to pay private lenders of the FHA-insured loans the difference between 20% of the home buyer's monthly income and the monthly mortgage payment.

The Fair Housing Act also [lowered underwriting standards](#) to combat redlining. This policy led to some improvements in African American's ability to attain mortgages outside of the inner city, but this left further concentrated poverty in its wake. In addition, Section 236 enlisted the facilities of the private market in constructing low-income rental housing, mostly of the multi-family variety. HUD lowered the interest rates for the involved private companies to 1% on construction loans, and in exchange, the owner of the buildings agreed only to rent to households with incomes at or below 80% of the area median income and to subject the rent charged to HUD approval.

The Fair Housing Act also created legal standards to combat exclusionary housing policies. Most notably, in the court-ordered Gautreaux program (1981-1996) in Chicago, federal judges determined that the location of public housing projects [constituted intentional segregation](#). In [more than ten other cities](#) across the country, including Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Memphis, Minneapolis and Omaha, lawsuits levied by the local NAACP organizations resulted in changes to single-family zoning ordinances. None, though, were as successful or prominent as the Gautreaux program.

The legacy of the 1968 Fair Housing Act lies mostly in policies that it spawned, and in the broadened effort to address racial discrimination in housing. Politicians have repeatedly affirmed and strengthened the law, such as President Obama's 2015 [Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing](#) rule, which commits to "meaningful actions to overcome historic patterns of segregation, promote fair housing choice, and foster inclusive communities that are free from discrimination." However, federal judicial regimes have thus far refrained from using the law to consistently address local segregation.

Historical Context for U.S. Housing Policy Part 4: Section 8

Nixon's 1973 moratorium on the production of public housing marked the beginnings of a new consensus in U.S. housing policy: insufficient incomes and rising costs—e.g., affordability—constituted the major problem, rather than a physical shortage of units. This conviction, though not unchallenged at the time, led the federal government to fully commit to a demand-side approach with the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.

What has come to be known as [Section 8 vouchers](#) found its roots gradually, through a patchwork of policy initiatives and experiments. Ultimately, Section 8 has taken over as the dominant mode of federally subsidized housing, with over two-thirds of the Section 8 growth deriving from transfers from public housing. Vouchers operate by providing recipients with a subsidy to close the gap between 30% of their income and the cost of renting a unit on the private market. The options for rental have been constrained by various algorithms over the course of the program, but there are generally [three conditions](#):

1. Voucher holders must find an apartment on the lower-end of the price-spectrum as calculated by the Fair Market Rent (FMR) of the surrounding area;
2. The rental unit must comply with standards for physical adequacy;
3. The owner of the unit must agree to participate in the program, incentivized by the federal subsidy which ensures reliable payment.

Vouchers were initially championed by conservatives under President Nixon and struck progressives as a retreat from the era of strong federal influence in the housing market. Section 8 enjoyed support from the housing market lobby in Washington DC—most notably the National Association of Real Estate Boards, or the NAREB—because it generated an influx of reliable renters who could afford moderate pricing. On the other hand, most affordable housing advocates at that time supported public housing because they did not trust the private market. Over time Section 8 gained widespread support, particularly from social welfare-minded constituencies which hoped it could operate as a tool for economic and racial integration.

The court-ordered Gautreaux program, located in Chicago in the 1990s, provides a good case study of how and whether vouchers can work to deconcentrate poverty. The Gautreaux program created a lottery to select a set of Black households, which were given Vouchers accompanied by individualized counseling on the available affordable units and the benefits of living in affluent neighborhoods. [75% of the participants were relocated to suburbs](#), while the rest settled in primarily White urban neighborhoods. The results were dramatic, especially with regards to the suburban/urban divide. [27% of the children relocated to suburban areas ended up attending a four-year college, compared to only 4% of city children](#). While it is debatable whether it is a good thing for urban Black families to move away from neighborhoods where they have strong community and cultural ties, the Gautreaux program illustrates how suburban living improves various measures of well-being. It is important to note, however, that many scholars have questioned how generalizable these results are, given that the program is likely self-selected for more enterprising families.

Inspired by Gautreaux, the federal government launched Move to Opportunity, or MTO, in 1993. Unlike Gautreaux which took an explicitly race-based affirmative action approach, MTO focused on income. It was implemented in five metropolitan areas: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. The results were far less encouraging. Many participants remained in the city, often opting to attend the same school in the same high-poverty neighborhood. While the families expressed higher satisfaction with their home and were exposed to less violence, there was little if any improvement in education or economic flourishing.

While many journalists note that the main divergence between Gautreaux and MTO was the requirement in Gautreaux that participants relocate in suburbs, there is understandable reluctance from many urban residents to do so. Following the implementation of MTO, White, working-class suburban residents organized in fierce opposition, expressing [race-tinged](#) fear that public housing residents would enter their neighborhood.

Despite resistance to Section 8-driven economic and racial integration, many advocates continue to extol vouchers for their ability to move program participants to areas of higher opportunity. Pragmatic progressive critics, however, note that Section 8 is insufficient to solve the problem of low-income housing. Section 8 has failed to break out of its original form, which was crafted under the fiscally conservative leadership regimes of Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. Unlike other federal programs such as Medicaid and SNAP, Section 8 funding is capped at a set amount. Currently, only [one in four eligible parties receive vouchers](#), and every locality harbors lengthy waiting lists.

In recent years, concerns over landlords' amenability to vouchers have joined concerns over underfunding. From 2010 to 2016, over [10,000 landlords have backed out](#) of the Section 8 program, and have fought successive laws to outlaw this practice under the rationale of

unfettered choice. In a 2018 study conducted by the Urban Institute, two-thirds of landlords in five major cities said they would refuse to accept vouchers. While Section 8 vouchers are widely considered an effective tool, both historically and for the future, their success depends on other aspects of housing policy to provide affordable units.