

Colorado Political Science Review



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Political Science Research

What is the Status of Colorado's Political Opinions? A Brief Analysis of the Colorado Political Climate Survey

3/28/2024 • By **Deven Kukreja**

On the national, state, and even local levels, Colorado has been home to several highly contested elections that have had a ripple effect throughout the nation's political climate. The 2022 Midterm Election, for example, saw an intense battle between Republican incumbent Lauren Boebert and Democratic challenger Adam Frisch for representation of Colorado's 3rd Congressional District. Although Boebert retained her status as House Representative, the highly contested election came down to less than 1,000 votes (Verlee 2022). As reported by FiveThirtyEight projections ("2022 House Forecast" 2022), there was little to no expectation that Frisch would garner as much support as he did, and especially not almost win the district (Luning 2022). This one example among many indicates that Colorado's citizenry is truly passionate about elections. Capturing the voices of Coloradans is crucial in forecasting election results and any potential upsets that could affect politics on the national level, which is important heading into what is likely to become a highly contested 2024 general election.

Those important voices are exactly what the American Politics Research Lab (APRL) at the University of Colorado Boulder is measuring with their annual Colorado Political Climate (CPC) Survey and report (Sokhey and Mader 2024). As CU Ph.D. candidate and CPC Survey Report co-author Madeline Mader writes, "The CPC measures Coloradans' attitudes on a variety of state and national issues, and it is one of the few resources for measuring public opinion consistently over time in the entire state of Colorado." By measuring the voices of Coloradans on numerous relevant—and often controversial—topics, such as "political leaders and institutions, electoral fairness, economic conditions, social policies, and Colorado state ballot initiatives" and then reporting the results in an easily digestible manner via the CPC, the APRL provides an invaluable resource for both casual observers and scholars alike. This article aims to highlight the methodology of the CPC and several key insights gained from the survey that could affect the 2024 general election.

The results of the CPC survey were gained from an 800 person survey conducted by YouGov, one of the largest and most trusted polling firms in the United States today (Morris 2024). ~

As mentioned earlier, the CPC survey organized its survey results into relevant categories, several of which are connected to the upcoming 2024 presidential election. The first primary section asks the respondents who they would vote for if the presidential election were held at that moment. The survey shows an expected, yet close result, as Joe Biden maintains a 7% lead over Donald Trump (47-40), with the remainder of the respondents selecting the "Other" option. Biden remains in front of Trump with support from the woman-identifying demographic, as 49% of women say they will vote for Biden compared to Trump's 36%. Biden also maintains slightly stronger support from his partisan base, as 88% of Democrat voters support Biden compared to 85% supporting Donald Trump. However, there is a larger percentage of remaining Democrats that would plan on voting for Trump in 2024 when compared to Republicans who would vote for Biden (10-5), which would indicate that there is slightly more polarization in support for Trump in 2024. Regarding independent voters, Biden has a significant lead over Donald Trump. This finding is especially important heading into the 2024 election, as Biden has a much higher likelihood of securing Colorado by maintaining the independent vote. However,

there is still enough support from the Republican base, which could pose a legitimate challenge to the Democrats in 2024.

When looking at a generic ballot that consists of the choices of "Democratic Candidate," "Republican Candidate," and "Other" for a hypothetical U.S. House of Representatives election in respondents' districts, 49% of Coloradans would vote for the Democratic candidate compared to 42% who would vote for the Republican candidate, which is similar to the hypothetical 2024 election. However, when looking at the partisan split on the generic ballot, there is much more polarization in the Democratic party for a general House Representative than in President Biden. 94% of Democratic respondents would vote for the Democratic candidate in their district compared to Biden's 88%. While a small change likely will not sway the election either way, it is still worth noting that Biden is not as popular with his voter base when compared to a hypothetical candidate. On the Republican side, the rate of support for the hypothetical House Representative was almost identical to partisan support for Trump, as there were slightly fewer responses for the "Other" option and slightly more for the Republican option. The rate of Independent support for the Democratic, Republican, or "Other" option also remained almost identical, with support for the Republican candidate at 10% behind the Democratic candidates at 49%. These results indicate how partisan divides are still heavily embedded in Colorado's political culture, as Colorado is not an exception to the growing feelings of political polarization felt by voters spreading across the U.S. today (Kleinfeld 2023). The results also show how Independents may be the key to safely securing the victory for the Democrats in the 2024 general election or being the deciding factor in swaying votes toward the Republican candidates.

The survey shifted to Coloradoan approval ratings for key political figures and institutions. In particular, they asked respondents how they approved of how Biden was handling his role as President. The CPC reports that Biden has a 42% approval rating in Colorado, with 50% of respondents stating that they disapprove of Biden's handling of his job as President. These results, while not unexpected considering many of the domestic and international problems currently facing the U.S., indicate that Biden is not gaining much momentum heading into the election season. Coloradoans, specifically, are feeling the brunt of these domestic economic issues. Over 75% of respondents indicated that they were either concerned or very concerned about the cost of living in Colorado. Only 23% stated that U.S. economic conditions were excellent or good, while the remaining 77% stated that conditions were average, fair, or poor. These issues measured by the CPC had a fairly bipartisan response, indicating that Republicans are not the only ones unhappy with the economic issues at both the state and national levels. However, his 42% approval rating demonstrates the relatively high support of President Biden in Colorado, as Biden had a national approval rating of 37% as of February 2024 (Reuters 2024). Biden's higher approval rating in Colorado when compared to the national average, demonstrates how Colorado will most likely remain a Democratic stronghold in the upcoming 2024 election, barring any major surges in Trump's popularity.

The CPC then asked respondents about their trust levels in the 2024 election. To preface, when the CPC asked the respondents how often they would trust the federal government to act in the public's best interest, 49% selected "Rarely" or "Never." Democratic respondents were more likely to select "Most of the Time" or "About Half the Time" compared to Republican respondents, but these results were similar across partisan lines. On the national level, 52% of respondents agreed that national elections would be conducted fairly, while 32% disagreed and 16% were unsure. Republican respondents were fairly split between their trust in national elections; 41% of Republicans agreed that the elections would be conducted fairly, while 44% disagreed with that sentiment. Democrats were much more likely to agree with the initial claim, as 75% of Democratic respondents agreed, compared

to 16% who disagreed. Free and fair elections are one of the pillars of democracy (“Free and Fair Elections,” n.d.), so it may be alarming to citizens and political scientists alike that democratic institutions like elections are being questioned on their authenticity, whether or not claims of corruption are founded in fact. Furthermore, 59% of respondents agreed that all citizens could vote if they desired, and 51% agreed that the elections would reflect the will of the American populace. Heightened levels of distrust in government will pose a challenge to both candidates, with an especially difficult effect on the incumbent since Biden is the representative of the less trustworthy U.S. government in the eyes of many citizens.

Overall, the Colorado Political Climate Survey offers invaluable information on the attitudes of Coloradoans concerning several relevant issues and topics facing the state and the country as a whole. The annually conducted survey remains an essential tool not just for gauging opinions for the purpose of predicting elections, but also simply for anyone interested in how Coloradoans feel. The work that the American Politics Research Lab at CU conducts, especially the Colorado Political Climate Survey, is crucial in providing information about domestic policy and the opinions of the people that everyone can interpret and use for their own purposes.

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Opinion and Analysis

The Demise of Democracy in El Salvador

3/28/2024 • By **Kate Huntington**

With a murder rate of around 52 per 100,000 residents, El Salvador has long been recognized as one of the most dangerous countries in the world (Statista 2023). However, in 2019, a new administration took office intending to rid the country of this notorious reputation. Nayibe Bukele was elected president after running on the campaign promise to reduce the country's gang activity. Now five years later, President Nayib Bukele's extensive crackdown on gang membership is attributed to the country's revival. His popularity amongst the country's residents is unrivaled evident through his landslide victory with 84.7% of votes during his 2024 campaign (BBC, 2024). His party, New Ideas, also experienced a sweeping victory in the country's legislative assembly in 2021, allowing Bukele to implement major institutional changes during his first term as president.

Despite this widespread support, many are calling the legitimacy of Bukele's second term into question. In May 2021, halfway through Bukele's first tenure, the National Assembly, which had been overtaken by the New Ideas party, appointed new judges to the country's highest court. Subsequently, mere months later, the court granted Salvadoran presidents the ability to hold office for two consecutive terms (BBC, 2021). Fast forward 3 years and around half of Bukele's first term later and Bukele is the first Salvadoran president to exercise this newfound power, defeating his opponents for a second 5-year term. The New Ideas party also made massive gains in the country's congress, winning 54 out of the 60 seats. The adjustment from 84 to 60 seats, an initiative Bukele spearheaded during his first term, may be partly to thank for this massive advantage taken by the New Ideas party. Now that a super-majority of Congress aligns ideologically with Bukele and only 3 seats belong to members of an opposition party (ABC, 2024), Bukele has secured the $\frac{2}{3}$ vote necessary for approving changes that will assist his gang-stopping scheme among other plans (BBC, 2021). In other words, there are less legislative checks on Bukele's power.

As for the judicial branch, that too has fallen victim to Bukele's executive aggrandizement (Contreras, 2022). In 2021, the Legislative Assembly announced that judges over 60 or with at least 30 years served will "cease their functions" (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Bukele claimed that the approval of the bills is an act of "purification of the Judicial System" and a removal of corrupt judges (Labrador, 2021), however, the bills have no mention of this being the reasoning behind the forced retirement. The bills retire nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ of El Salvador's judges and open up around 200 spots for new, loyalist judges who will uphold the agenda of Bukele and New Ideas (Human Rights Watch 2021). The highest court, the country's supreme court has also been subject to changes by Bukele's regime- 5 judges from the supreme court and the attorney general have all been ousted (BBC, 2021). The former attorney-general, Raúl Melara, was terminated from his role due to his suspected connection with ARENA, a right-wing opposition group (Reuters, 2021). His successor, Rodolfo Delgado, was approved by the assembly with 66 votes and backed by New Ideas (Reuters, 2021). These revisions to the state's judicial branch further reduce the checks on Bukele's power.

Despite concerns regarding the survival of democracy in the country, it seems as though a majority of citizens are celebrating Bukele's second term. His crackdown on gang violence is praised by many. Salvadoran authorities state that the number of murders has decreased by 70% and that Bukele's prolonged state of emergency is credited as the leading cause of this (Reuters, 2024). Over 74,000

people have been arrested in the country on suspicion of having ties to gangs, proving to be both relieving to the country's citizens who can now enjoy peace of mind in the streets of their country, but also distressing for families of those who claim their family members were wrongly detained (The Economist, 2024). With over 8% of young men in custody, trying all of them will be a lengthy process, and because few trials have already commenced, many are left to wonder how due process will play out in Bukele's regime. Despite these concerns, the reduction of the homicide rate is undoubtedly commendable- until you consider the investigation led by the aforementioned former attorney general Raúl Melara, that is. His investigation claims that in 2020, members of El Salvador's largest gangs negotiated with Bukele's government officials in prison, where they exchanged better prison conditions and job opportunities for gang members for their commitment to keeping the country's homicide rate down (Elfaro, 2021). Bukele denied these claims (Sherman, 2021). Then in May 2021, Melara was removed from office due to his close ties to opposition groups. This isn't the only controversy stemming from Bukele's pursuit of ending gang violence. In 2020, in search of funds to finance a strong military and police force, Bukele made his way into the assembly along with a group of armed police. He aimed to get the assembly to pass a multi-million dollar loan that would support his plan for securing the country (BBC, 2020). The leader of the assembly in 2020 and a member of the National Coalition Party, Mario Ponce described Bukele's actions as an "attempted coup d'etat" (France24, 2020). Mario Ponce is no longer a member of El Salvador's legislative assembly.

The country of El Salvador is considered a "constitutional multiparty republic with a democratically elected government" (US Embassy, 2022). Anyone over the age of 18 may vote and the country is said to have free and fair elections according to observers abroad (US Department of State, 2009). Further, the country operates under a constitution that was established in 1983 (WIPO, 2014). Up until recently, the country has been dominated by two main parties, the Nationalist Republican Alliance and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. Bukele's presidential run with his newly founded New Ideas party disrupted this tradition, practically redefining the country as a one-party state (Perelló & Navia, 2022). As of 2020, the country's democratic institutions have earned it a freedom score of 66, or "partly free" (Freedom House, 2020). The country has been condemned by countries like the United States for undermining many democratic institutions. Still, Bukele has acquired unparalleled support not only from his constituents but from international onlookers. During a February 2024 visit to the United States, Bukele was cheered at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) as he urged conservatives to stand up against the "dark forces" of the country, claiming that El Salvador was an example of what happens when the dark forces take over (Licon, 2024). While some argue that Bukele's actions are a step away from democracy, the Salvadoran president claims that the country had not known democracy until him and when asked about a possible third term, Bukele stated that Salvadorans have the right to amend the constitution to allow for this (The Economist, 2024). Currently, the constitution only permits presidents to hold two terms, but based on what has been observed, that can surely be subject to change.

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A Social Constructivist Analysis of the Afghanistan War

3/28/2024 • By **Nikhitha Garaga**

The War on Terror has pervaded socio-political rhetoric in the United States for over two decades, intermingling itself over time with the Western democratic ideal, permeating domestic policy and foreign relations. Simply put by Muhammad Ishaque Khan, a scholar of Peace & Counterterrorism Studies, “Afghanistan is an enigma, and no one has yet reached the key which may resolve it” (Khan 2021).

As such, I will not attempt here to offer a decisive analysis of the Afghanistan War, as that would be painfully reductive, but to examine the US’s strategy under the lens of Social Constructivism, which can be defined as the “idea that individuals within societies construct the ‘realities’ of their identity and interest through the dynamic processes of social interaction and social definition” (Wendt 1992). This view acknowledges that social reality plays a crucial role in interactions between logical decision-making actors with competing preferences, proving particularly useful to explore the cultural nuance of Western hegemony, liberal intervention, and democratization.

When the United States abruptly ended its 20-year military and civil presence in Afghanistan under the order of President Biden, Kabul immediately descended into the control of the Taliban amidst disturbing reports of chaos in the sudden absence of American institutions and security forces (Stewart 2021). The Americans left Afghanistan having achieved its immediate goal - the complete destruction of Al-Qaeda, yet, public opinion of the invasion overwhelmingly expressed tepid disillusionment, painting the picture of the United States fleeing with its tail between its legs after overstaying its welcome.

Boots hit the ground in Kabul, Afghanistan under the name Operation Enduring Freedom for the first time in the aftermath of the 9/11 Attacks on the Twin Towers by Al-Qaeda (CFR 2024). President Bush famously remarked “Either you are with us or against us” (“President Declares ‘Freedom at War With Fear,’”2001) – a threat not only to terrorist syndicates, but to the United States’ allies abroad. The message was clear: the United States was willing and able to act unilaterally in a manner that was both unprecedented and unparalleled, and anyone unwilling to cooperate was not only an enemy of the United States’ goals, but an enemy of the liberal world order.

It’s needless to say the United States has enjoyed substantial influence in the international system since the end of World War II, but this shift in approach marked its entry into total, unperturbed ideological hegemony. America was preparing to carry out its modern Manifest Destiny, with “democracy as a mission to transform the nature of the international political system” (Younus 2024). The United States had ceased to behave as an actor bound by international norms and law, but as the self-proclaimed architect of a new global democratic order.

Regime change in Afghanistan and installing a stable democratic politic was a developed intention of the twenty-year occupation, offering geostrategic, economic, and ideological value to the United States. Afghanistan physically occupies crucial territory in Central Asia, bordering untapped oil reserves and proximate to critical regional actors – Iran, China, and Russia (Khan 2021). The installation of a friendly democratic government in Afghanistan was a long-term goal, meant to outlast American military presence in the nation and continually serve Western means and ends.

Missteps in the discourse narrative of American presence in Afghanistan blossomed into tangible weaknesses as the new democratic infrastructure was built. The American-backed government in Afghanistan was quickly marred with reports of corruption, inefficiency, and general incompetency (Vittori 2021). The new government also crucially failed to consider the regional dynamics of Afghanistan – the central Kabli government had a low capacity to provide government services to remote villages and towns. Historically, Afghans have been more loyal to local leaders rather than national leaders, with a national identity having been cultivated largely through religious unity under Islam (Younus 2024). There was general agreement amongst Afghans that the government was perhaps out of its element: unable to function effectively and inherently incompatible with its environment.

The American approach to governance in Afghanistan was reductively monolithic - fueled by the potential construction of the “modern Afghan” society through liberal intervention. The US-backed government aimed to “civilize” the native Afghans via democratic infrastructure, essentially installing a government that would socialize Afghans to descriptively American political ideals including liberty equality, private ownership, individualism, free trade, and the rule of law (Younus 2024). However, the US critically failed to adapt to the existing socio-political norms of Afghanistan, exposing the cultural incongruency of liberal interventionism. US-Afghanistan relations consistently operated under the inference of Western socio-political dominance: the assumption that stability in Afghanistan could be achieved via democratic installation alone.

Throughout the US occupation, the government’s institutional inability to provide government services effectively and its ideological incongruence with the established social norms exposed weaknesses that were quickly exploited by remaining Taliban forces in the region.

In 2009, approximately half of Afghans reported sympathies for armed opposition groups, mainly the Taliban (CFR 2024). This can be attributed in one part to general discontent with the US-backed government and to the Taliban’s narrative of the Western occupation; that the Afghan identity was being endangered by foreigners who had installed an alien government that served its own agenda, not that of the Afghan people or of Islam.

Subsequently, the Taliban launched an ideological campaign under the concept of Jihad (a struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam). They framed themselves as the preservers of the Afghan tradition against the onslaught of Western interference that hoped to strip them of their national identity (Younus 2024). Although general Afghan support for the Taliban or other militant groups waned approaching the 2021 withdrawal of US troops (CFR 2024), the Taliban enjoyed particular popularity in remote villages and among religious-ethnic minorities (the particular groups being underserved by the existing government) (Younus 2024).

Once militarily driven out of Afghan territory, the Taliban had once again garnered notable political notoriety and was invited to the negotiating table by the United States in February 2020 to reach a peace agreement (CFR 2024). This was a notable departure from Bush-era rhetoric that lauded unitary American hegemony, with President Bush famously remarking that the United States doesn’t “negotiate with terrorists” (ABC 2002), and perhaps an admission that the United States’ military might was simply not enough to achieve the societal transformation in Afghanistan that the Americans had envisioned. The peace deal called for a gradual reduction of American troops in exchange for the Taliban agreeing not to conduct terrorist activities on Afghan territory.

Despite reaching an agreement for measured peace, US troops and Taliban forces almost immediately engaged in combat when the Taliban launched dozens of assaults on Afghan security forces, prompting the US to respond with air strikes in Taliban strongholds (Rahim 2020). Taliban leaders argued that American presence in Afghanistan inherently communicated a narrative of undue foreign occupation and advocated for the reconstruction of the Afghan government through an Islamic system.

The Taliban and the US-backed Afghan government eventually re-engaged in lasting peace talks again in 2020, both expressing a desire to end violence in Afghanistan and to build a framework to allow for the departure of US troops (CFR 2024). In November 2020, the United States announced its plan to withdraw half of its troops before the inauguration of President Biden, with Biden announcing in April that the United States would not meet the deadline set under the U.S.-Taliban agreement and released a plan for a full withdrawal by September 11, 2021, ending the two-decade war. In August of 2021, the Taliban insurgency took control of Kabul with little resistance from both Afghan and US security forces (CFR 2024).

Reflecting on the end of the US's involvement in the Afghanistan War, President Biden expressed that the United States “should learn from its mistakes” and that the withdrawal marks the end of “an era of major military operations to remake other countries” (“Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan.” 2021). As such, the United States tepidly walked away from its bold plan to establish a new liberal world order, acknowledging that the dreams of its “modern Manifest Destiny” were perhaps impetuously carried out.

The Western liberal model simply was not as one-size-fits-all as the United States had initially assumed, predicated on the shallow assumption that Afghan society needed to be modernized into Western ideals to achieve lasting peace. Not only was this approach inherently dehumanizing, but the inability of the US-backed government to institutionally acknowledge the Afghan tradition and sociopolitical norms with equity became its Achilles heel. The installed government failed to garner legitimacy from the Afghan people, failed to deliver crucial government services, and ultimately failed to introduce democratic ideals and lasting peace to Afghanistan. Taliban forces utilized this discontinuity in its insurgency efforts, and the United States, who once announced its bold plans to end terrorism in whatever way it deemed fit, was left with little choice but to reflect on its imprudence.

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Civic and Political Engagement

Political Science Department Hosts First Annual Civic Engagement Fair

3/28/2024 • By **Franny Willardson**

The Civic Engagement Fair was held at the UMC at the University of Colorado, Boulder. At this event, there were two keynote speakers and multiple booths about ways to get involved in the community. Civic engagement is important because it can change the outcome of elections and inform citizens about local issues. Young people should feel more motivated to participate in their community because election decisions will have a large impact on them.

The two keynote speakers were Marta Loachamin and Molly Fitzpatrick.

Marta Loachamin started off her career here at CU Boulder. She was a full-time student while working in the restaurant industry and graduated with a degree in Ethnic Studies. After college, she started working at a bank learning more about the complicated financial system in the United States. In the US, not many of us are fully aware of the financial system and what access to credit scores means.

After that she moved into the mortgage field, helping people buy homes. The process of buying a home can be daunting if you are not familiar with the process. Loachamin also noticed how the home-buying process is another systematically racist institution where people of color are less likely to be treated the same and be approved for a home loan.

After starting at grad school to become a teacher, she had to leave school for a time because of the pressures of supporting her family, but was able to come back and finish her degree in education.

Loachamin started Resiliency for All, a data assessment firm to determine barriers to access to local governments and other agencies. Resiliency for All strives to help bridge the gap between the Latino population of Boulder County and help make these agencies more accessible. One of the recommendations is providing more guidance to attempt to remove the barriers put in place by the system.

The second keynote speaker was Molly Fitzpatrick, a County Clerk overseeing elections, motor vehicles, and recording. Her goal is to flip the narrative that our government doesn't care and is slow. As a County Clerk, Fitzpatrick has had over 100,000 motor interactions since being elected in 2018. She believes that the most important way to make change is to vote. Voting can change who is in the seats of local governments, and who can create large changes for communities.

The Know Your Voting Rights campaign in Boulder County is to ensure that people are aware of their right to vote and when elections are coming up.

The Civic Engagement Fair was attended by around 100 students, who were able to learn about ways to get involved in the community with organizations like Boulder County Boards and Commissions, League of Women Voters, Bridge USA and more. The Civic Engagement Fair highlighted the importance of being involved. By being involved in your community, you can make change just like Loachamin and Fitzpatrick.

Keller Corner and Supreme Court

An Introduction to the Supreme Court

3/28/2024 • By **Makayla Gardner**

The U.S Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court, which is the highest court in the country, holds nine elected justices appointed by the sitting president that are then approved by the senate. Yet many cases are not covered unless thought to be a historical moment for the country. However, there are many other cases that are important too and may have an impact on our community. That's why the Keller Corner on the Supreme Court was created.

Meet The Justices

Below are the Supreme Court justices that work day in and day out among their staff selecting the few cases of which they believe to be the most critical to hear.

John Roberts, who is the current chief justice, attended both Harvard for his undergraduate degree and his law degree. Justice Roberts started out as a law clerk working his way up the ladder to a Judge on the United States Court of Appeals which ultimately got him nominated to the Supreme Court by President George W. Bush (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Clarence Thomas attended the College of the Holy Cross for his undergraduate degree and received his law degree from Yale Law School. After an impressive higher-up law position in Missouri, he became a Judge on the United States Court of Appeals leading to his nomination for the Supreme Court by President George W. Bush (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Samuel Alito attended Princeton University for his undergraduate degree and then went on to receive his law degree from Yale Law School ("Judicial Nominations – Justice Samuel A. Alito,"). After graduating with his law degree, he quickly climbed the ladder through positions in the federal courts before being nominated to the Supreme Court by President George W Bush (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Sonia Sotomayor attended Princeton University for her undergraduate degree graduating with the highest of honors bestowed upon by the school. Right after graduating from Yale Law School, she became Assistant District Attorney. After a career in both the District Court and the U.S Court of Appeals she was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Bill Clinton (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Elena Kagan attended Princeton University for her undergraduate degree, then went on to graduate from Oxford with a master's in philosophy. She then continued her education by receiving her law degree from Harvard Law School. After both an impressive career practicing and teaching law she was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Barack Obama (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Neil Gorsuch attended Columbia University for his undergraduate degree and received his law degree from Harvard Law School, as well as a Doctorate in Philosophy from Oxford University. After both a career in higher up law offices as well as teaching law, he was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Donald Trump (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Brett Kavanaugh attended Yale University for his undergraduate degree and continued to Yale Law School to receive his law degree. After working his way up the ladder in the U.S Court of Appeals, working in a law firm and for the White House, he was eventually nominated for the Supreme Court by President Donald Trump (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Amy Coney Barrett attended Rhodes College for her undergraduate degree and then went on to receive her law degree for Notre Dame Law School. After career advancements she went back to Notre Dame to teach law before becoming a Judge in the U.S Court of Appeals. She was then nominated to her current position to the Supreme Court by President Donald Trump (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

Ketanji Brown Jackson attended Harvard-Radcliffe College and continued to Harvard Law School graduating in high honors from both colleges. After an impressive career in both higher up federal courts as well as private practices before becoming a U.S Court of Appeals Judge then being nominated to the Supreme Court by President Joe Biden (Supreme Court of the United States 2022).

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Foreign Policy and International Affairs

The Exclusion of Wealth Within Developing Countries

3/28/2024 • By **Preston Meyer**

Out of approximately 195 countries, there are 152 developing countries in the world. An estimated 6.74 billion people in total live in these developing countries; an outstanding number when comparing the global population of a little over 8 billion people. Why do the vast majority of countries hold so little of the spread of wealth? The journey that a country takes to become a developed country is not smooth sailing, there are many political, economic, and historical factors that impede progress; these factors have made it increasingly difficult for poor countries to develop while the factors in place disproportionality prioritize richer nations' interests.

There are many aspects that play into the development of countries. Regions that are located in tropical, resource rich locations are more susceptible to a slower rate of economic development (Park, 2023). What role do other developed countries play in this? One suggestion is that tropical regions that are rich in natural resources are a very admirable location for developed countries to capitalize on. Looking for a quick way to extract resources, exploit the land and its inhabitants; these developed countries will colonize the area. This leads to a development of extractive colonialism within that country. These colonies, as opposed to settler colonies, where strong institutions were set in place for the incoming inhabitants, relied on exploitative practices that profited those with the ruling power. "Colonizers whose focus was on extracting resources from the colonies plausibly set up weak institutions with poor property right protections to facilitate this extraction" (Dell, 2017).

The legacy of these weak institutions have perpetuated into the very structure of economic development within countries that had previously been an extractive colony. Once a former colony becomes its own state, it can take a long time for the state to shift their economic structure into one that benefits its own economy. "Newly independent governments often lacked governmental institutions, good governance skills, and the governing experience needed to effectively rule their newly sovereign nations" (Marker, 2016).

In the case of the Belgian Congo, there were few educational or political opportunities available to the Congolese people; Belgium stuck to practical education: teaching people for trade and not skilled labor that would prove to be important. The Congolese people were in no shape to be able to govern their own state, but after four years of the independence movement, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was declared a sovereign state. Once independence was acquired, there were only 16 university graduates, no lawyers, no doctors, and no engineers. (Chester, 2023). Upon independence, they were set up to fail; subsequently experiencing years of political instability, a military coup, and economic turmoil. Still to this day, the DRC is "...among the five poorest nations in the world. In 2022, nearly 62% of Congolese, around 60 million people, lived on less than \$2.15 a day. About one out of six people (live) in extreme poverty" (Overview, 2023).

Another key factor that negatively disrupts the development of developing countries is the interactions between Multinational Corporations and their host countries which are typically developing. To begin, a brief explanation of FDI: An FDI is an investment in a foreign country via the acquisition of a local facility or the establishment of a new facility. These investments abroad are particularly attractive because it brings a corporation into a much larger market than their domestic counterpart; larger

markets mean more profits generally. When investors go abroad, they gain access to the local market and its resources. Corporations view foreign markets as a great place to invest; developing countries have cheaper labor-costs compared to developed countries, corporations are willing to outsource their company where they can earn higher profits at a smaller cost to the firm. So what do they do? They bring their corporation abroad and establish a facility where they can make higher profits than before; effectively becoming a Multinational Corporation (MNC).

All seems to be well, the MNCs are able to make profits while the host country of the MNCs are able to acquire new jobs and are enabled to join the world market. However, these MNCs are now competing with domestic firms. MNCs are, in part, much larger than any developing countries firms that produce a substitute product. Since MNCs products have been outsourced, the product will most likely be cheaper than the domestic product; the domestic firm incurs losses. "This not only depletes jobs as these businesses close down, but also strays customers away from supporting these businesses" (Scott, 2022). Even worse, those profits the MNCs make do not fully go back to the host country; there is repatriation: the profits that the MNCs make go back home. With the implementation of MNCs, Least Developing Countries, or LDCs are making substantial losses.

International trade agreements between developed countries and developing countries can also interfere with the growth of developing countries' economies. In the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement, (NAFTA) Mexico's newly opened borders harm the domestic farmers within Mexico. Authors Gonzalo Fanjul and Arabella Fraser argue that The Mexican corn sector is in acute crisis because of the influx of cheap subsidized corn imports from the US. Poor Mexican farmers cannot compete against US producers, who receive \$10bn a year in subsidies (Fanjul, 2003). Because of the NAFTA agreement, the US agricultural sector is essentially dumping their corn onto Mexico, creating drastically low prices for corn for Mexicans and causing the farmers who export corn to lose profits. However, because this benefits the U.S, there is no incentive for the U.S to stop this practice.

Democracies have been shown to promote greater development as opposed to differing regime types. Democracy "fosters higher GDP by enacting economic reforms, improving fiscal capacity and the provision of schooling and health care, and perhaps also by inducing greater investment and lower social unrest" (Acemoglu, 2019). However, there have been many instances where democratically elected leaders within developing countries have been overthrown in order to promote the economic interests of developed countries. This disrupts the economic potential of those developing countries who now have been forced to shift away from a democratic regime; All of the benefits seen from democracies that Daran Acemoglu has provided are effectively obsolete. Many of these obstructions to democracy have been covered up by the guise that developed countries are dismantling regimes to fight communism, which makes it more difficult to address the issue of hindering development since the real cause has been hidden under a facade.

The United States has been a predominant perpetrator of overthrowing democratically elected officials and governments in order to promote their own economic interests. In the case of the Guatemalan Coup of 1954, the democratically elected leader, Jacobo Arbenz was overthrown by a military coup organized by the CIA called PBSUCCESS. The reason why the US was so interested in the domestic politics of Guatemala was because the United States firm, United Fruit Company, now known as Chiquita, controlled 42% of Guatemala's land and did not have to pay taxes or import tariffs. The United Fruit Company controlled much of Guatemala's private firms, "The company owned all of Guatemala's banana production, monopolized banana exports, and also owned the country's telephone and telegraph system, as well as almost all of its railroad track - while brutally repressing

farm owners”(Bensaid, 2019). Arbenz proposed the “Decree 900” which effectively weakened the United Fruit Company by expropriating “225,000 acres and made them available to rural workers and farmers” (Ibid). Worried about their profits, many members of the Eisenhower Administration who were also shareholders or associated with the United Fruit Company saw Arbenz’s policies as an attack on the interests of the company. Through the CIA, the United States government was able to overthrow the government and helped a Guatemalan military leader, Carlos Castillo Armas to assume power. Under the Dictatorship of Castillo, Guatemala proceeded to ban trade unions and returned over 1.5 million acres of land to the United Fruit Company. The United States backed coup in Guatemala productively hindered the development of Guatemala’s domestic economy and benefited the interests of American coffers.

The United States’ involvement in Guatemala persisted long after the coup of 1954. From 1960 to 1996, Guatemala fell into a civil war; with leftist guerrilla fighters fighting against the dictatorial government. The 36 year long conflict had devastating economic effects as well as many human rights abuses. Hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans and indigenous people were murdered during the civil war. In 1977, Jimmy Carter tried to pressure Guatemala to stop the abuses by banning the sale of military weapons to Guatemala. However once Ronald Reagan became president all the efforts of Carter were reversed. Reagan productively lifted the trade embargo, provided financial support, and assisted in military advising (Gaffey, 2020). The origins of the civil war in Guatemala is embedded with the interactions of the United States. The deaths and economic turmoil that the war caused is to be blamed solely on the U.S Government. Gaffey continues to say that “The U.S. knew exactly what was occurring in the Guatemalan civil war and instead of intervening to help avoid the genocide, the U.S. stood idly by”(Ibid). Instead of helping Guatemala’s political and economic stability, they undermined it; Entirely in favor of the monetary interests of American firms and individuals.

International systems that are in place also impede the development of developing countries. These institutions favor the economic growth of more developed countries who oversee the committees and provide a disservice to developing countries. Two main international institutions: The World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund are examples of said institutions that appear to assist developing countries but fail to do so and disproportionately favor developed countries.

The World Trade Organization, or WTO, has policies that favor developed countries over developing. Under the WTO’s “most-favored-nation” all countries are treated equally in trade. For developed countries this is fine, they have the maturity to be able to adapt to those terms. But for developing countries, it causes adversity. “Under the WTO rules, developing countries are prohibited from following the same policies that developed countries pursued, such as protecting nascent, domestic industries until they can be internationally competitive”(Top, 2000). Because of this, developing countries cannot implement certain trade practices that would be beneficial to them like the Infant Industry Argument says they are justified to do. The Infant Industry Argument justifies “that new industries require protection from international competitors until they become mature, stable, and are able to be competitive” (CFI-Team, 2022). Developing countries need these protections because they are in no way able to compete with the developing countries industries. If they had protections such as tariffs on imports and production subsidies they are more likely to build a stronger economy than without them. The WTO actively prevents developing countries from attempting to level the playing field against the larger industries of the developed countries.

The WTO also highlights the relative powerlessness that developing countries have compared to developed countries. The WTO provides developing countries with little to no power when it comes

to decision making. This leads to decisions that diminish potential economic growth seen by developing countries. Author Aileen Kwa, argues that because many of the developing countries of the world depend on the United States, EU, China, Japan, and other strong economic institutions in terms of imports, exports, aid, and security, they usually consider their obstruction of a consensus at the WTO too much of a threat to their overall well-being and security (Kwa, 2005). Instead of advocating for policies that promote developing countries' economies, they are practically bullied into submission to agree on policies that promote the interests of developed countries.

By using the WTO's power, developed countries are able to overpower and undermine the developing countries, ultimately worsening the collective action problem. Kwa also argues that the WTO's trade negotiations are based on the principle of reciprocity, or a trade-off (Ibid). These negotiations are more harmful to developing nations because they have less of a diversified economy to rely on for trade; they only have a few things they can trade and typically those are the areas of interest that they want to protect. The larger more diversified economies of developed countries are able to trade-off more without harming their own economies in the process. Kwa states that it is known in WTO circles that developing countries almost never barter for benefits, but usually relent to the requests of the developed countries (Ibid). The WTO, the institution that ensures that trade is free and equal, clearly doesn't seem to be accounting for the developing countries. The WTO supports the interests of developed countries, who, in fact, were mainly involved in creating the GATT and WTO in the first place.

The other institution that hinders the development of developing countries is the IMF. The International Monetary Fund, whose goal is to achieve sustainable growth and prosperity for all of its 190 member countries (IMF, 2022), does so in a way that disproportionately benefits developed countries and obstructs potential development of developing countries. A large criticism of the IMF is that the loans that the IMF provides, specifically to developing countries who cannot pay off their debts contain harsh conditionalities that do more harm than the loans do good. These conditionalities are economic reforms that are attached to IMF loans. The conditionalities can be far-reaching in areas even beyond the financial market, such as privatization, trade liberalization, and austerity measures. Author Thomas Stubbs as well as his other colleagues conducted a study to find out that "greater austerity leads to greater income inequality and higher poverty" (Stubbs, 2022). The IMF's seemingly helpful loans do not provide any benefit to the economic state of developing countries; In fact, they provide a disservice. Due to the Bretton Woods Conference held by the global powers, The IMF was created in a position that only serves to benefit those who created it. Developed countries are able to pay off loans as well as undergo the austerity measures such as the case of Greece and Portugal. However, developing countries who are burdened with austerity measures will disproportionately face extreme difficulty to pay them back.

Finally, the issue of climate policies. Climate change is a difficult problem to address. The reason behind this is because it affects every country in the world, albeit not to the same extent. One of the largest contributing factors to climate change is the emissions of greenhouse gasses from burning fossil fuels, which is our main source of energy so it provides adversity when attempting to switch over sources of energy. Even worse, there is an extreme lack of leadership and accountability on an international level that makes it quite difficult to enact equitable climate policies that benefit the actors involved and the planet.

The reason why finding a solution to protecting the environment is due to a collective action problem. No country has a real incentive to protect the environment if no one else will contribute or will just

free ride off of their efforts. Unfortunately, developing countries are disproportionately more vulnerable to the catastrophic effects of climate change than their developed counterparts. For example in Bangladesh, floods in 1988 covered about 60 percent of the land area, affecting about 45 million people, and causing more than 2,300 deaths (Choudhury, 2001). Because of this, developing countries desperately need strong and effective climate policies on an international level that helps mitigate climate change but at little or no cost to them since they cannot afford the high costs. The Paris Agreement is a great step forward for the international community to come together and tackle climate change but it is weak in its facilitation of regulation and requires all types of countries, developed and developing to cut greenhouse gas emissions. However, this is an inconvenience to the development of developing countries.

Developing countries cannot be forced to cut their carbon emissions at the same rate that developed countries can. As the Environmental Kuznets Curve (seen right) shows, post-industrial countries (developed) are able to cut their environmental degradation as income levels rise. But for Pre-Industrial Economies (Developing) their incomes are low and require more time to be able to develop, which unfortunately means that environmental degradation has to occur until they reach an optimal level of income where they can afford to enact environmental policies. This causes a problem because due to the collective action problem, richer, more developed countries do not want to reduce their emissions if other countries do not as well. This harms developing countries because this causes little to no action on mitigating climate change; which disproportionately harms developing countries more.

Despite the collective action problem, the reality is that developed countries must reduce their emissions faster than developing countries do. Further, "23 developed countries are responsible for half of all historical CO2 emissions" (Lindwall, 2022). These developed countries that are responsible for the majority of emissions must cut their emissions but allow developing countries time to grow their own economies before they can implement effective climate policies; The developing countries of the world still need time to be able to use fossil fuels that the current developed countries were able to use when they were developing.

There are many factors involved that perpetuate the difficult process of developing a country. Such as the way that the history of colonialism that has perpetuated deep into the growth of a country; The ways that Multinational Corporations undermine developing countries; International Trade Agreements that hinder development; Dismantling democratically elected governments in developing countries; International Institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund that do more harm than good for developing countries; And the ever increasing threat of climate change and how developed nations will not do their part in order to protect their own interests.

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Ad Astra Per Legatio: NASA as an Effective Diplomatic Power

3/28/2024 • By **Jenny Brown**

“Ad astra per aspera”; to the stars through difficulty. As a society, we’ve faced a multitude of difficulties in trying to reach the stars. From failed launches to limited technology, we’ve faced it all. Our biggest challenge, however, is not the lengthy travel time required to go anywhere in space nor is it the uninhabitable characteristics of nearby planets; the biggest opponent we face is each other.

In 2021, Russia tested an anti-satellite missile that put considerable debris into near-Earth orbit. Astronauts onboard the International Space Station (ISS) were forced to take precautionary cover (Neuman 2021). Detritus in Earth’s orbit is not a new concern. The Kessler Effect describes a phenomenon in which space debris in low-Earth orbit will collide with each other, creating more debris. This continues ad infinitum, creating hazards for satellites and spacecraft (Wall 2022). According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), there are around 23,000 pieces of debris larger than a softball orbiting Earth (Garcia 2024), and this number will only increase. Beyond the technological implications, there are considerable consequences for international relations. As space exploration becomes more internationally pursued, nations will have to work together to avoid causing significant damage to not only others, but themselves. As of right now, NASA is the only space agency that is effectively used as a diplomatic power to promote space cooperation with other nations, because it’s the only space agency with the power to do so. The United States, and by extension, NASA, has a history of excellence in space as well as considerable funding for technological innovation.

The end of World War II resulted in two global superpowers, the United States and Soviet Union. Ideological and political differences (notably the support of communism by the Soviet Union) resulted in a race for military might (Burton 2020). One of the rings in which the two nations fought was space. The United States and the Soviet Union competed against each other in a number of ways, most famously in the great Space Race. In 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik, an artificial low-Earth satellite (History.com Editors 2020). This ushered in an era of mounting space exploration in both nations. In 1958, Congress passed the National Aeronautics and Space Act, which created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). In 1969, after many different attempts, both failed and successful by both nations, the United States launched Apollo 11, and Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, effectively ending the Space Race (SMD Content Editors 2024). Since then, the United States and NASA have steadily continued to pioneer space exploration.

The Soviet Union achieved their own notable successes and failures in the Space Race; from Sputnik to Laika, Belka, and Strelka, to the first man in space, they have their own storied history (Hanes 2023). Since the Cold War, the official Russian space agency has undergone multiple administrative changes. Originating with the Soviet Space Program (active from 1955 to 1991, the fall of the Soviet Union (Reichl 2017)) the program was, after multiple overhauls, reincarnated as a state corporation named Roscosmos in 2015 (Pandey 2020). Recently, Roscosmos unveiled its plans for a new space station, after announcing the decision to step away from using the International Space Station (ISS) (Sankaran 2022).

NASA is not only a space agency, but a method of diplomacy in the U.S.’s arsenal, particularly in terms of soft power. The international cooperation that is promoted by the current and past administrations are a clear sign that NASA is used as a soft power bargaining chip, comparable to China’s “panda

diplomacy” (Liang 2023) in the sense that they are both a uniquely national cultural phenomenon. In 2021, Vice President Kamala Harris issued the United States Space Priorities Framework, in which it is suggested that “space activities broaden and deepen our international partnerships” (Foust 2023). It’s notable that Russian astronauts are frequently on NASA-manned missions, whereas Chinese astronauts are not. I argue that NASA is the only space agency with the ability to be used as a method of diplomacy because it’s the only one with the power to do so, due to its history and its funding.

The United States’s history of excellence in space exploration has led to it being a world leader in space. When Neil Armstrong walked on the moon it signaled an end to the space race; NASA achieving the ultimate goal. The USSR had many notable achievements in terms of space, but in the eyes of the public, they did effectively ‘lose’ the Space Race. The ‘winning’ of the Space Race led to decades of space-related nationalism by the American people. This paved the way for decades of large budgets for NASA.

Similar to the United States military funding, NASA funding is considerably larger than that of its peers. This has allowed for significant technological innovation in space exploration. As a result, NASA is at the forefront of space technology, and has become a “go-to” location for astronomers, astrophysicists, and engineers. In 2022, the United States spent 61 billion dollars on space programs (Vanleynseele 2022), 24 billion of which went to NASA (Planetary Society 2022). China was second in terms of funding, with a budget of about 12 billion dollars. After China, Japan came in third (approximately 5 billion dollars allocated), France in fourth (4 billion dollars) and finally, Russia fifth (3.5 billion dollars) (Vanleynseele 2022). It’s clear that NASA has significant funding, especially when considered against other countries. This allows for new technology, via the support of scientists and researchers. NASA often uses parts of its funding as grants towards universities. According to U.S. News, four of the top five universities for space science are in the U.S.: California Institute of Technology, Harvard University, University of California Berkeley, and Princeton (the remaining college is Cambridge)(U.S. News 2023). Between the funding for technology and research, and the support for academics, NASA is a desirable agency to work for.

While different and often in conflict with each other, Russians and Americans share the same love and curiosity over space. A residual of the U.S.’s success in the Space Race is that space exploration has become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon. Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong are household names, with Armstrong’s famous phrase (“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind”)(Stamm 2019) often quoted in pop culture. In a study conducted by Pew Research Center, 75% of American adults view NASA favorably, with 69% of adults saying that it is “essential” for the United States to maintain leadership in space exploration (Atske 2023). In a considerably polarized nation, this is a significant majority. In Russia, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, one of the three founding fathers of astronautics (along with Robert Goddard and Hermann Oberth) is celebrated as a national hero. The Tsiolkovsky Fund, headquartered in Moscow, holds conferences to discuss the history of Russian space exploration and Tsiolkovsky’s impact (Siddiqi 2013). This shared passion for space seems to be an international one that even geopolitics cannot interfere with; Expedition 69, sponsored by NASA, has a crew of three NASA astronauts, three Roscosmos astronauts, and one United Arab Emirates astronaut (Garcia 2024). The only realm in which the United States works with Russia is in space, a direct demonstration of NASA’s diplomatic power.

In conclusion, NASA is the only space agency with the ability to be used as a method of diplomacy because it’s the only one with the power to do so, due to its history and its funding. Looking forward, it should be researched whether there are other arenas in which rival countries could be influenced

into cooperation due to a shared interest (namely, climate change). Because of the overarching and international ramifications of space exploration and climate change, it would be beneficial to attempt to find a diplomatic solution to reducing carbon emissions, halting deforestation, etc. Prominent American planetary scientist and astronomer Carl Sagan once wrote, “Look again at that dot. . . That’s home. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. . . every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there-- on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam” (Sagan 1994). In the midst of wars and geopolitics and conflicts and recessions and the strifes of day to day life, it's important to remember this. It’s profound that the endlessness of space can bring us together even as enemies; with effort and cooperation, it’s possible to take this grain of diplomacy and use it to solve other problems, working towards a better future for all.

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