THE CLARION

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Edition 2.1.1, Spring 2026

The Clarion: YU's Undergraduate Journal of Political Science

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From the Editorial Desk:

In November of 1989, *The Yeshiva University Clarion* launched its inaugural edition. The then Publisher/Research Director Benyamin Kaminetzy remarked in his opening letter that "Today, more than ever before, we are witnessing vast changes within the global political arena." History repeats itself, and one could argue that the changes, advancements, and conflicts of today rival, if not even surpass, those of that transformative era.

This pattern of recurrence has also defined the life of the journal itself. A 2006 letter from the editor proudly proclaimed that after an extended hiatus, Yeshiva University's undergraduate journal of political science had returned to present a strong compilation of student and faculty work. The 2006 revival didn't last, and fourteen years later, a 2020 letter from the editor echoed that same sentiment almost word for word. Another revival, another chance, another renewed sense of purpose, but yet another vision not fully realized.

Now, six years later, your editors—Chloe Baker, Zachy Gross, and Eli Rubin—are proud to unveil what we hope is more than just another comeback. This edition is our commitment to building lasting infrastructure in the political science department and the university at large. In a society evolving at an unprecedented pace, the ability to analyze, research, and genuinely wrestle with ideas is not a luxury, but essential to the health of our democracy. On a campus home to so many intelligent, curious, and motivated students, there must be an outlet where rigorous work finds an audience and students have the ability to learn from one another. This journal is here to be that outlet—a platform for anyone passionate about political science to publish research, voice an opinion, engage with current events, or grapple with the institutions that shape our world.

You will see that this is "*Edition 2.1.1*," which is purposeful. After the journal's unstable past, it is our hope that this time it will be here to stay and have the ability to be published twice annually. As "*The Clarion 2.0*," we are working to build the infrastructure necessary for this journal to remain active at the university past all of our time here. For clarity—as this is the inaugural new edition—going forward, the "2" will always remain, the first "1" refers to the school year published ("1" is the 2025-26 school year, so the 26-27 year will be "2"), and the second "1" is the edition published within that year. Yes, you heard us right; a second edition—Edition 2.1.2—will be published before graduation in May.

Before you are presented with this brand new edition, it is important that gratitude be shown. None of this would have been possible without the help of Dr. Maria Zaitseva. Her assistance, guidance, and constant encouragement were integral to this project coming to fruition. Additionally, we extend our thanks to Dr. Joseph Luders, Chair of the Political Science Department, for his support and enthusiasm for *The Clarion* and the political science major as a whole. To our contributors – this journal would not exist without your well-researched and written pieces. Thank you for wanting to contribute to academic discourse on campus and for investing in a project so near and dear to us. And finally to our readers – thank you for your curiosity and interest.

Co-Editor in Chiefs: Chloe Baker, SCW'26 / Zachy Gross, YC'28
Managing Editor: Eli Rubin, YC'26

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Contributor Biographies

Chloe Baker

Chloe Baker is your first Co-Editor-in-Chief of The Clarion! She is a Senior majoring in Political Science, focusing on international relations and security studies. She is Senior Opinions Editor of the YU Observer and a Resident Advisor on the Beren campus. When she isn't dedicating time to one of her above commitments, she can be found reading articles on current events, going for walks around NYC, drinking iced coffee, and checking out customers in the 245 cafeteria.

Zachy Gross

Zachy Gross is your next Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Clarion! Originally from Boca Raton, Florida, he spent two years at Yeshivat Sha'alvim before coming to Yeshiva University, where he is now a sophomore majoring in Political Science and History on the pre-law track. On campus, he's involved in the Clarion, YUNMUN, the YU Undergraduate Law Review, YUPAC, and Mock Trial. Outside of that, he pitches for the YU Maccabees, is an advisor for NCSY Boston, and you can usually find him in the kitchen cooking.

Eli Rubin

Eli Rubin is your Managing Editor of the Clarion! Hailing from Teaneck, New Jersey, Eli is currently in his last semester at YU, majoring in Political Science and Jewish History. In his downtime, he enjoys reading and spending time with family. He plans on attending law school this coming year.

Emmit DeHart

Emmit DeHart is a junior in Yeshiva College, where he is double majoring in Political Science and History. After graduating he plans to attend law school and hopes to pursue a legal career in corporate litigation. On campus, he is actively involved in student leadership and academic life. In addition to writing for The Clarion, he serves as a chair for YUNMUN, sits on the board of YUPAC, works as a writer and editor for the YU Undergraduate Law Review, and is a member of the Jacob Hecht Pre-Law Society.

Gabriel Simon-Hakalir

Gabriel Simon-Hakalir is a Junior majoring in political science from Chicago, Illinois. He is the co-founder and master of the Yeshiva University Alpha Epsilon Pi chapter. He carries a passion for leadership and problem-solving.

Meira Berkowitz

Meira Berkowitz is a Junior majoring in Political Science with hopes to enter the law and nonprofit spaces. She is a contributor for the YU Observer, a member of the YUPAC Education Committee, and was an Admin Assistant on her first YUNMUN experience this year. In her free time she enjoys listening to music, hanging out with friends, spending time outside, and telling herself she'll go to sleep earlier tomorrow night.

Amichai Greenberg

Amichai Greenberg is from Potomac, Maryland. He is a junior majoring in Political Science and minoring in Philosophy. He is a Campus Fellow for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis. In his free time, he enjoys playing guitar, doing photography, and playing board games. Amichai plans to pursue a career in law or public policy.

Mikey Neusner

Mikey Neusner is a senior at Yeshiva University, majoring in Strategy & Entrepreneurship. Originally from Boston, Massachusetts, he spent two years studying at Yeshivat HaKotel before moving to New York for college. On campus, he serves as a Head Resident Advisor, where he plays a role in building community and supporting students. After graduation, he plans to work as a paralegal.

Talia Isaacs

Talia Isaacs is a Political Science major and Women's Studies minor from Teaneck, NJ, on the pre-law track. She's also on the editorial board of the YU Undergraduate Law Review, as well as involved in the Students Against Domestic Abuse club on campus. In her free time, she enjoys writing and engaging in political activism.

Ashley Hefner

Ashley Hefner is a senior at Yeshiva University majoring in Psychology and minoring in Political Science. She is a Staff Writer for The YU Observer and an ORA Campus Fellow. She is interested in law and public policy and is hoping to attend law school in Fall 2027.

Aiden Harow

Aiden Harow is a Senior majoring in Political Science and minoring in Business. He also serves as President of the Yeshiva Student Union, Managing Editor of the YU Undergraduate Law Review, and Co-Head of Education at the YU Political Action Committee. In his spare time, you can find him singing with the Y-Studs, playing sports, learning, or watching the Celtics.

Framing Crime: How Partisan Media Reports on and Shapes Public Perception of Crime and Policing

Emmit DeHart

In today's polarized media landscape, news outlets do far more than merely report on crime and policing; they construct competing political narratives through framing and agenda-setting. These partisan portrayals do more than reflect ideological divides—they actively shape public perception.

American media as a whole, but especially local news, disproportionately focuses on crime: "Americans are more likely to get news and information about crime than about any other local topic except the weather" (Gramlich and Eddy 2024). However, perspectives on crime vary sharply depending on which outlets audiences consume. Media is inherently subjective; "objective news" is a myth. Journalistic practices, institutional biases, and societal influences all shape the narratives audiences receive (Wolfsfeld 2011). Conservative and liberal media use both framing and agenda-setting to very different effects and outcomes, with one of the most striking differences being how each frames the broader narrative of crime rates, public safety, and policing.

Conservative outlets such as Fox, The Daily Wire, and The New York Post often run stories amplifying the perception of rising crime to construct a narrative of societal breakdown that calls for stricter policing and legal policy. Liberal outlets, such as MSNBC, CNN, and Democracy Now, by contrast, tend to contextualize crime data within broader social or economic trends and urge reforms rather than crackdowns. While this is a broad generalization, it is genuinely challenging to find fully neutral reporting in mainstream media, with a clear divide between liberal and conservative reporting. When searching the phrase "migrant crime," liberal-leaning outlets repeatedly use words such as "backlash," "mistake," and "unprecedented," whereas conservative-leaning outlets frequently use terms like "illegal," "crime," and "convicted." This reinforces the media's ability to craft narratives that play on emotion and guide audiences toward particular conclusions. This phenomenon resembles what scholars describe as partisan coverage filtering, where outlets emphasize different language, facts, and emotional frames based on political leanings (Broockman and Kalla 2023). As a result, audiences consuming news from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum can inhabit entirely different political realities.

The representation of police is another area where framing diverges sharply depending on the outlet's political leaning. Conservative news often portrays law enforcement as heroic defenders of order who are under attack from overreaching bureaucracies and social movements. This "thin blue line" narrative aligns with broader law-and-order political messaging and calls to defend law enforcement and expand police discretion (National Police Association 2025). Liberal media, by contrast, tend to be more skeptical of law enforcement and frequently highlight misconduct, systemic abuses, and accountability failures.

In the wake of the police killing of George Floyd and the subsequent nationwide protests, Fox News ran stories emphasizing destruction, clashes, and injuries to officers, including "Police Under Siege: Attacks on Law Enforcement in Wake of George Floyd's Death" (Casiano 2020). CNN coverage, by contrast, documented what it described as a "violent and excessive" police response to protesters (Shoichet 2020). These articles, published just days apart in June 2020, demonstrate the media's ability to frame the same events in dramatically different ways.

Politically framed media coverage correlates with electoral behavior and public opinion. In August 2020, the Council on Criminal Justice documented a stark partisan divide on support for major changes in policing, with only 14 percent of Republicans in favor compared to nearly 90 percent of Democrats (Council on Criminal Justice 2020). In their study of media persuasion, economists Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan (2007) famously documented "The Fox News Effect," finding that the introduction of Fox News into local cable markets increased Republican vote share and persuaded between 3 and 28 percent of non-Republican viewers to vote Republican in the 2000 election. This demonstrates the persuasive power of media framing in shaping political attitudes and electoral outcomes.

Political narratives about the causes of crime further expose partisan divides. Conservative media frequently attribute rising crime to progressive policies and efforts to defund the police, framing crime through a law-and-order lens (Wolfsfeld 2011). This message has been echoed by conservative political leaders, including former President Donald Trump, during his 2025 address to Congress, where he blamed Democratic leaders for rising crime and referenced the death of Laken Riley.

Liberal outlets, conversely, often frame crime as a systemic issue rooted in structural inequality, poverty, and institutional failures. For example, following the death of Laken Riley, some left-leaning outlets emphasized immigration policy failures and court system shortcomings rather than focusing primarily on immigration status (Cevallos 2024).

National crime data complicate partisan narratives. FBI data show that violent crime has declined significantly, reaching a 20-year low (Gilder 2024). When media outlets frame crime through a partisan lens, they risk distorting complex social realities and discouraging bipartisan solutions (Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2025).

The 2024 election further illustrates how media framing shapes political priorities. Immigration and violent crime ranked among the top concerns for Republican voters (Pew Research Center 2024). During the campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly framed immigration as a driver of violent crime, a narrative amplified by right-leaning media. Fox News alone ran nearly 1,000 weekday segments in 2024 covering "migrant crime" (Gertz 2024). Yet empirical evidence suggests immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born citizens, and violent crime declined by 10.3 percent between 2023 and 2024.

Framing distortions are not exclusive to conservative media. During debates over drug decriminalization in San Francisco, some progressive outlets downplayed policy consequences and emphasized structural explanations (Bowles 2022). After the passage of Proposition 47, larceny rates rose

by 25 percent between 2014 and 2019 (California Department of Justice 2020). Similarly, overdose deaths in Portland rose sharply following Measure 110 (Oregon Health Authority 2023), though some progressive outlets framed the increase as primarily a failure of social safety nets (Herzlich 2024).

The disparities between empirical data and political messaging underscore the media's powerful agenda-setting role. Through framing, word choice, and emotional appeals, media outlets construct political agendas that shape policy debates on crime and policing. Americans are often not merely disagreeing on policy, but operating from different perceived realities. This polarization undermines public trust in journalism and deepens partisan divides. Recognizing the framing power of media is essential to navigating an increasingly polarized information environment.

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Media: The Fourth Estate

Talia Isaacs

In democracies, where freedom of the press is an indispensable right, the media and press act as a bridge between politicians and the public. Thus, mass media acts as an extension of the democratic process; it encourages citizens to form opinions on the various actions of office-holders, which journalists will then publish, leading those office-holders to react accordingly. Without the media as a "bridge", there is no true consent of the governed, and no way for citizens to be educated about the actions of their policymakers. This informed consent is vital not only for voting, but for citizens to decide whether or not they wish to protest, petition, lobby, or accept the legislative status quo. Due to the major involvement the media has in the relationship between the public and their government, it is essential that the government allow the media to freely publish all information deemed relevant to the public. To maintain the utmost transparency, the media should have safe and easy access to all information that is safe for the public to know, and it should be willingly handed over to them in the name of democracy.

Many democracies cherish freedom of speech and freedom of the press, the right to both of which are respected by dozens of countries across the globe (Herre, Rodés-Guirao, and Ortiz-Ospina 2024). Accordingly, in countries where freedom of expression is highly valued, the media "tend to be comparatively unrestrained" (Graber and Dunaway 2014, 17). Transparency of the government and tolerance of criticism is a hallmark of a prosperous, healthy democracy, in which public opinion is valued. Likewise, the media is necessary for individuals to form their opinions, the collective of which will ultimately be published in the press for politicians to see and react to. This cyclical relationship of media and public sentiment is precisely why it is so crucial to the democratic process. Without the media, the vast majority of the population would be rendered politically immobilized, lacking the knowledge to exercise their democratic right of removing unwanted office-holders from government. As Graber and Dunaway put it, "[i]f media surveillance causes governments to fall and public officials to be ousted, democracy is well served" (Graber and Dunaway 2014, 19). Fundamentally, the media is what allows citizens to protest unfair policy and government actions, where journalists act as "guardians of the public welfare" and "foster political action when necessary by publicizing social evils" (Graber and Dunaway 2014, 20). These are not merely latent functions of the media, but imperative to uphold the principles of democracy. Without expansive access to information or an honest relationship with office-holders, citizens will not be able to exercise their fundamental rights.

The realm of media in which the government's absolute candor is perhaps the most important is the field of investigative journalism. The media acts as our "eyes and ears," bringing scandal and injustice to light that the average person does not have the means to investigate (Graber and Dunaway 2014, 19). Yet,

without access to the relevant files, tapes, and materials, the suspicious and potentially harmful activities of our government may never be uncovered.

As a result, unfit or corrupt politicians may remain in office, potentially enacting harmful legislation that could be calamitous for the country. In order for investigative journalism to thrive, full disclosure is needed from the government regarding records, political processes, and information.

Moreover, journalists and reporters should not be faced with undue violence or aggression from authorities when peacefully attempting to procure news. During protests and investigative endeavors, police officers have been known to exert unwarranted force against news people, threatening arrest or even engaging in alleged brutality (Phillip 2014). This is antithetical to the democratic principles of due process and freedom of the press; access to this information is their right, and the right of the public, and they should not be punished for pursuing its publicization. Reports of journalists being "detained, threatened or otherwise prevented" from covering stories should be cause for concern, and spark public outrage and legislative reform (Phillip 2014). Reporters should be guaranteed safe and comprehensive access to stories and information without fear of arrest or violence. Without this, the relationship between the government and the media will be fraught with fear, and political processes could be halted. It is the government's job to ensure the safety of news people and their right to information, the enforcement of which democracy depends on.

Some may argue that maintaining such radical transparency between the media and the government could result in disaster or jeopardize the security of the country. However, with the exception of select intelligence[1], the past has proven that the concealment of government information can have detrimental national and global ramifications. The primary example of this is the infamous Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, also known as "The Pentagon Papers", where the U.S. government hid critical information regarding the Vietnam War from the public. Political activist Daniel Ellsberg leaked the classified intelligence, as he felt the actions of the government were so egregious that the masses had to be alerted (The Editors 2025). This confidential report revealed ruinous details about America's involvement in the war, including unnecessary escalation of the conflict and continued drafting of soldiers despite anticipating defeat (Gross 2021). Eventually, in protest of what he felt to be an unjustifiable war, Ellsberg illegally[2] exposed portions of the Pentagon Papers to the public, but it was too late — the war had already been raging on for several years, and countless people had already died. Much of the public stopped trusting the government, and the relationship between the media and office-holders was severed.

[1] Such as information that would jeopardize national security or the safety of an individual or group of people.

[2] Ellsberg was later deemed innocent after the Supreme Court ruled that his release of the Papers was allowed, but was initially charged with a litany of criminal offenses (Harvard Law School 2021).

While the release of the report did not stop the war, it was a major turning point in the deescalation of the conflict, and applied pressure to the U.S. government to withdraw its troops from Vietnam. Had the Pentagon Papers not been "top-secret," and had journalists had access to them to publicize their contents, proactive pressure from the public may have been enough to end the war earlier, saving countless lives. This is precisely why government transparency and media access are so important, because in extreme cases, it can save lives. Thankfully, since then, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) has been amended to include a broader range of records and materials, but it remains profoundly flawed to this day[3] (Martin 2025). Whatever dangers the release of this kind of information may present, it oftentimes does not outweigh the danger of concealing it.

Exhaustive transparency from the ruling body is a sign of a robust, thriving democracy, and an open and protective relationship between media and government officials is necessary to achieve this. The government exists to protect its citizens, and that includes journalists and reporters, whose rights must also be protected. Comprehensive access to records and guaranteed safety are paramount for the media to do its job correctly, and without it, chaos will surely ensue. Optimal media-government relationships include veracity, safety, and overall good faith; without them, democracy simply cannot function.

[3]Procuring government information available under the FOIA requires an application, paying a fee, and approval by a government agency. Furthermore, there are nine criteria of information that are exempt from release to the public, making the information even less accessible. This is a far cry from true transparency and accessibility (U.S. Department of Justice n.d.).

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Participation Does Not Equal Understanding

Ashley Hefner

Over the past few years, protests and rallies have become a defining feature of campus political culture. Societal issues unite students together with posters, chants and social media posts, and as such, participation in politics among students is easily visible. But, does this form of activism develop students' political reasoning, or does it simply appeal to a strong human desire to feel like they belong?

Some people celebrate the rise in activism as evidence of a well-educated generation. For example, Michael S. Roth, president of Wesleyan University, published an article titled "The Campus Protests Over Gaza Are All Part of a Good Education" (2024). In it, he explained that student rallies about the issue at hand—and rallies in general—are valuable because they help expose students to opposing views. However, engagement alone does not necessarily aid in one's ability to think critically.

Truly understanding nuanced political matters requires more than just awareness or participation. It requires a willingness to question one's own biases and evaluate alternative sources of evidence. These skills encompass critical thinking. The APA dictionary defines critical thinking as "a form of directed, problem-focused thinking in which the individual tests ideas or possible solutions for errors or drawbacks" (American Psychological Association n.d.). Campus political culture goes against these values and instead rewards performative engagement.

In many social settings, students experience pressure to quickly take sides on popular political questions. If students do not adopt clear positions, they risk being seen as indifferent or even sympathetic to the opposing side. Thus, the social benefits of belonging to a political community or cause can discourage the slow, demanding process critical thinking requires. The social psychology concept of groupthink helps explain this dynamic.

Groupthink is "a mode of thinking that occurs when a group's desire for unanimity overrides realistic appraisal of alternatives," as defined by the psychologist Irvin Janis (Kretchmar 2021). In the "Political Psychology journal," Paul 't Hart, professor of public administration at the Utrecht University School of Governance, mentions an important additional aspect of Janis' definition of groupthink—an "excessive form of concurrence-seeking," in which preserving group unity becomes more important than careful reasoning and reaching one's own conclusion (Hart 1991). Hart continued by stating that these environments can create a skewed understanding of the world and lead to overconfidence in group decisions. On college campuses, this type of environment can push students toward rushed ideological alignment instead of conducting thorough research of complex issues.

The increase in political engagement among college students is not entirely negative. It also carries vital benefits, including an increasing awareness of national and global issues as well as encouragement among students to reflect on how they can make a

positive impact on society. However, engagement without true understanding is dangerous. When supporting a narrative becomes more important than researching important issues, the value of on-campus activism diminishes. The goal of getting a university degree isn't to merely express opinions. Rather, the goal is to create habits that foster rigorous thinking about the ideas one comes across.

The difference between awareness and understanding is not only important for college campuses. Democratic societies in general also need citizens who can evaluate evidence, address misinformation, and engage with people who do not hold the same views. When political engagement serves the purpose of belonging to a group above gaining a deeper understanding of the world, the result is a deterioration in these skills.

To increase critical thinking among students, society—and more importantly, universities—need to place greater emphasis on challenging our ideas. While classrooms are essential to higher education, they cannot counter the social pressures that dictate student political attitudes. Institutions, therefore, should invest in ways to further incorporate structured dialogue across the political spectrum in campus programming. The result of this investment will hopefully be encouraging students to seriously examine political issues and opposing viewpoints.

Student passion is not the problem. It is actually one of the greatest strengths of campuses today. But that passion must come alongside the critical thinking that higher education should cultivate.

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Critical Thinking in a World of Entertainment

Meira Berkowitz

In "The Culture Industry Reconsidered", German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno analyzes how modern culture, capitalism, and mass media shape society and human thinking (Adorno 1975). What once was a space for creativity and critical thinking has become a system for producing entertainment that mainly keeps people passive and easy to control (Adorno 1975). His work argues that the modern culture industry that produces movies, music, and television is more focused on making money and maintaining the social order than on helping people think or express themselves.

The problem is that culture is being used to control people. Adorno is concerned with how culture has turned into an industry; something that produces products for sale just like any other ordinary factory does (Adorno 1975). He argues that in modern capitalist societies (like the United States) culture is no longer about creativity, individuality, or critical thinking. Movies, music, and other forms of entertainment follow the same formulas, making them predictable, addicting, and easy to consume (Adorno 1975). This standard leads to what he calls "pseudo-individualism," where cultural products might seem unique on the surface, but are all very similar underneath (Adorno 1975).

It is imperative that people of today's society exercise their ability to think critically. Thinking critically is extremely significant because it helps individuals make informed decisions, solve problems effectively, and recognize misinformation or manipulation. Critical thinking encourages people to ask questions, evaluate evidence, and consider multiple perspectives, which leads to better understanding and stronger communities. In a world filled with complex issues like politics, media, science, and ethics, critical thinking helps protect democracy, improve public debate, and support innovation.

Instead of being challenged by art or encouraged to think about the world differently, audiences are simply entertained. They are kept comfortable and distracted. According to Adorno, this keeps people from noticing or questioning social and political problems around them (Adorno 1975). The culture industry has become a powerful tool for maintaining the current system and so it encourages people to accept things the way they are rather than try to change them.

This issue hasn't gone away. Today's digital media environment has made the problem even worse. Platforms like Netflix, YouTube, and TikTok constantly feed us content that matches our preferences. Algorithms are designed to keep our attention and give us what we already like, which means we're less likely to encounter new or challenging ideas. This supports Adorno's idea that modern culture discourages critical thought and promotes conformity (Adorno 1975).

Other thinkers have also discussed this problem. For example, Guy Debord's The Society of the Spectacle describes how life is increasingly dominated by images and appearances rather than real experiences (Debord 1994). Similarly, media theorists today talk about how news, entertainment, and

advertising blur together in ways that make it hard to separate truth from distraction.

Adorno doesn't offer a step-by-step plan for fixing this problem, but he does believe that recognizing what's happening is the first step (Adorno 1975). If people can understand how culture is being used to shape their thoughts and behaviors, they can start to resist it. This means not just passively consuming entertainment, but actively thinking about what we watch, read, and listen to and asking questions about who created it, why, and what values it promotes.

He also argues that truly independent or "autonomous" art can still offer a way out (Adorno 1975). This kind of art doesn't follow the rules of the culture industry. It's often difficult, strange, or uncomfortable—but that's the point. It forces the audience to think, rather than just sit back and enjoy. For example, experimental music or challenging films might not be as popular as blockbuster movies, but they encourage deeper reflection and emotional responses.

Is this solution persuasive? In some ways, yes. The idea that awareness is the first step toward change is a powerful one, and Adorno's concern about how culture can influence our thinking is a legitimate one. But at the same time, his solution feels limited. He relies heavily on the idea that individuals will somehow learn to resist the system by thinking critically, but they don't explain how this could happen in a world where even education and information are shaped by corporate interests. If schools, news outlets, and social media are all influenced by the same forces that control the culture industry, where will people learn to think differently?

A key critique of this perspective is that it underestimates how capable modern-day entertainment mediums are of encouraging audiences to interpret media in their ways. Especially as movies and television shows become more sensitive to pressing cultural and political issues, audiences might use them to talk about social issues or reinterpret them to reflect on their own experiences. Next, Adorno seems elitist. He prefers high-quality and high-class art over lowly pop culture. It feels like an underestimation of modern genres that can give a voice to marginalized communities that need to express resistance, not conformity. Lastly, it's worth noting that the culture industry today is more complex and complicated than Adorno's time. While big companies still dominate, the internet has made it easier for independent creators to share his work. Podcasts, YouTube channels, blogs, and other platforms have opened up new spaces for critical voices and alternate views. That being said, these spaces are still influenced by the same pressures of profit and popularity, so the struggle continues.

Nonetheless, Adorno's ideas are still useful. His analysis reminds us to look more closely at the media we consume and ask important questions about power, influence, and control. His work connects to broader political and ethical issues of today, reminding us even many years later just how important it is to think critically about societal and political norms.

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Modern Political Theory and the Tyranny of Merit

Amichai Greenberg

INTRODUCTION

For most of human history, economic and political power was, for the most part, arbitrarily distributed. Some rulers justified their wealth and power by appealing to family lineage, military power, or other morally arbitrary characteristics, while other rulers appealed to religion, divine favor, or superior virtues. One of the most significant issues in the age of modern philosophy has been to justify property rights and the distribution of wealth and power, to rid man of the arbitrary powers of the Dark Ages.

Meritocracy is a very prevalent view in contemporary political discourse. People believe they possess "rights" to their property, and by extension, wealth, so long as they work hard for it. Proponents of meritocracy believe that if everyone has equal opportunity and competes honestly in a fair and open economic system, then those who end up on top "deserve" the rewards of their labor. However, as political philosopher Michael Sandel argues in *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (2020) claims of "merit" are often used to excuse inequality, create a sense of shame for the working class, and instill hubris among elites. It is not greed that drives inequality, but rather the idea that everyone deserves their success (and failures) that amplifies it (Sandel 2020). But meritocratic thinking is not confined to one side of the political aisle, with both parties in America claiming to support meritocracy as the ideal, and disagreeing only about how much the government should do to "even the playing field."

This paper will illustrate how many liberal and modern philosophers have attempted to explain under what conditions property and wealth are acquired legitimately and, in doing so, actually justify inequality. First, it will show how classical liberal thinkers sought to conceive of a more just means of acquiring property, leading people to believe that they are inherently deserving of what they have. Second, it will demonstrate how liberal thinkers have used the "rhetoric of rising" in their arguments for liberty and how this rhetoric contributes to problems with meritocracy. And finally, it will conclude with remarks on moving society away from meritocratic ideas.

SECTION I

In his Second Treatise of Government, John Locke provides an account of how people come to acquire property. According to Locke, property is a fundamental right that exists in the state of nature. But how does property that was common and ownerless come into one's hands? In response to this question, Locke writes that "[t]he labour that was mine, removing it out of the common state they are in, hath fixed my property in them" (Locke 1689, chap. 5). Similarly, "His labour hath taken it out of the hands of nature... and hath thereby appropriated it to himself" (Locke 1689, chap. 5). Meaning, that if someone combines their labor with unowned land or resources, they receive the right to it as their property.

Locke likely was not giving a historical account of how people acquired property. He was certainly aware of property acquired through taxation, crime, or conquest. Writing after the Glorious Revolution,

he was attempting to rationalize the status quo and present a prescriptive account of how people acquire property justly from the common domain.

For Locke, the value of property rights is so vital that he grounds human dignity in terms of property rights. In discussing natural law, Locke writes that "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions" (Locke 1689, chap. 2). He is arguing that we ought to respect other people because we are God's property, but this only works if property is something that someone has a right not to have violated. Thus, property rights become logically prior to human rights.

Although Locke acknowledges that one must leave "enough, and as good" for others (Locke 1689, chap. 5), it still follows that those who acquired property by these means are morally deserving of it. In Locke's political philosophy, property is one of the most important things for the government to protect, alongside life and liberty.

However, this becomes problematic when all property is taken and distributed. Wealthy landowners and industrialists can claim their right to such property if acquired according to Locke's criteria. Any objection to wealth distribution—such as an imbalance of negotiating power or circumstance—can be dismissed on the grounds that property was initially acquired properly. Locke's account replaces arbitrary control over resources with other arbitrary factors: those who happened to win the race to mix labor with nature now "deserve" the property they own. Furthermore, the skills necessary to acquire property are themselves shaped by genetics, family, class, and geography, meaning that once property is inherited, it becomes dependent on birth rather than work. Locke introduced the precedent of post hoc justification for property distribution, which today manifests in meritocratic thinking.

Locke's ideas support Sandel's thesis that meritocracy divides citizens into "winners and losers" (Sandel 2020), where those at the top attribute success to education, hard work, and talent. Like Locke's labor theory, these factors rationalize acquisition after the fact, placing shame on those who do not succeed. Yet, as Sandel notes, the talents that generate wealth depend on market demand and contingency (Sandel 2020). For example, a nurse may contribute more socially than a casino owner, yet the latter may generate more wealth due to market demand.

SECTION II

Sandel also criticizes the "rhetoric of rising," in which politicians and elites emphasize upward mobility as a justification for the inequality that comes as a result of Meritocracy (Sandel 2020). This paradigm creates hubris among the successful and shame among those who do not "rise," and it also reflects a judgment about which forms of work deserve honor. The idea that social mobility justifies people's place in society is implicit in the thought of nineteenth-century liberal thinkers such as Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès and John Stuart Mill.

In "What Is the Third Estate?", Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès criticizes the French system that confined power to the first two estates. He argues that the Third Estate—those who produce in the economy and have no political power—should be granted political representation. He writes, "Nevertheless, the privileged have dared to preclude

the Third Estate... Honors are not for the likes of you" (Sieyès 1789). While it may appear that Sieyès is advocating for a more equal society, Sieyès does not eliminate hierarchy in his political proposal. Rather, he seeks to shift the elite from aristocrats to one based on merit and productivity. Political representation ensures that honors become "the natural prize and reward of recognized ability and service" (Sieyès 1789).

This is precisely meritocratic logic that Sandel criticizes in The Tyranny of Merit. It allows the elites to say they are the most talented or industrious, not just those who inherit their position, and therefore deserve their place in the socioeconomic hierarchy. In such a society, it leaves those at the bottom feeling that they deserve where they are and allows the elite class to hold a hubris above the lower classes. Although it is not worse than an oligarchy, it is more dangerous, as it allows those who came to power to morally justify their success and disregard the value of the working class. It gives the appearance of fairness, but bases its fairness on morally arbitrary qualities like the talents the market happens to demand. Seiyes believed the French Revolution would produce a meritocracy that would result in a more equitable society; however, he was merely changing the criteria for entry into the elite. Although it may be argued that these criteria are superior to those of the feudal era, they do not morally justify inequality.

SECTION III

John Stuart Mill further influenced meritocratic thinking. Mill is best known for his arguments in favor of maximising liberty. He was, however, a utilitarian. Freedom was not a good in itself, but rather the best means for advancing total happiness. In On Liberty, Mill argues that liberty enables individuals of superior talent to innovate for society's benefit. Mill writes, "The general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind" (Mill 1859). Regular people are mediocre and contribute less than those with superior talents. "Persons of genius, it is true, are, and are always likely to be, a small minority; but in order to have them, it is necessary to preserve the soil in which they grow." Meaning that freedom allows "experiments in living," so that persons of superior ability will rise up.

Evident from this passage, those who are successful in this system are meant to be admired, while the ordinary person is deemed mediocre. While Mill advocates some redistribution for those left behind, there remains a condescending attitude toward the ordinary worker. In the state of freedom that Mill advocates for, those who have become successful look down on everyone else as lacking ability and creativity. Many today justify inequality under the guise of freedom. They argue that freedom allows us to work hard and go as far as our talents take us. However, this philosophy disregards those who do not make it to the top as mediocre and not deserving of the admiration that the "men of genius" receive.

CONCLUSION

Meritocracy is appealing because it provides moral satisfaction to those who are successful. People do not just desire wealth; they also want to feel that their hard work has paid off and that they deserve it. However, Meritocracy is inherently flawed. It posits that, as long as the game is fair, society should reward the winners and leave the losers behind. It gives the elite a sense of hubris and the poor a sense of shame

and resentment. The rhetoric of rising is used to justify this system, claiming that the "best" will rise to the top. What is meant by "best" is not a function of creativity, talent, or even hard work, but rather what the specific talents market demands, which in the end is based on luck and is morally arbitrary. Meritocracy does not honor the social contributions the working class makes to society and to the creation of wealth.

So what is the solution? What should determine merit in society? Communist and populist revolutions have only resulted in authoritarian leaders claiming they deserve unlimited power because they represent the working class. Revolutions that claim to empower the working class often justify new forms of domination or authoritarianism. Instead, there ought to be no ultimate moral justification for wealth and status. This does not mean that no one can become affluent. Rather, the successful must recognize that their success arises from circumstances beyond oneself—family, community, providence, contingency. Even talent and hard work lead to success only because our circumstances cultivate them. A society oriented toward the common good must give dignity to all forms of socially valuable work and reward contribution rather than mere market success.

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Montesquieu and the Framing of the United States Constitution

Eli Rubin

Over the course of their appeal to the American public, the authors of *The Federalist Papers* alluded to—or even directly quoted from—the works of numerous political philosophers, including John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, and David Hume. According to Constitutional scholars, the political thinker most frequently referenced in *The Federalist Papers* was Montesquieu (Rosen 2023; Tauber 2023); thought of in extremely high regard by America's founders, he was even referred to as "the celebrated Montesquieu" by James Madison (Federalist 47). The similar philosophies of Montesquieu and of America's Founding Fathers can be explained easily; both endeavored to determine the best form of government and to propagate the principles which they believed would ensure such a government to succeed. Specifically, the Constitution's Framers agreed with and cited Montesquieu in three contexts:

a. In the terms of what Montesquieu termed the nature of confederate republics—what we would now call Federalism;
b. In terms of the maxim of the separation of powers;
c. In terms of the importance of checks and balances.

Although they concurred with him in most cases, the Federalists—particularly James Madison—disagreed with Montesquieu on occasion, such as in the context of the degree to which government would succeed in a large republic. Despite occasional disagreements, it's clear that Montesquieu and the Framers of the United States Constitution shared an almost identical political philosophy.

In terms of the nature of federalism, Montesquieu recognized the underlying necessity of a republic to maintain autonomy while at the same time defending its citizens and enabling them to succeed. As he put it, Montesquieu believed that "if a republic be small, it is destroyed by a foreign force; if it be large, it is ruined by an internal imperfection," understanding that a nation's independence is correlated with its ability to preserve its own identity (Montesquieu 1751, IX.1). For this reason, Montesquieu suggested that numerous smaller republics could join together, concurrently maintaining their own identities, while simultaneously providing a stronger defense. Summarizing this concept, he wrote that "this form of government is a convention by which several petty states agree to become members of a larger one... to be able to provide for the security of the whole body... it enjoys the internal happiness of each" (Montesquieu 1751, IX.1). Strikingly, the Framers quote a number of these ideas verbatim in *The Federalist Papers,* disputing some of the finer points of Montesquieu's suggestion, but fundamentally expressing the same idea. As the Federalists concluded, a constitution of numerous smaller republics "so far from implying an abolition of the State governments, [is what] makes them constituent parts of the national sovereignty... [which, at the

same time] leaves in their possession certain exclusive and very important portions of sovereign power" (Federalist 9). As expressed by Montesquieu and other political thinkers, the responsibility of government to ensure national security and internal happiness is even mirrored in America's Constitution: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity..." (U.S. Constitution, Preamble). The Framers of the Constitution recognized the necessity both to allow the States to maintain their own identities and to unify them to the degree that would ensure collective security. In other words, both the Framers and Montesquieu acknowledged that while the government must unite its citizens to better protect them, it must also respect their individual identities and differences.

Furthermore, both the Federalists as well as Montesquieu believed that the separation of powers between the respective branches of government was the key to preventing government overreach and ultimately tyranny. As Montesquieu framed it, "when the legislative and executive powers are united... [branch of government] there can be no liberty; because apprehensions may arise, lest the... [government] enact tyrannical laws, to execute them in a tyrannical manner" (Montesquieu 1751, XI.6). In other words, Montesquieu believed that when authority—particularly in relation to the citizens—is concentrated in one branch of government, there is nothing stopping it from taking advantage of its powers and abusing the people. For example, if there is no representative legislative body to oppose an executive, the executive would be free to oppress the people without any accountability or restraint. America's Founding Fathers reflected this belief as well, ultimately creating a tripartite federal government in the United States. As a matter of fact, James Madison believed that Montesquieu himself was "the source from which the maxim [of separation of powers] was drawn" (Federalist 47). Frequently quoting Montesquieu in his explanation, Madison paraphrased the former stating that "the accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands... may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny" (Federalist 47). Madison (or according to some, Hamilton,) elaborated on this idea elsewhere, writing that the "separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government" is "essential to the preservation of liberty" (Federalist 51). Recognizing that legal authority should not be unilateral, Madison and the other Framers made sure that the legislation, execution, and interpretation of the law should be divided into separate branches; each branch should only have part of the authority needed to govern the people. Both Montesquieu and Madison proved correct according to late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who testified that "the real key to the distinctiveness of America is the structure of our government" that the Constitution "prevent [sic] the centralization of power in one person or in one party" (Scalia 2016).

While Montesquieu and America's Founders both recognized that authority must be divided into separate branches of government, they also recognized that unitary authority invested in one branch of government would be taken advantage of if left unchecked by the other branches. The basic premise of this argument lies with the belief that is in man's nature to take advantage of the powers given

to him. In *The Spirit of Laws,* Montesquieu outlined his concern that accumulation of power by one branch of government would lead to its exploitation, writing that "to prevent this abuse, it is necessary from the very nature of things that power should be a check to power" (Montesquieu 1751, XI.4). James Madison directly reflected Montesquieu in *The Federalist Papers*, writing that "ambition must be made to counteract ambition" (Federalist 51). This expression referred to the idea—as espoused by both Montesquieu and Madison—that the only way to counteract the natural power-ambitions of one branch of government is to give power over it to other branches of government. Madison elaborated on this concept, stating that "if men were angels, no government would be necessary" (Federalist 51). Fearing that the accumulation of authority vested in a single branch would lead to tyranny, Madison hoped that each branch of government would have some mechanism of preventing the other branch of government from acting unilaterally and "going rogue" at the expense of the American people. As Madison himself wrote: "it is evident that each department should have a will of its own; and... that the members of each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others" (Federalist 51). In other words, Madison sought to ensure that each branch of government was answerable to the other branches, and that no branch could function without the cooperation of the other branches. Both having recognized man's inherent ambitions for power, Montesquieu and the Founding Fathers sought to prevent ambitions from causing tyranny by designing the institutions of government to provide checks on each others' authority, to maintain a fair balance of power at the highest levels of government.

Although the authors of *The Federalist Papers* agreed with Montesquieu frequently—even to the point of quoting him directly—there was a stark difference in opinion between them with regard to the degree to which a government could succeed in a larger republic. In a larger state, as Montesquieu understood it, the elite class would hijack the national agenda to address their own concerns, ignoring the needs of the masses. In his view, the elite "has interests of his own; he soon begins to think that he may be happy and glorious by oppressing his fellow-citizens; and that he may raise himself to grandeur on the ruins of his country" (Montesquieu 1751, VIII.16). In other words, the larger nation's agenda would be driven by a faction of elites who would neglect the needs of the masses, and drive the nation to failure. Reflecting the arguments of David Hume in *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*, Madison disagreed with Montesquieu, believing that larger republics would better reflect the interests of the majority of the populace. Specifically, Madison pointed out that with a "greater number of citizens in the large than in the small republic, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates" to bribe their way into office, as they'll need to pay off multitudes of people (Federalist 10). Additionally, a large electorate offers a greater variety of "men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters," as opposed to the smaller pool of candidates in the smaller republic (Federalist 10). On the whole, as Madison put it, the large republic makes it "less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens" (Federalist 10). While Montesquieu feared that a faction of elites would drive the national agenda, Madison and the other Federalists believed that the larger the population,

the harder it would be for factions to take control. In other words, the Federalists had confidence that the electorate would maintain its own stability and that the interests of the people would not be neglected. Hundreds of years later, during testimony to the House Un-American Committee, Ronald Reagan—then President of the Screen Actors Guild—expressed similar optimism in the ability of America's citizens to persevere over un-American factions. When a Congressman implied to him that the American Communist Party should be banned lest they gain seats in government and destroy the country, Reagan rejected the idea that legislation was required to prevent the Communist faction from taking control, as Reagan put it: "I still think that democracy can do it" (Reagan 1947).

Ultimately, it's evident that Montesquieu's political philosophy affected that of James Madisn and the other Federalists. In terms of federalism, Montesquieu influenced the Framers of the American Constitution to balance the authority of the federal government with the autonomy of the several states of which the Union was comprised; despite America's five-year Civil War, stability has been successfully maintained. Montesquieu's insights guided the Federalists to separate authority between the respective branches of government in order to prevent one branch from enacting tyrannical laws against the people. Furthermore, Montesquieu's works led Madison to prevent tyranny at the highest levels of federal government by providing each branch with checks on the powers of the other branches. Although the Federalists held Montesquieu in extremely high regard, they took the opposite view of his when it came to the desired size of a republic, believing that larger republics are more likely to prevent factions from driving the national agenda. All in all, the authors of *The Federalist Papers* were clearly intimately familiar with Montesquieu's writings, using his political philosophy to craft the Constitution. Thus, a familiarity with the works of Montesquieu is required to properly understand the philosophical background and context of the Constitution and to understand the mindset of America's Founding Fathers.

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The Key to Presidential Success: Looking into the Presidency of James Monroe

Zachy Gross

Presidents don't get to travel through time. Some are elected during eras of reconstruction, poised to build a new political order, while others take office amid disjunction and decline. In The Politics Presidents Make, political scientist Stephen Skowronek argues that presidential authority is structured by "political time," the cyclical relationship between presidents and dominant governing regimes that shapes their opportunities for action. This framework has a "pivotal place in the dynamic of systemic political change," yet it struggles to account for variation within the intermediate categories of articulation and preemption (Skowronek 1986, 51). This paper argues that while political conditions may shape possibilities, effective leadership ultimately determines presidential success. Skowronek's model remains essential for mapping these structural opportunities and constraints, but Fred Greenstein's leadership framework in The Hidden-Hand Presidency (1982), which emphasizes organizational capacity, political skill, and emotional intelligence, helps explain how presidents navigate those constraints. James Monroe best demonstrates this, as the Monroe Doctrine represented the culmination of his unifying and disciplined control, exemplifying effective governance in a less transformative era.

Skowronek's political time theory is especially compelling when tested against patterns of presidential rankings and historical reputation. The 2009 C-Span Poll places reconstructive presidents like Abraham Lincoln (1), Franklin D. Roosevelt (3), and Ronald Reagan (10) at the top, while grading dysjunctive presidents like James Buchanan (42) and Franklin Pierce (40) at the bottom[1] (C-SPAN 2009). However, the mixed success of articulating and preemptive presidents suggests that political time alone cannot explain presidential outcomes, implying that other variables beyond structure influence success.

While political time can "suggest the ways...political structure delimit[s]...political capacity," it doesn't propose the performance of a leader during his presidency as a defining factor, leaving outliers as "exceptional" to his generalized equation (Skowronek 1993, 49). Skowronek even admits that a preemptive president's "aggressive leaders[hip]" can lead to success in hostile political landscapes, revealing that an exclusive focus on political time pushes "individual variation...to the margins," limiting his framework's ability to explain how leadership shapes outcomes (Skowronek 1986, 56; Hoekstra 2003, 660). Dwight D. Eisenhower (8), for example, who "experimentally test[ed]" his context, is viewed merely as "an exception in support of the more general rules," despite other preemptive presidents like John Tyler (35) and Andrew Johnson (41) being viewed as failures (Skowronek 1993, 49). If presidents in less formative environments can achieve success through strategic leadership, they are

[1]Throughout this paper, the number in parenthesis next to a president will refer to his 2009 C-Span Poll ranking

not exceptions, but evidence of a broader pattern, in which leadership strategy, as described by Greenstein, ultimately determines whether presidents succeed or fail.

This interplay between political time and effective leadership is exemplified in Eisenhower's preemptive presidency, where his success stemmed from "six strategies"[2] that emphasized abilities such as organization, discretion, and emotional restraint (Greenstein 1982, 57). Through "adjusting his supervision" from behind the scenes and only participating in policy when he deemed necessary, Eisenhower "exercise[d] influence over other leaders" without visibly engaging in political confrontation (Greenstein 1982, 81, 99). Eisenhower's "hidden-hand" leadership preserved his popularity and effectiveness, as reflected in his 69 percent average approval rating (Spokesman-Review 2024). While political time defines the playing field, skilled leadership under Greenstein's model is the determining factor for presidents to navigate these constraints effectively. A similar dynamic emerged more than a century earlier in the articulating presidency of James Monroe (14), whose strategic and unifying leadership guided the creation of the Monroe Doctrine and exemplified comparable success in navigating political time.

Entering office at a rare moment when the union wasn't "preocup[ied] with the survival of the Republic," Monroe focused on articulating the Virginia dynasty (Skowronek 1993, 86). Drawing on his experience as a "soldier, legislator, governor, diplomat, and cabinet secretary," he entered the presidency as one of the "most qualified individuals" to assume office, well prepared to lead the nation (Greenstein 2009, 67; White House Historical Association). His "popularity rose" after the War of 1812, during which he uniquely held both roles of Secretary of War and Secretary of State under Madison (Miller Center 2023). Once elected, Monroe worked to maintain that reputation through inclusive and unifying leadership.

To cement this vision in the public mind, Monroe opened his presidency by calling the nation "one great family with a common interest" (Avalon Project). He began to fulfill that promise by building an "exceptionally strong cabinet" (Greenstein 2009, 71), breaking from the Virginia dynasty by recognizing "New England Republicans as full-fledged partners in his national coalition" (Skowronek 1993, 90). After being unopposed and reelected in 1820, Monroe's presidency culminated in the Monroe Doctrine, "the biggest part of (his) legacy," a product of his unifying leadership and vision through which he "declared the Western Hemisphere off-limits to new colonization" (Mr. Beat 2025, 27:55; Greenstein 2009, 70).

The enduring relevance of the Monroe Doctrine, even being invoked symbolically during crises such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, underscores how Monroe's leadership choices produced a durable vision of American independence (National Archives 2022). Tim McGrath described the doctrine as "the third major document of our country's birth," highlighting Monroe's bold vision for U.S. engagement (Mr. Beat 2025, 28:48).

[2]All six strategies are (1) Effectiveness as a public communicator, (2) Organizational capacity, (3) Political skill, (4) Vision, (5) Cognitive style, and (6) Emotional intelligence. This paper will not focus on every strategy, but they are all nevertheless prevalent.

Monroe's organizational capacity provided the mechanism through which his leadership translated vision into policy, ensuring the stability necessary for the Monroe Doctrine's creation. His disciplined, low-turnover cabinet functioned as a cohesive team; he convened meetings only when productive, reinforcing efficiency and control (Greenstein 2009, 71). This structure enabled effective collaboration, as he and John Quincy Adams jointly prepared the message to Congress, with Adams even authoring most of it, illustrating how Monroe's managerial leadership empowered skilled subordinates to realize his vision (American Battlefield Trust). Even Skowronek concedes Monroe's exceptional skill, observing that he "did more than any other incumbent" in cabinet building (Skowronek 1993, 87).

Capitalizing on his organizational effectiveness, Monroe's political skill in public communication sustained and expanded his popularity during the Era of Good Feelings. There, he built goodwill with former partisan adversaries, even in Boston, "where the most determined opposers of the administration" resided, as press coverage of his over one hundred visits expanded his popularity (Greenstein 2009, 71; Miller Center 2023). Running "uncontested" in the 1820 election best evidences Monroe's success, missing only one electoral vote (Miller Center 2023).

Taken together, Monroe's administrative discipline and communicative skills laid the groundwork for the Monroe Doctrine. While James Madison (20) also governed as an articulating president in the Jeffersonian Era, Monroe (14) "was a more effective president" because of his organizational capacity, political skill, and emotional intelligence (Greenstein 2009, 63, 71–72). By "not endors[ing] any candidate," Monroe triggered a chaotic four-way race that ultimately resulted in the election of John Quincy Adams (19) (Miller Center 2023). Viewed through Greenstein's model, Monroe's articulation shows that individual effectiveness, rather than structural circumstance alone, determines presidential success.

Monroe and Eisenhower each governed in different eras but both under constrained political conditions, and by navigating their environments through effective leadership, they forged lasting legacies. While political time may shape possibilities, Monroe's presidency proves that it is how presidents unify, communicate, and govern within political time's limitations that determines enduring success. It isn't solely because of the time they served, but because of how they led.

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Beyond Oversight: Deception, the CIA, and Covert Regime Change in the Early Cold War

Aiden Harow

INTRODUCTION

Two FA-18 fighter jets, each costing sixty-seven million dollars. Seven Reaper drones, totalling over two hundred million dollars. Thousands of munitions worth between one and two billion dollars. The end of any illusion of American deterrence in the broader Red Sea region. These were the costs of Operation Rough Rider, launched by the United States military in 2025 with the stated goals of restoring "freedom of navigation" in the Middle East and reestablishing an image of strength in the eyes of the Iran-backed Houthi militants in Yemen (Johnsen 2025). Since the onset of Israel's war against Hamas, the Houthis, under the guise of Palestinian solidarity, have maintained a vice grip on one of the world's most vital shipping lanes through their relentless bombardment of container ships passing through the Red Sea. They have also posed an immense security threat to America's closest regional ally, Israel, constantly sending ballistic missiles its way. When the Trump administration took office in January 2025, it quickly redesignated the Houthis as foreign terrorist organization, indicating intent to "eliminate the Houthis' capabilities and operations, deprive them of resources, and thereby end their attacks on U.S. personnel and civilians, U.S. partners, and maritime shipping in the Red Sea" (White House 2025). Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told the world in his now-notorious Signal chats that President Trump wanted to "restore freedom of navigation and re-establish deterrence" (Johnsen 2025). And then, it all went wrong.

After fifty two days of bombing and over eleven hundred individual strikes, regional experts estimate that "Houthi power remains entrenched, [and] its drone and missile capabilities weakened, but intact" (Johnsen 2025). After vastly underestimating Houthi defense capabilities and resilience, the US was forced to settle on a deal that protected US-flagged ships in the Red Sea but left global shipping as well as Israel vulnerable to further Houthi aggression. According to the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, "the general view of specialists is that the United States failed to defeat, decisively deter, or even significantly degrade the group." The Houthis declared victory, claiming that the US backed down, and pledged to continue attacking Israel (Johnsen 2025). Deterrence, far from reestablished, became weaker than ever, and the United States suffered an embarrassing strategic and financial loss. How could the outcome of this operation be so far removed from the stated goals of the White House and the Secretary of Defense? How could the US possibly have engaged in such a drastic degree of foreign intervention while operating on such obviously incomplete intelligence? These questions, unfortunately, have haunted US foreign policy for decades.

The United States' conduct during the Cold War showcased a more aggressive foreign intervention thesis than has been seen from the US before or since. During the Cold War, the CIA engaged in six overt and sixty four covert attempts at regime change, with a US-backed government assuming power in twenty

nine of them (O'Rourke 2018). These operations were a crucial component of the US strategy to contain the USSR's sphere of influence, ensuring that pro-Western governments acted as a buffer between the two superpowers and that capitalism and democracy kept pace with communism and authoritarianism in the battle for global influence. However, some of these operations had detrimental unforeseen consequences or were costly and embarrassing failures based on faulty/incomplete intelligence, with glaring gaps in information often resulting from a deliberate misrepresentation of events by those orchestrating the operations in order to advance their personal foreign policy agendas.

The goal of this paper is to argue that, while the Executive Branch was largely aware of broader foreign intervention goals, it was intentionally misled about operational specifics by key decision makers, namely brothers Allen Dulles (Director of Central Intelligence, 1953-1961) and John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State, 1953-1959). This will be proven by examining the CIA's plausible deniability doctrine and the fragmented bureaucratic architecture it created as well as three key early Cold War case studies: Operation Ajax (Iran, 1953), Operation PBSuccess (Guatemala, 1954), and Operation Pluto (Cuba, 1961). These three cases have been selected due to their chronological proximity, ensuring similarities in both domestic and global geopolitical conditions, and demonstrable significance to the CIA's broader foreign intervention thesis during the early Cold War. The primary research method for this paper is declassified archival materials and correspondence between involved parties accessed online. Historical context has also been provided to frame the motivating factors behind each operation.

PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY: AVOIDING ACCOUNTABILITY

The plausible deniability doctrine, or the principle that the instigator of covert operations can obscure its role by pinning its actions on other parties, was the central underpinning of CIA covert regime change operations. This concept was generally applied vis-a-vis other countries and foreign actors in order to keep them in the dark about US involvement abroad. However, some scholars and high-ranking officials allege that this plausible deniability doctrine was applied by the intelligence community domestically as well in order to shield the CIA from oversight and accountability. Senator Frank Church, chairman of a 1975 Senate investigation into covert operations, famously labelled the CIA as a "rogue elephant, rampaging out of control" (U.S. Senate 1976). The Church investigation found that only fourteen percent of CIA covert actions had been vetted and approved by the National Security Council (NSC) between the years 1961-1975 (O'Rourke 2018). The report alleged that "loose understandings rather than specific review formed the basis for CIA accountability for covert operations" and that, while the CIA acted based on general directives from the NSC, operational details were left entirely up to CIA discretion (O'Rourke 2018). In addition, a scathing post-Bay of Pigs memo from Special Assistant to the President Arthur Schlesinger Jr to President John F. Kennedy contends that "CIA operations have not been held effectively subordinate to US foreign policy," that "clandestine intelligence collection [was], by charter, free from State Department control," and that the CIA was able to "seize the initiative in ways which reduce [The State Department's] role almost to that of a rubber

stamp." Schlesinger even goes so far as to intimate that the CIA engaged in covert operations "for the joy of it," illustrating the ease and lack of oversight with which the CIA operated during the early Cold War (Schlesinger 1961). These analyses are alarming and pose uncomfortable questions about the degree to which unelected officials played a role in crucial foreign policy decisions. In other words: were the American people voting into the void when it came to international relations? As the following three case studies will demonstrate, the answer, sometimes, was yes.

CASE STUDY #1 - Operation Ajax (Iran, 1953)

In the early 1950s, Iran faced a critical crossroads. Countries across the Middle East were beginning to renegotiate their petroleum sharing arrangements with Western imperial powers, revolutionizing the industry away from its previously exploitative status quo. In 1950, facing the threat of Saudi oil field nationalization, the United States' Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) agreed to a 50:50 profit split with the Saudi government, increasing Saudi oil revenue by about fifty percent (Ross 1951). In response, the Iranian government attempted to negotiate the terms of its agreement with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), owned fifty one percent by the British Empire. The presiding arrangement only gave Iran sixteen percent of oil profits. Iran's largest oil refinery, at Abadan, had been occupied by Britain since 1933 and was managed strictly by AIOC, which maintained all executive decision making power and often relegated Iranian workers to lower-tier roles (Taafe-McMenamy 2015). Iran and the AIOC reached a deal known as the Supplemental Agreement, which was intended to increase Iran's profit share to twenty percent and provide added opportunities for native workers. Future Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, appointed to monitor the agreement, determined the terms to be insufficient, and fomented a flare-up of Iranian nationalism. This ultimately led to the assassination of the previous pro-Imperial Prime Minister and ushered Mossadegh into office, where he promptly nationalized the Iranian petroleum industry despite AIOC's eventual concession to a 50:50 profit share (Taafe-McMenamy 2015). The British Empire promptly levied sanctions and mulled military action against Iran, whose new regime was supported by the USSR-backed Tudeh Party. Communist sympathizers rapidly gained power amidst the chaos, and the US feared a full communist takeover should the regime collapse, an event which would have given the USSR control over sixty percent of the world's petroleum supply (Taafe-McMenamy 2015). So began Operation Ajax.

During the Truman administration, covert and foreign intervention operations were preemptively analyzed by the Office of National Estimates (ONE), an office that worked under the Directorate of Intelligence whose sole purpose, according to the CIA, was to produce "national intelligence estimates" and "essential intelligence backing for US policy and planning at the highest level of government" (Central Intelligence Agency 2025b). Its function was to evaluate the intelligence gathered by the CIA and its contractors and present decision makers with a suite of options accompanied by all relevant advantages and risks as well as odds of success. Under Eisenhower, however, ONE's role was essentially eliminated. Motivated by a desire to combat the spread of Communism and keep military costs down under the New Look policy, Eisenhower turned to brothers John Foster Dulles, who he

appointed Secretary of State, and Allen Dulles, who became Director of the CIA. The Dulles brothers blurred the line between analyst and policymaker into nonexistence, and, based on their alarmist positions on the "communist threat," gave heavily biased guidance to the Oval Office despite their responsibility to remain objective (Taafe-McMenamy 2015). Allen Dulles never tasked ONE with calculating the probability of success of Ajax nor espoused the estimates of the intelligence community over the best course of action in Iran; intelligence personnel assessed in National Intelligence Estimate 75 that, while regime collapse was a possibility, a communist Tudeh takeover was unlikely (Taafe-McMenamy 2015). Dulles, however, described the adverse outcome as "probable" at the 135th National Security Council (NSC) meeting in 1953, a statement that has been characterized by some Cold War historians as "a deliberate misrepresentation of the threat" in order to "carry out the policies of the Dulles brothers" (Taafe-McMenamy 2015).

The fraternal relationship between two of the most powerful men in the world, combined with their tendencies to select their staff with an eye for loyalty over competence, created a powerful echo chamber within the CIA and State Department that led to a phenomenon coined by intelligence scholar John A. Gentry as "politicization by omission" wherein policymakers deliberately omit data/information that will vex political officials, thereby shaping their decisions (Gentry 1993). Eisenhower approved the operation in 1953, allowing the CIA to foment rebellion amongst anti-regime and popular religious elements and supply them with weapons, training, and organizational assistance. Mossadegh's government was overthrown and replaced by the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, a pro-Western monarch who ruled until the 1979 Islamic revolution. A communist takeover was avoided, a Western-friendly government was installed, and petroleum flowed freely into the so-called "free world." However, while Operation Ajax definitively fit within the Eisenhower administration's foreign policy doctrine and achieved many beneficial short and medium term goals, the exclusion of ONE and accompanying ignorance of alternative options and long term risks/benefits represents deeply flawed decision making at the highest levels of government, and definitively proves that the Executive branch was deliberately misled by the very same advisors and intelligence community upon which it relied so closely. The very next year, though, the Dulles brothers expanded their deception to the halls of Congress as well, fabricating a communist takeover narrative so compelling that Congress was ready for war.

CASE STUDY #2 - Operation PBSuccess (Guatemala, 1954)

In 1950, Guatemala was on the cusp of major political reform. Jacobo Arbenz had just won the presidential election on promises to "transform Guatemala from a backwards, semi-feudal economy into a modern capitalist economy" and passed laws giving Guatemala's government the authority to expropriate land on estates larger than two hundred and twenty three acres. This massively impacted the United Fruit Company (UFCO), an American corporation which had seventy percent of its land holdings, equalling one seventh of all arable land in Guatemala, repossessed by the government (O'Rourke 2018). The Truman administration, pressured by UFCO's immense lobbying power, briefly considered a covert regime operation

codenamed PBFORTUNE, but scrapped it over concerns that its cover had been blown (Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024). Early into the Eisenhower administration, however, the President was keen on reviving the operation. The motivations behind this initiative are among the most hotly debated topics in Cold War history. Some scholars assign almost purely economic intent to the overthrow, citing Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' close ties with UFCO and tremendous revenue loss as a result of Arbenz's policies[1] (Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024). Others look to CIA Director Allen Dulles' personal militancy against communism, direct line of communication with President Eisenhower, and willingness to exaggerate the threat of a communist takeover in order to advance his own foreign policy goals.

In 1953, several journalists and members of Congress made visits to Guatemala, often financed and coordinated by UFCO and its connections. Allen Dulles was eager to debrief with legislators after their visits and do what he could to convince them to throw their weight behind a covert regime change operation, writing in a memo that "the chances of success would be greatly enhanced if there were a coordinated effort in the political field" (Dulles 1953). Indeed, after one such visit made by Congressman Bourke Hickenlooper in late 1953, Dulles provided him with "notes" to include in his speech on the floor of Congress about the state of affairs in Guatemala "tailorized to fit the PBSUCCESS overt themes in order to gain the profits of bringing before the Congress and the people of the United States the true danger to the latter of unbridled communist activity on its doorstep" (Central Intelligence Agency 1953). Ignoring Arbenz's insistence on ushering Guatemala into a capitalist economy, Hickenlooper's speech, largely shaped by CIA talking points, "painted a terrifying picture, a full-blown 'Kremlin conspiracy' taking over Guatemala and the rest of the region. 'All in all', the notes summarised, 'Guatemala looms as a formidable communist bastion and cancer in the Americas', a 'soft underbelly'" (Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024; U.S. Government 1953; Central Intelligence Agency 2025a). Senator Alexander Riley was also identified as a candidate for amplification of the thesis behind PBSuccess. After his own trip coordinated by UFCO representatives, he gave a now-famous speech that later became a twenty-two page pamphlet detailing the communist threat in Guatemala, with much of the evidence cited, as made clear by Riley's notes, collected by United Fruit (Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024).

Over the following year, the Dulles brothers' plan of stirring up bipartisan support for intervention in Guatemala worked so well that he was forced to backtrack due to some hawkish contingents of Congress advocating for overt, rather than covert, military action. Facing criticism from Congress for what appeared to be inaction against the communist threat, Allen Dulles elected to share information on the progress of PBSuccess with a Special Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee (Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024). In contrast to Ajax, where Dulles' deliberate exaggeration of the threat was necessary for the operation to be approved, PBSuccess actually came in danger of being nixed because Dulles' overstatements of Guatemala's communist ties were received too readily. The White House, sold on

[1]UFCO made sixty five million dollars a year before the reforms, more than twice the revenue of the Guatemalan government

Dulles' characterization yet committed to Eisenhower's New Point plan to fight communism while keeping military budgets down, was determined to preserve PBSuccess, and fought to keep Congress in line by reassuring them that the CIA knew "whenever the Reds make a move" and that the US had "a good man in Guatemala and . . . he is watching the situation very closely and giving us constant reports" (Hagerty 1954). Once consolation failed to extinguish the ever-growing war frenzy Dulles had ignited, Eisenhower snuffed out proposed Congressional investigations into US action in Guatemala and the Dulleses silenced dissenting voices amongst the Legislative Branch and the press. Congress stayed the course and Operation PBSuccess was launched on June 18, 1954. After ten days of supporting the small rebel militia of Castillo Armas through psychological warfare and precision airstrikes, the Guatemalan military laid down its arms and Arbenz resigned. Armas assumed power and the coup was complete (Trenta, Fahey, and Atkinson 2024). The Executive and Legislative branches, sold on the version of events sold to them by the Dulles brothers, stood together, sharing information throughout the process and collaborating to a degree as yet unseen in covert regime change operations, albeit after heavy pressure from Eisenhower to disregard more hawkish sentiments and the proposed military action that accompanied them. However, despite the undeniable operational success, the process leading up to its approval was marred by subterfuge and deceit, with the Dulles brothers doing everything in their power to first cause and then limit alarmist views of the communist influence over Guatemala. Facts were twisted, information was withheld, and the CIA once again leveraged Eisenhower's implicit trust to paint an exaggerated picture and pursue Allen Dulles' personal foreign policy agenda. PBSuccess was, unquestionably, a victory for Dulles, but the next time he tried pushing an operation through by misrepresenting the reality on the ground, it ended in the greatest foreign policy failure in American history.

CASE STUDY #3 - Operation Pluto (Bay of Pigs, 1961)

At the end of Eisenhower's second term in 1960, the foundation for an armed invasion of Cuba was already being worked on by the CIA. Castro's communist regime had grown in power and support both from the Cuban populace and the USSR, and posed a very present threat to US security and interests. Castro had already moved to nationalize US businesses in Cuba and appeared to be invulnerable to popular revolution due to his immense approval amongst his people. Eisenhower instructed Dulles to find a way to neutralize Castro and essentially wrote him a blank check to do so without any knowledge of operational specifics (Prados 2017). Dulles settled on an armed invasion carried out by a US-trained militia of Cuban exiles, designed to ignite anti-Castro sentiments in the country which would swell the ranks of this invading force. The newly elected John F. Kennedy inherited this plan upon his inauguration in January 1961. The week after his inauguration, he ordered the Joint Chiefs to evaluate the operation, at the time known by the cryptonym JMATE. The briefing given to them by CIA Manager of Operation Tracy Barnes was only verbal, as both Cuban spies and the press had picked up the scent of the operation during the transfer of power between administrations, and communication of the particulars was poor. The lead officer on the Joint Chiefs panel gave the operation only a thirty percent chance of success, a fact that was omitted from the

report sent to Kennedy about the briefing (Prados 2017). His national security advisor McGeorge Bundy pushed him hard to approve the operation, stating that the CIA has "done a remarkable job of reframing the landing plan so as to make it unspectacular and quiet, and plausibly Cuban in its essentials.... I have been a skeptic...but I now think we are on the edge of a good answer" (Dylan, Gioe, and Goodman 2020). Kennedy greenlit the operation soon after, and fourteen hundred and fifty Cuban exiles began to be trained in third-party countries around Latin America.

In briefings leading up to the operation, Allen Dulles repeatedly stressed that there was "a great increase in opposition" to Castro's regime in Cuba and reassured Kennedy about the likelihood of a popular uprising once the spark was lit in the form of the invasion (Barrett 2017). Very few written manuscripts of Dulles' briefings exist due to the security concerns at the time, but one partial transcript of a briefing he gave to the House Armed Services subcommittee on the CIA survives. In it, Dulles describes a three-pronged attack on the Castro regime. The first component was propaganda, which he described as "very effective," although relative to PBSuccess the psychological warfare efforts made in Cuba were minimal. (Barret 2017; Dylan, Gioe, and Goodman 2020). The second was political, with Dulles asserting that despite there being "over 100 separate, different Cuban groups, all of which aspire to leadership" and "at least 100 people that think they ought to be the next president of Cuba,...we really feel now there is some ground for hope" (Barrett 2017). The third was military, with Dulles describing the thousand-man force as "probably the best force to ever develop in Latin America, as far as its firepower and its maneuverability and all is concerned" (Barrett 2017). Congressman Frank Osmers, normally mild-mannered, repeatedly pressed Dulles on the feasibility of a force of just over a thousand men taking on a militia of over two hundred thousand, despite the massive amount of material and political support it was receiving from the US. Dulles promised that he had sought and received the "very highest and most effective support" from the US military regarding operational specifics. There is no evidence this took place, however, and Dulles denied the CIA's Intelligence Directorate any significant analytical role in planning the operation due to Deputy Director Robert Amory's very public skepticism about its viability (Barrett 2017).

Fueled by wishful thinking and riddled with operational shortcomings, Operation Pluto was launched on April 17, 1961 and was a colossal failure, leading to the deaths of four Americans and one hundred and fourteen Cubans. The beachhead was never entrenched, air support was never established, and popular support failed to materialize in any form. The United States was embarrassed on the world stage, and Kennedy, in his anger over being misled about the operation's prospects, expressed a desire to "scatter the CIA to the wind" (Dylan, Gioe, and Goodman 2020). Allen Dulles and his deputy were fired and left to hold the blame for the spectacular failure that was the Bay of Pigs invasion, a folly propped up by faulty intelligence, misguided optimism, and a lack of honesty and accountability at the highest levels of government. Dulles' deception, instead of resulting in operational success or harmful consequences over two decades later, was an immediate and highly visible failure, ending his CIA career and deeply shaking the trust between the

Executive branch and its premier intelligence resource.

CONCLUSION

The three aforementioned case studies, while all occurring in different geopolitical conditions and resulting in radically divergent outcomes, are all united by a common thread: their approval process was tainted and expedited by the deception of the Dulles brothers. Systemically misleading the White House and Congress allowed the Dulles brothers to pursue personal foreign policy agendas while stripping the American people of their constitutional right to decide the future direction of their country. The ability for select individuals to have unilateral decision power on foreign intervention operations, facilitated by the fragmented bureaucracy and limited oversight created by the plausible deniability doctrine, is a stain on American history and foreign policy. That being said, after Allen Dulles' removal in 1961, the CIA expanded its power, continuing to employ covert regime change operations and ramping up surveillance both domestically and abroad. A potential future area of research is the evolution of the CIA after 1961 to warrant Congressman Frank Church's "rogue elephant" designation in 1974 and the extent to which its foreign intervention thesis and deception of the White House and Congress changed after the departure of Dulles and his cabal. Despite the Bay of Pigs failure, the US conducted forty four foreign regime change operations from 1961-1974 (O'Rourke 2018). Were these operations also orchestrated by unelected officials? How much longer were foreign policy decisions taken away from the American people and those elected to represent them?

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Why Do Some Responses to Terror Succeed While Others Fail, and What Role Can Civilians Play?

Mikey Neusner

INTRODUCTION

On September 8th, 2025, Jerusalem was shaken when Palestinian terrorists opened fire at a bus stop, killing six and wounding twelve. An Israeli soldier, civilians, and a taxi driver helped kill the attackers and save lives, demonstrating the impact civilians can have during a terror response (Associated Press 2025). While terrorism aims to instill fear and disrupt society, effective responses are crucial to minimize this damage. Responses have broad implications, ranging from reshaping societies, to strengthening communities, to, at times, causing adverse effects. There is vast literature on the nature of post-terrorist responses, which covers psychological, communal, and governmental reactions to terror (Rosen, 2010; National Commission, 2004) and offers insights into effective emergency management techniques (William L. Waugh and Kathleen Tierney, 2007). The unique contribution of this paper is that, while active societal involvement plays an important role in a successful post-attack response, the response is more effective when civilians and law enforcement coordinate closely, maintaining civilian agency rather than being directed by authorities. The analysis will discuss common post-terrorism responses and distinguish between successful and unsuccessful ones. It will then compare five case studies and highlight how civilian and law enforcement partnerships work as a model for a successful response.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Common Post-Terrorism Responses

There are several post-terrorism responses; however, law enforcement, civilian, and government actions generally dictate the overall response framework. First, it is important to consider the role of law enforcement in the aftermath of an attack. Scholars Joshua D. Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, Rachael A. Arietti, and Noah D. Turner (2024) note that before 2001, only the FBI participated in counterterrorism efforts; after the September 11 attacks, state and local law enforcement agencies developed a critical role in preventing and responding to terrorism. Police activity includes emergency assistance, order maintenance, mitigation of terrorist damage, and criminal investigation of terrorist incidents (Freilich et al. 2024).

The next type of response is found at the civilian level, where behavior can strengthen social unity or deepen existing divides. Shawn J. McCoy, Ian K. McDonough, and Punarjit Roychowdhury (2020) examine the impact of terrorism on social capital. They argue that its effects are ambiguous. Some say that terrorist incidents may strengthen bonds among citizens, increasing both trust among individuals and confidence in institutions. Others hold that terrorism may create feelings of insecurity, raising distrust in people of different ethnicities, cultures, or religions, and the government in general (McCoy, McDonough, and Roychowdhury 2020). Their study (2020) of the 2015 Charlie Hebdo shooting

attack found that the impact of terrorism on social capital is at its peak right after a terror attack, but quickly reverts to pre-attack levels (McCoy, McDonough, and Roychowdhury 2020). This shows that society unites after tragedy, then reverts to old norms soon after.

Finally, government actions form the third type of response to terrorism. In a book titled "Making the nation safer: The role of science and technology in countering terrorism" (National Research Council 2002), various counter-terrorism factors are discussed. One factor includes the role of the government, which terrorists may try to disrupt or attack. The book notes:

In times of crisis, it is imperative for the government, as the centralized body responsible for maintaining the society and coordinating domestic operations and military activities, to be kept intact. The idea of disrupting our system of government is attractive, as the mailings of anthrax to various political leaders illustrated...The disablement of multiple government operations by whatever means could trigger military, economic, and law enforcement failures. While the protection of our top leaders and the continuity of our present federal structure is a priority, we must not overlook the importance of regional, state, and local government entities and their preservation. Local responses to attack must be coordinated by multiple levels of government and private sector organizations, and the efforts must all be integrated (National Research Council, 2002, pg. 270).

Thus, the government's guidance plays a role in restoring harmony after a terrorist attack. Together, these three types of responses form a framework that determines how society responds and recovers from terrorism.

B. Criteria for Successful versus Unsuccessful Response

The way law enforcement, civilian, and government actions interact is important, as each group's actions influence whether a response succeeds or fails. To illustrate, scholars identify successful responses as those that include an informed and active public, quick response times, and clear roles for emergency responders.

First, Isaac Ashkenazi and Richard C. Hunt (2019) highlight the silent response gap, which is "the time between the occurrence of the emergency incident and the arrival of trained responders, or in other words, the time between when people are injured, and the time that they receive treatment by first responders" (Ashkenazi and Hunt 2019, 2). They note that, "the public is best positioned to provide immediate support because of their proximity to the injured" (Ashkenazi and Hunt 2019, 2). Thus, a factor involved in a successful response is civilians knowing how to act rather than stand by or flee, emphasizing a need for emergency education.

Another factor in a successful response is swift, decisive action. Jarosław Stelmach and Natalia Moch (2022) write that in mass murder attacks, "time plays a significant role...it is recommended to neutralise the perpetrator as soon as possible, without waiting for counter-terrorism forces to arrive. The decisive factor in this case is time. With every minute the perpetrator acts, the number of deaths and injuries increases, and the most effective way to interrupt this

increase is to apprehend the terrorist" (Stelmach and Moch 2022, 13). Delays can result in greater casualties; being quick can save lives.

Finally, clear and efficient communication plays a key role in successful response efforts. Jessica Jensen and William L. Waugh Jr (2014) describe the Incident Command System, a successfully proven management system that organizes all responding entities to an incident, as an example of how organization and accountability are maintained during a response (Jensen and Waugh 2014). This underlines the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities during a response. Overall, public readiness, speed, and organization consistently demonstrate factors that lead to a successful response to terror.

An unsuccessful response is not simply the opposite of a successful one. While successful responses involve effective law enforcement, strong communication, and civilian involvement, scholars attribute unsuccessful responses to not only the absence of these qualities but also to heightened public fear. The main factors are slow response times, poor communication, and increased public fear. Two of these issues were portrayed in the Mumbai terror attack of 2008, where slow deployment and uncoordinated agencies worsened the response (Elkus and Sullivan 2009). John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus (2009) discuss how "command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance were not integrated" and that "there was no immediate action to stop the attackers' momentum—and ordinary Indian police were simply unprepared to deal with the militants' operational shock" (Elkus and Sullivan 2009, 2).

In a book titled "Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime - From the Sedition Act of 1798 to the War on Terrorism," Geoffrey R. Stone (2004) argues that governmental actions and rhetoric that increase public anxiety can worsen the situation. He points to a key mistake made by the Bush administration after 9/11. He writes that "the president's declaration that the threat of international terrorism was not merely a 'war' but a war that could last indefinitely" heightened public anxiety and that "Bush's claim that 'the war against terrorism will never end' [was] misleading and dangerous" (Stone 2004, 554). Collectively, these factors—slowness, miscommunication, and increasing panic—are shown to contribute to unsuccessful terrorist responses.

Drawing from the scholars and sources discussed, this paper defines a successful response by two factors, both led by law enforcement and civilians: actions that immediately and over time minimize harm, and actions that quickly restore societal stability. In contrast, a response is unsuccessful when law enforcement actions or inaction increase harm and delay recovery, or when there is no or minimal civilian participation.

CASE STUDIES

Before examining the case studies, it is important to discuss their common ground and the reasons they were chosen. The attacks in Norway, Manchester, London, Glasgow, and Boston all involved modern terrorist attacks in a Western democracy, which tested national crisis management and communication systems, and impacted societal trust, unity, or division.

A. Norway Attacks

One example of a failed response occurred on July 22, 2011, in Norway, starting in Oslo and then on Utøya Island, about 500 meters off the mainland coast. Anders Behring Breivik, affiliated with the extreme right, detonated a bomb in front of Oslo's government building, killing eight and injuring many more. He then traveled to Utøya, where the Norwegian Labour Youth were gathered for their annual summer camp. Dressed as a police officer, he pursued and shot camp participants (Nilsen et al. 2019). In total, 77 people were killed, including 69 on the island.

Three factors led to this failed response. First, the police did not catch Breivik after he bombed the government building in Oslo. At 3:25 PM, the bomb was detonated, and at 5:17 PM, Breivik arrived in Utøya (Associated Press 2021). Law enforcement had almost two hours to catch him while he was fleeing on a boat in plain sight. Second, there was improper communication. Due to a lack of coordination, the police's Emergency Response Unit (Delta) was unable to coordinate with local police to determine where to meet and launch the police boat to get them to the island. Lastly, the available resources were insufficient, and civilian involvement remained limited. Restrictions on police helicopter access and the small capacity of the police boat meant that civilian boatmen came to help, though their involvement was primarily limited to providing transportation (Nilsen et al. 2019).

In a study examining post-terror trust in the police and in the justice system among young survivors from the 2011 Utøya terror attack, Lisa Govasli Nilsen, Siri Thoresen, Tore Wentzel-Larsen, and Grete Dyb (2019) note that trust in law enforcement declined among those directly affected by the attack. While confidence in the legal system increased over time, both in survivors and their parents, trust in the police dropped to a level significantly lower than in the general population (Nilsen et al. 2019). Thus, the failed response was not only slow, lacked communication, and had minimal civilian involvement, but also posed a new challenge: regaining society's trust in law enforcement.

B. Manchester Arena Bombing

While successful responses minimize harm, the Manchester Arena bombing response produced the opposite effect and created more challenges. On the 22nd of May, 2017, a suicide bomber detonated his device in a public area next to the Arena Bowl, killing twenty-two people and injuring many others (Saunders 2022). The inquiry written by Honorary Sir John Saunders (2022) acknowledges the on-scene heroism of very few citizens and criticizes the emergency response. He detailed the lack of communication between emergency responders, both through the inability to physically co-locate at a single multi-agency Rendezvous Point (RVP) and via radio (Saunders 2022). Plans were unclear, unknown, not understood, or not practiced. Leadership also failed to take control of the situation during the critical response period and was unable to secure the area properly, worsening conditions on the scene (Saunders 2022). Delays in deploying personnel, ambulances, and paramedics on the ground led to more deaths (Saunders 2022). Saunders even provides two examples of people whose deaths could have been avoided had the response been quicker.

Additionally, the police's numerous raids on the Muslim and Libyan communities in Manchester in

the days following the attack created more division; hate crimes rose by 505%, according to the Radicalization Awareness Network (Ruf 2019). Although the Manchester City Council and the Greater Manchester Police set up the RADEQUAL campaign to build community resilience and challenge hate, prejudice, and extremism, Libyans in Manchester still felt unjustly targeted and stigmatised by the police.

Ultimately, the response to the Manchester Arena bombing was marked by failures both immediately and in the days after the attack. While there was some civilian involvement, it was limited; it failed to significantly impact recovery efforts. A successful response would have required clear communication, fair policing, and more communal participation to ensure a timely and effective recovery.

C. London Train Bombing

The 2005 London bombings offer an example of a successful emergency response. On July 7th, at 8:50 A.M., bombs detonated on three London Underground trains. Later, a fourth bomb was detonated on a double-decker bus. These attacks killed 52 people and injured over 700. This attack marked the deadliest assault on London soil since World War II. Agencies responding to these attacks faced several challenges, particularly because the attacks coincided. Initial reports were conflicting, citing causes ranging from a train derailment to a body on the tracks to a power surge in the London Underground system. Meanwhile, fleeing passengers made it harder to determine the number of attack sites. These factors prevented police and emergency responders from effectively assessing and managing the crisis.

Despite these obstacles, a National Institute of Justice-funded study by Kevin J. Strom, Ph.D., and Joe Eyerman, Ph.D (2008), found that London's protocols for interagency coordination largely minimized major problems (Strom and Eyerman 2008). Established relationships and practiced procedures enabled a quick implementation of the command and control system, which helped limit confusion regarding roles and responsibilities (Strom and Eyerman 2008). By these measures, and based on the definition of a successful response, the damage was minimized, and society was able to move forward, however slowly.

The London Train bombings highlight the importance of inter-agency coordination in responding to terror (Strom and Eyerman 2008). Strom and Eyerman (2008) note that to minimize common barriers to effective coordination, agencies need to develop self-regulating, long-term processes — or "coordination regimes" — that facilitate collaboration in preparation and response activities. Failure to establish effective methods for working across agencies before an emergency event can result in inter-agency competition, which, in turn, can lead to an ineffective joint response. The more agencies are connected before and during an attack, the more successfully they can minimize the impact of terror.

The response still had its flaws. Communication with the victims' families demonstrated a lack of excellence, and an attempt to limit cell phone network access to reduce network traffic had the unintended consequence of cutting off access for many responding agencies, including the London Ambulance Service. Fortunately, alternative methods were used, avoiding significant harm (Strom and Eyerman 2008). Nevertheless, the Metropolitan

Police's analysis of the PAS found that confidence in the service and law enforcement increased following the 2005 London bombings.

The success of the London bombing response went beyond immediate crisis management; civilians played a role in the city's post-attack mental health response. Research by Matthew G. Whalley and Chris R. Brewin (2007) found that direct survivors of terrorist attacks have high rates of mental disorders (Whalley and Brewin 2007). Therefore, after the London bombing, a public health program was instituted to address the mental health needs of survivors (Brewin et al. 2008). This involved the setup of a centralized screen and treatment program to identify all affected individuals, screen them for mental disorders, and refer them for proper treatment (Brewin et al. 2008). Civilians contributed by self-identifying for help, referring others, or working within assistance programs, all important actions that led to the city's ultimate recovery.

Overall, coordination among agencies and the active involvement of civilians enabled rapid command and control, effective communication, and timely mental health support. By minimizing harm on the scene and in the days after, London's response stands as a great example of an effective post-terror strategy.

D. Glasgow Airport Attack

The second successful case study is the response to the Glasgow Airport attack of June 30th, 2007. That afternoon, during a busy summer traveling day, attackers drove a Jeep Grand Cherokee packed with explosives into door 2 of Glasgow Airport and deliberately set it on fire (Crichton 2014). Metal bollards stopped the vehicle from gaining access into the crowded check-in hall, preventing casualties (Crichton 2014). Ultimately, the airport reopened within 24 hours. The response was effective due to strong planning, quick and coordinated communication, and civilian involvement. Gillies Crichton's study, "Learning from history: The Glasgow Airport terrorist attack" (2014), outlines several key points. First, the leadership team planned "for anything—not everything" (Crichton 2014, 171). These plans focused on emergency response, recovery time, and service objectives (Crichton 2014). Second, the crisis management team acted within an hour, minimizing damage through quick and coordinated communication (Crichton 2014). A multi-agency tactical command centre which had representatives from all Category 1 responders and the airport focused on restoration of normality, which helped enable the airport to open so quickly, soon after the attack (Crichton 2014). Civilian involvement also played a role. Members of the public who were waiting to pick up or drop off loved ones helped the police in apprehending the two terrorists. One taxi driver broke his leg while kicking at one of the terrorists in an attempt to halt his escape (Crichton 2014). These civilians were later recognized for their contributions. While thorough preparation did not prevent the attack, it minimized damage through readiness, quick action, effective communication, and civilian involvement — key qualities of an effective response.

E. Boston Marathon Bombing

On April 15th, 2013, as spectators were cheering and runners were crossing the Boston Marathon finish line, two brothers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, detonated explosives nearby, killing three people and injuring more than 500 others. This attack was one of the largest on U.S. soil since 9/11.

An after-action report for the Boston Marathon bombing (2014) detailed that the response to the attack interacted with other successful post terrorism responses. The report found that "incident commanders came together quickly on Boylston Street, and within 30 minutes made a decision to stand up a nearby Unified Command Center (UCC)" while "numerous spectators and bystanders quickly responded to the critically injured" (Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency 2014, 79). The immediate response was quick, well-coordinated across agencies, and involved community members who played a crucial role in minimizing damage. The response to the attack was not finished, however, as a manhunt for the brothers was underway. While law enforcement was able to find and neutralize one of the brothers, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, they needed the assistance of ordinary citizens to find the other brother, Dzhokhar. An announcement from law enforcement read as follows:

Due to an ongoing manhunt in the Boston area, state authorities have shut down the [Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority] and issued a shelter-in-place advisory for several surrounding towns...If possible, please stay home, keep doors locked, and do not open the door for anyone other than identified law enforcement officials...Please also be aware that residents in the cities of Boston, Watertown, Waltham, Newton, Belmont, Cambridge, Brookline, and Allston-Brighton have been advised to shelter in place. Businesses in these areas have also been advised to remain closed (Earle 2020).

This request worked. Photographers, as stunned as everyone else, documented the unprecedented lifelessness of various Boston neighborhoods that Friday (Earle 2020). A few hours into the request, Dzhokhar was caught after a civilian reported suspicious activity on his boat that was parked outside his home. This collective action, strengthened by direct, purposeful roles assigned to the public, highlights the effect of civilian involvement post-attack. Like other successful case studies, the Boston case illustrated how a quick response, coupled with strong inter-agency communication and civilian participation, led to a successful outcome, culminating in the terrorists' quick capture and the restoration of Bostonian society.

IMPLICATIONS

While each successful case study showed different effective responses to terrorism, all highlighted the importance of civilian involvement. Civilians contributed in varied ways, but the Boston Marathon bombing added a partnership between law enforcement and civilians, where instructions were given as requests, not orders. Civilians were asked, not told, to help, and they did. The Boston case demonstrates that assigning civilians a clear, voluntary role encourages compliance and increases law enforcement effectiveness.

Why is it that people comply when given a role, specifically when this role isn't even mandated? This can be linked to the theory of self-determination, which focuses on the difference between autonomous and controlled types of motivation (Martela et al. 2021). Autonomous motivation involves feeling a sense of choice, as the person fully endorses their own actions or decisions. In contrast, controlled motivation means that the person engages in a particular action because they feel forced and

pressured to do so. The distinction is about how the person experiences an action: Does it feel like something they want to do, implying voluntary compliance, or something they have to do, implying pressured compliance (Martela et al. 2021)?

The instructions to stay in place following the Boston Marathon bombing attack are similar to autonomous motivation. People felt they were actively choosing to help; they were assigned a role rather than told they had to do it. They were asked to comply, not forced to. Even in the announcement, the language was cautious and non-coercive. Statements such as "a shelter-in-place advisory" or "If possible, please stay home" were more requests than commands. These requests, not commands, empowered people. The Boston case showed that a way to amplify the success of post-terrorist responses that includes civilians is to ask for help rather than demand it.

CONCLUSION

Comparing successful and unsuccessful responses to terror demonstrates that time, communication, and civic involvement play a key role in determining a response's success. The case of the Boston Marathon bombing exemplifies the power of giving civilians an active, voluntary role, making the fight a partnership between the city and local law enforcement. However, there are areas of research that could be pursued in the future to demonstrate further the effectiveness of involving civilians. Should future responses follow the Boston Marathon model, where civilians are asked to shelter in their homes until the terrorist is neutralized? Or would a more proactive approach be better? This would involve mandatory training sessions that would teach civilians how to act decisively in the moments following an attack, knowing where to go, who to help, and how to assist effectively. It is also possible that the level of civilian involvement in the aftermath of an attack depends on the historical context and nature of the threat. Some responses may require more civilian participation, while others do not. Answering these questions through extensive research could provide valuable insights into the most optimal way to mobilize society to respond to terror. It could yield new approaches to minimize the damage from attacks and accelerate societal recovery.

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Mexico: Cartel Economy, Cartel State

Gabriel Simon-Hakalir

INTRODUCTION

Beyond its military challenges, Mexico's limited progress in dismantling the cartel system stems from the state's deep economic entanglement with cartel-related capital flows. Through extensive money laundering networks, large-scale cartel employment, and remittances tied to illicit activity, cartel enterprises have become embedded in the national economy. In many regions, cartels function as the largest and most reliable employers, sustaining local livelihoods where legitimate industry has collapsed. This economic dependency discourages the Mexican government from fully confronting organized crime, as dismantling the cartels would also destabilize key sectors of the economy. Building on recent economic and government analyses, this paper argues that Mexico's economy and stability have become structurally dependent on both the implicit and explicit activities of the cartels, creating powerful disincentives for meaningful state intervention.

Understanding Mexico's failure to suppress the operation of cartels requires one to analyze more than just Mexico's military or law enforcement capacity. Rather, one has to look at the economic and institutional failures that have left Mexico's economy and security dependent on the stabilization and even success of cartels. Over the past two decades, the cartels have become embedded in Mexico's legitimate and illicit economies, creating an inextricable economic web of power. The theoretical lens of political and developmental economics can show how this interdependence formed and why it continues to exist. Instead of acting solely as criminal rings, cartels operate as legitimate economic actors whose influx of (often illegitimate) capital, labor markets, and internal security stabilization protocols perpetuate stabilized, employed, economically buoyant regions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section examines the methods by which cartels transform their illicit markets into legitimate economic structures. Drawing from political and developmental economic theory, it argues that the Mexican state's inability to suppress cartel activity stems from three factors: the distortion of economic growth caused by cartel violence, the adaptation of companies to violent environments, and the engulfment of corruption in public institutions. These factors collectively transform cartels from a source of chaos and criminality into a stabilizing pillar of regional economic and security development.

Bel and Holst (2018) demonstrate that cartel-related violence and state militarization suppress economic growth while diverting investment toward illegal activities, distorting Mexico's economic development. Utar (2024) shows that legitimate companies, when operating in regions dominated by cartel violence, adapt by informalizing their practice and employment, integrating cartel capital and criminal activities with formal legitimate markets. Finally, Morselli and Prieto-Curiel (2021) expose institutional corruption within local police forces, which sustains the cartel domination by providing

stability for cartel operation and dismantling the state's ability to enforce the law.

Together, these studies form the theoretical foundation for understanding how cartel-related capital becomes indispensable to Mexico's economy. A framework starts to develop that connects these findings to state dependence, institutional weaknesses, and the political-criminal economy. By tracking the structural interdependence of illicit and legitimate economic markets, it becomes clear that the domination of cartels in Mexico arises not only from a police failure but also is a reflection of the economic circumstances sustaining the Mexican state.

Continuing the Mexican state's war on the cartels raises a paradox. While the war has been framed as an effort to restore peace and enable economic development, it has instead furthered distortions in the national economy. Bel and Holst (2018) provide a comprehensive empirical analysis of this dynamic. Using regional economic growth data, they "find that the growth in the number of homicides had negative and significant effects on state GDP growth," suggesting that violence is not a symptom of low economic development but rather a central factor in reducing Mexico's economic status. As cartels consolidate power, investment shifts towards safer regions or into illicit markets in that region, undermining the state's ability to measure and encourage regional growth.

Bel and Holst's economic distortion functions on two levels. On one level, violence directly drives away legal business operations and deters investors. When companies anticipate insecurity, they factor in the volatility and redirect capital into short-term ventures, typically those that can be mobile and relocate rapidly if conditions deteriorate. These types of ventures are also ideal for money-laundering operations, which helps solidify a cartel foothold in the region. On the second level, "the actions implemented by the central government, specifically in the form of military expenditure," reallocates tax dollars away from productive investment in infrastructure in favor of security and military budgets. Bel and Holst argue that this draining of state capital creates a "development trap" in which the state's efforts to combat the cartels result in the state instead propagating the conditions that allow them to thrive.

These distortions fundamentally alter the structure of the Mexican economy. As legitimate channels of investment become riskier, illicit ventures become more stable. Cartel operations fill the investment vacuum left by the legitimate business flight. Laundered money enters regional economies through everything from real estate to agriculture to retail. This process blurs the line and connects illicit and legitimate economic growth, resulting in cartels becoming indispensable to regional economies and stability.

The economic consequences of the drug war are not limited to the loss of stability, life, or property, but also result in stronger cartel positions and economic interdependence. When violence and illicit capital become the features of local economies, the state's influence over the region's development and security weakens. Municipal governments rely on the tax dollars generated by local, often illicit businesses, in this area, in order to sustain local government, and national politicians face a dilemma: cracking down too much on illicit money laundering businesses can trigger unemployment and local recession, especially

in regions where cartels have totally replaced formal industries.

Bel and Holst illuminate the first mechanism of economic interdependence, that being growth distortion. The drug war does not take place only in a vacuum, but the economic development is also reshaped, and labor and capital are channeled towards informal and illicit systems when intergovernmental-cartel violence escalates. The cartels' integration and, in some cases, domination of Mexico's economy can be viewed as a free market's adaptation to structural insecurity.

While Bel and Holst (2018) emphasize how violence suppresses growth at the regional level, Hale Utar's 2024 study, "Firms and Labor in Times of Violence: Evidence from the Mexican Drug War," views the situation from a microeconomic level. The research demonstrates that violence fundamentally reshapes how firms hire, produce, and interact with local labor markets. Using company data from Mexican manufacturers, Utar (2024) finds that firms exposed to cartel violence tend to reduce formal employment and shift towards off-the-books labor. This adaptation allows them to remain operating in violent areas, but it contributes to a larger economic corruption that binds the legitimate sector to cartel operations. Utar (2024) finds that cartel violence increases uncertainty in production and trade. Firms respond to this volatility by cutting back on permanent, formal jobs, avoiding higher wages and traceable payments, and substituting them with under-the-table arrangements. This change weakens Mexico's ability to collect taxes, protect laborers, and creates a large sector of employment that is invisible to the state. In many cartel-dominated labor economies, cartels become the largest and most stable employers, either directly through operations or through illicit businesses. This creates a cycle in which company behavior influenced by cartel violence helps reproduce the circumstances that sustain cartels.

Utar also shows that companies alter their production models, with "violence ha[ving] a significant negative impact on plant output, product scope, employment, and capacity utilization." Many reorient output toward less capital-intensive goods, preferring low-skill labor and smaller investments in such an unpredictable area. Companies also tend to move to municipalities that experience less cartel behavior, resulting in "safe enclaves" while propagating economic isolation and handing over some economies to the cartels. Utar's "results show that a violent environment has a significant negative impact on manufacturing plants' output, product scope, employment, and capacity utilization," proving how the cycle of violence generates not just social disorder but an entire reconfiguration of how firms participate in the national economy.

Utar's findings extend beyond company-level decision-making. The "cartelization" of local economies represents a structural link in some regions between the legal and illicit economies. Companies adapting to cartel violence often become entangled in cartel-exploited logistical, financial, and labor networks. This creates a hybrid animal of an economy, one that is legitimate on paper but functionally illicit and dependent on the protection and capital of the cartels.

Thus, we once again find a feedback loop between insecurity and economic adaptation. Violence reduces formal employment opportunities,

pushing labor into illicit sectors. As the illicit economy grows, it becomes increasingly dependent on the liquidity and labor provided by cartel operations. This dependence then reduces political and social incentives to confront the cartels, as both local governments and local citizens derive indirect economic benefits from the de facto cartel economy. Company behavior in the face of violence is not only a rational response to violent volatility but also has become a mechanism for cartels' economic and regional dominations.

Hale Utar's analysis complements Bel and Holst's macroeconomic results by illustrating how the private sector internalizes the costs of violence and reorganizes around the cartels. Together, these studies reveal that the Mexican state's relationship with organized crime is not one of confrontation but of adaptation and dependence.

While economic distortions and company adaptations explain the cartel's embedment in Mexico's economy, Morselli and Prieto-Curiel (2021) show that corruption within law enforcement is what allows these economic ties to persist and deepen. Their study, "Modeling the Role of Police Corruption in the Reduction of Organized-Crime Violence," analyzes how corruption alters the dynamics of violence between rival criminal groups and the state. Their findings illustrate how police corruption doesn't just reduce violence between the cartels and state, but instead it actually stabilizes cartel dominance by enabling the cartels and suppressing enforcement efforts, noting how "police corruption is not a random occurrence but a structural component of organized crime's survival" (Morselli and Prieto-Curiel 2021, 7). By modeling the flow of corruption through enforcement networks, they show that even small levels of institutional corruption can produce "long-term equilibria in which criminal organizations thrive and violence becomes self-sustaining" (Morselli and Prieto-Curiel 2021, 9). This study helps explain why the Mexican government's militarized strategy has failed to produce an actual reduction in cartel operations or violence.

From an economic perspective, corruption can help cartels become semi-legitimate local powers. If the cartels run the economy, and they pay and control law enforcement, and they employ most people in the region, then the cartels effectively rule that part of the country in a semi-political manner. Corruption acts as both a symptom and a mechanism of cartel entrenchment. It not only reflects real political power but also reproduces power through governmental dependency. Local politicians, underpaid law enforcement, and municipal employees rely on illicit payments to sustain political operations and personal livelihoods. Corruption, even a small amount, can maintain the same levels of violence for "long periods" (Morselli and Prieto-Curiel 2021, 8). Even small levels of corruption can perpetuate cartel economic domination through the effect that cartel violence has on the economy. Cartel-linked capital becomes embedded within the political economy of governance itself. Rather than existing outside the state, cartel networks operate through it, shaping public spending, law enforcement, and municipal politics.

CASE STUDIES AND STRUCTURAL DEPENDENCE

While the theoretical section establishes how cartel capital operates within and overtakes Mexico's

economy, the following case studies illustrate the specific mechanisms through which this dependency operates in practice. Each case focuses on a different dimension of the cartel-state economic relationship, showing how structural weaknesses created by economic globalization, inequality, and institutional weakness transformed organized crime into a central pillar of Mexico's economy.

The first case, studied by Dell, Feigenberg, and Teshima (2019) and Erickson and Owen (2025), examines how trade liberalization and global competition displaced Mexican workers and companies, creating the socioeconomic vacuum in which cartels expanded. The second case, based on Dell et al. (2023), explores how cartels filled this vacuum by becoming large-scale employers, offering income and mobility in regions neglected by formal development policy. The third case, using Sáenz and Sandoval (2020) and Díaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Romero (2015), investigates the role of money laundering and financial interdependence, revealing how illicit profits circulate through legitimate institutions. Finally, the fourth case, informed by Lloyd (2022) and Mercille (2011), analyzes the political economy of corruption and the state's implicit acceptance of cartel-linked capital, showing how governance itself becomes economically dependent on criminal finance.

Together, these cases demonstrate that Mexico's struggle with organized crime cannot be understood as a purely security or moral issue. It reflects a delicate economic equilibrium in which the state, legitimate companies, and illicit networks are bound together by mutual dependence. Disrupting this equilibrium requires more than a military response; Mexico's economic and institutional foundations need reconfiguration.

One of the most significant structural drivers of cartel domination in Mexico has been the economic disruption caused by trade liberalization. The NAFTA agreement and globalization pressures transformed the Mexican economy, giving it opportunities to access foreign markets but also increasing pressure on its industrial and agricultural markets through foreign competition. As Dell, Feigenberg, and Teshima (2019) demonstrate, the resulting loss of stable manufacturing and agricultural employment created a fertile environment for organized crime. Their study finds that "municipalities more exposed to Chinese import competition experienced larger increases in drug-related homicides after 2007," linking trade pressures to the spread of cartel violence.

Dell et al. (2019) argue that the closure of employment opportunities reduced "the returns to legal work" and "pushed labor into criminal sectors," in regions where Mexico lacked the capacity to absorb displaced workers through economic diversification or social programs. This effectively turned cartels into a large labor market, capable of offering income to the jobless, protection, and valuable community infrastructure where state institutions had failed. Rather than existing as a parallel sub-economy, cartel operations became embedded in the post-liberalization regional economy as one of the largest employers. Erickson and Owen (2025) extend this analysis to Mexico's agricultural economy, using the avocado trade as a case study of how globalization pressures can propagate organized crime. Trade liberalization exposed Mexico to new markets, which increased the

profitability of crops such as avocados, but weak governance allowed cartels to capture portions of this market through extortion, land control, and protection-racket taxation. Erickson and Owen (2025) conclude that "trade openness without institutional safeguards transforms opportunity into vulnerability," where cartels infiltrate the high-value sector's growth rather than benefiting the national economy.

These findings reveal a paradox: the very reforms designed to modernize Mexico's economy deepened the socioeconomic environment that sustains cartel operations. Globalization not only made Mexico poorer, but it also redirected capital and labor into cartels, intertwining crime with the country's integration into the global markets. Trade liberalization, thus, was a catalyst for a stronger, richer cartel.

Dell et al.'s (2023) Science study, "Reducing Cartel Recruitment Is the Only Way to Lower Violence in Mexico," reframes cartel violence as a labor market problem rather than purely a security one. Using computer modeling and field data, the authors argue that Mexico's cartels sustain themselves by filling the economic void left by the state's limited capacity for job creation, "offering income, protection, and a sense of belonging to thousands of recruits."

The study finds that conventional strategies like arrests, military interventions, or leadership targeting do little to reduce long-term violence if economic recruitment incentives remain open. The authors argue that "reducing cartel recruitment is the only way to achieve sustained reductions in violence," since labor deprivation drives individuals toward cartels in the first place (Dell et al. 2023). In many rural regions, cartel employment has become the de facto norm, providing a steady income where the state and legitimate markets have disappeared. By treating organized crime as an employer rather than simply a criminal enterprise, Dell et al. (2023) reveal how deeply intertwined the illicit and formal economies have become. Efforts to dismantle cartels thus risk destabilizing local economies unless they are paired with investments in employment, education, and jobs.

While violence and employment reveal the surface-level reach of cartel influence, financial interdependence exposes its strong foundations. Sáenz and Sandoval (2020), in "Mexican Money Laundering in the United States: The Case of the Flores Notebook," document how cartel profits are integrated into legitimate financial systems through shell companies, money laundering, and foreign remittance channels. They discover that "laundered funds are not isolated from the formal economy but circulate through it, financing both legal and illegal activities" (Sáenz and Sandoval 2020, 215). This interconnection makes it difficult for authorities to cut off the financing of cartels without destabilizing swaths of the Mexican economy, which relies on the cartels. Similarly, Díaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Romero (2015), in "Caught in the Crossfire: The Geography of Extortion and Police Corruption in Mexico," find that in many regions state institutions have been so thoroughly captured by criminal organizations through corruption that the distinction between state authority and criminal power has effectively dissolved. As a result, money laundering becomes a stabilizing, power-producing mechanism for cartels and the regional economies.

Together, these studies show how Mexico's formal economy and its criminal underworld are financially co-dependent. Cartel capital sustains employment, companies, the police, and even government budgets, making the suppression of cartels prohibitively economically and politically disruptive.

The final dimension of Mexico's cartel-state relationship lies in the political acceptance of cartel-linked capital. Lloyd (2022), in "Drugs, Thugs, and Mariachis: In Search of an Institutional Response to México's Criminal Cartels," argues that decades of ineffective enforcement have built corruption into a part of governmental strategy. Rather than confronting cartels directly, local and national governments tend to seek to balance their need for cartel capital to sustain underpaid employees and regional economies with their need to present some sort of social order to their citizens. This "pragmatic accommodation," as Lloyd puts it, allows the state to maintain a semblance of stability while sacrificing enforcement and sovereignty.

Mercille (2011), in "Violent Narco-Cartels or U.S. Hegemony? The Political Economy of the 'War on Drugs' in Mexico," places this dynamic in a broader geopolitical and economic context. He writes that "the Mexican government has been complicit in sustaining the very narco-economy it claims to fight, as drug revenues and laundered capital help maintain macroeconomic stability" (Mercille 2011). This complicity is not express cooperation; it tends to take the form of selective regulation and prosecution, and tolerance of cartel leaders who contribute to local economic growth and stability.

Mercille and Lloyd emphasize that cartel influence continues to exist not because of state absence but because of selective state appearance. Corruption and tacit complicity transform cartel capital into a pillar of the national economy, sustaining a fragile equilibrium in which dismantling the cartels would also mean destroying Mexico's economic and fragile political order.

These case studies reveal that cartel capital in Mexico is not an external or parallel force but an integral force of the country's post-trade liberalization economic transformation. The labor displacement, financial interdependence, and institutional corruption ultimately caused by globalization forged an economic environment in which cartels became one of the largest, load-bearing pillars of the Mexican economy and state. The cartels' integration into labor, finance, and governance shows that Mexico's legitimate economy is indiscernible from its illicit economy. This makes the dismantling of cartel influence not a matter for just law enforcement but also a systemic economic reform. Thus, to actually end the scourge of cartel dominance over the Mexican state, Mexico must reform the deep political and economic dependencies that allow cartel investment to substitute for the state capacity and market opportunity.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As established, the primary challenge for Mexico's government in dismantling the cartels is not a law enforcement issue, but an issue of systemic economic reformation. Cartels have entrenched themselves in the national economy through three reinforcing mechanisms: large-scale employment, financial integration through money-laundering, and institutional weakness that fosters local corruption

dependence. The more violence sparked by military crackdowns, the more the cartels entrench themselves in legitimate economies. Therefore, policies that center only on combative measures tend to displace or reinforce cartel power instead of dispersing it. Real solutions must first reform the economic and institutional failures that make cartel participation both viable and necessary for regional populations.

Reducing recruitment requires the creation of legitimate employment opportunities in the poorest regions most affected by the cartel. Research by Dell et al. (2023) finds that cartel membership often functions as a rational economic decision where legal employment is rare. National strategies should then focus on reallocating military budgets to investment for job creation, training, and infrastructure in the most affected areas. Moreover, these investments should be sustained over a long period of time, as short-term programs will fail to make meaningful change.

Financial reform is also essential to curbing the circulation of cartel capital within legitimate markets. As Sáenz and Sandoval (2020) and Díaz-Cayeros, Magaloni, and Romero (2015) demonstrate, money laundering blurs the line between formal and illicit economies, enabling cartels to accumulate wealth through legal companies. The Mexican state must strengthen its financial regulations by enhancing bank transparency laws, improving cooperation with US financial crime intelligence, and meaningfully penalizing corporate complicity in laundering schemes. These efforts need to be balanced with the potential destabilization that withdrawing cartel cash influxes will cause to local economies. Policies should be gradually imposed while replacing criminal liquidity with legitimate investment in order to avoid the collapse of regional economies overnight.

Institutional reform needs to be the cornerstone of cartel dismantling. Weak and underpaid local governments and police have become dependent on cartel patronage in order to function. Addressing this dependency requires long-term investment in state capacity. These goals require ensuring fair salaries for police officers, implementing transparent public budgeting at the municipal level, and rebuilding legitimacy between the government and citizens. Equally important is fiscal centralization and the strengthening of local governments through direct investment instead of corrupt cartel money.

Extricating cartel influence from Mexico's economy demands a multidimensional strategy that integrates economic inclusion, financial accountability, and institutional strengthening. The power of the cartels lies not just in their violence but in their ability to fill the holes the weak government has left. Providing jobs, orders, and salaries to government officials and officers is a responsibility that has shifted from the de jure state of Mexico to the de facto state, the cartels. Until the Mexican government assumes this role with a serious, strong commitment to actually running their country, cartel capital will continue to operate as a form of government in many areas of the state. The path for the Mexican government towards economic and legal sovereignty, therefore, lies not in defeating cartels but in looking inwards and repairing the circumstances that have allowed the cartels to become the state where the state has failed.

CONCLUSION

Mexico's economy and stability have become structurally dependent on both the implicit and explicit activities of the cartels, creating powerful disincentives for meaningful state intervention. There is the question, who is the owner of the house? Who, truly, runs the Mexican state? Is the Mexican state the weak, ineffectual Mexico City government that cannot pay its employees a meaningful wage, and cannot enforce its laws in large swaths of cartel-controlled territory? The Mexico City government that fails to employ its people or prop up its economy? Is it really the same government that cannot defeat enemy actors who control so much of the state?

Or, is Mexico actually run by the organizations that employ most of the population, that own and operate most of the largest and most successful agricultural and industrial firms? The same organizations that are impervious to state military intervention, that have actually created a socioeconomic circumstance where they gain power and economic footholds, the more the state propagates violence against them.

This is the challenge currently posed to the Mexican government: reform your institutions, invest in your people, provide them with opportunities, or continue to set pesos on fire in military interventions and fail to enforce your law or collect taxes from your people. If the Mexican government really does still run Mexico, and they wish to continue to do so in any meaningful way, this is what they need to do.

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When "Empowerment" Becomes a Weapon: A Personal Analysis

Chloe Baker[1]

Former Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat once called the "womb of Palestinian women" the greatest weapon of the Palestinian people (Erez and Laster 2019).

But what happens when a woman cannot use this so-called "weapon" for the nationalist cause? Wafa Idris, the first female suicide bomber in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, faced exactly this dilemma. When informed she could not have children, her husband divorced her (Sofer and Addison 2012). Stripped of her ability to bear the next generation of *shahids*, Idris found another way to support Palestinian resistance: by becoming a *shahida* herself. In January 2002, she detonated herself on Jaffa Street in Jerusalem, killing one and injuring over 140, an act of terror whose human cost cannot be separated from the analysis that will follow. While media outlets in the West described Idris as "socially deviant," Palestinian media "celebrate[d] her act of martyrdom, ...regarding her as 'the ultimate form of motherhood: the mother of Palestine'" (Hamamra 2018). Her face appeared on posters, she was honored in poems (Palestinian Media Watch 2019), and a library at a children's hospital in Yemen was even named for her (MEMRI 2009); she was celebrated more in death than she was in life.

The tension between the language of female power and the reality of female utility in Palestinian society is at the heart of how these terrorist groups recruit, motivate, and celebrate women. These groups do not simply permit women to participate in violence; they package and brand it as liberation.

It's no secret that Palestinian society wouldn't win first place in a competition geared toward embracing progressivism. Personal Status Laws rooted in Shari'a govern marriage, divorce, and inheritance—and they do not favor women (Richter-Devroe 2011). Men may take up to four wives, while women cannot marry without a male guardian's permission. Daughters inherit half of what sons do, and often receive nothing at all. Divorce laws overwhelmingly favor men, leaving women to relinquish financial security just to legally exit a marriage (United Nations Development Programme 2018). In the political sphere, women have the legal right to vote and run for office, but remain vastly underrepresented in Palestinian leadership (UN Women 2022). Traditional gender norms continue to dictate women's roles in the home and community, and honor-based practices still govern how women are treated, particularly in regard to sexuality and public behavior.

Life under Hamas rule is arguably worse. Women are heavily encouraged to dress conservatively (Ma'an News Agency 2009), to the extent that female journalists who refuse to wear hijabs become victims

[1]This article is adapted from a larger research project conducted by the author in Summer 2025 as a Kressel Research Fellow at Yeshiva University

of violence (Palestinian Media Watch 2021). In 2013, Hamas chose to cancel the UNRWA Gaza marathon rather than permit women to participate (UNRWA 2013). And in 2021, Hamas barred unmarried women from traveling without a male guardian, referring to either her husband or father (Akram 2021).

These are not incidental restrictions. Rather, they are entrenched in an institution that creates a system in which women's autonomy and choice is kept on a tight leash. Women's public presence is conditional, and their worth is significantly determined by their relationship to men and the Palestinian national cause. Martyrdom is presented as empowerment and independence, and this messaging is effective. In a society which has foreclosed most other typical routes to recognition and praise, the offer of honor through martyrdom is more than appealing.

Across propaganda posters, public murals, and Palestinian Authority-sponsored school textbooks, a consistent pattern emerges. Female agency is portrayed as real, honorable, and attainable, but only through martyrdom, nationalist sacrifice, or participation in violence.

Reem Riyashi, a Hamas suicide bomber, is depicted in official Hamas imagery cradling her toddler in one arm and a rifle in the other, her identity morphed into a single symbol of maternal militancy (Dahal 2020). Before her attack, she recorded herself expressing her longing to have her "shredded limbs" become "shrapnel, tearing Zionists to pieces" (McLaughlin 2012). The Head of Hamas's Women's Movement, Rajaa al-Halabi, conveyed to women that their highest honor is achieved through this ultimate sacrifice, claiming that "all women of Hamas and Gaza would become suicide bombers if asked" (MEMRI 2021). A mural of teenage suicide bomber Ayat al-Akhras adorns the exterior wall of a school in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp south of Bethlehem, where children pass by every single day. This offers a direct example of how militant iconography penetrates the everyday spaces of childhood. In the West Bank town of Burqa, the Palestinian NGO Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) named a youth community center after Dalal al-Mughrabi, a Palestinian terrorist who led one of the most vicious attacks in Israel's history, killing 37 Israelis, among them 12 children (Marcus and Zilberdik 2017).

In a fourth-grade Palestinian Authority sponsored textbook, an illustration accompanies a poem in which a young girl in uniform walks on a blood-soaked path toward Jerusalem (IMPACT-se 2017). The poem espouses her worth as being defined entirely by what she is willing to destroy for the cause. In another textbook, a staged protest scene is depicted showing women holding signs reading "Freedom for Prisoners" and "We Will Not Forget Our Prisoners," demanding the release of individuals imprisoned by Israel for violent acts (Pardo 2017). This is an empowerment that is strictly conditional; the notion that visibility and participation are sanctioned only when women support the dominant nationalist narrative leaves no space for alternative or oppositional viewpoints.

This is what weaponized empowerment looks like. It borrows the vocabulary of agency – honor, recognition, purpose, and motherhood – and

attaches it exclusively to violence. It tells women they matter, while ensuring the only way to truly matter is by dying for the cause. The message is carefully constructed in media, posters and school textbooks. Terrorist organizations show that martyrdom is sacred, sacrifice is a feminine virtue, and death in service of the cause is the ultimate form of self-actualization.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that authentic autonomy requires more than the absence of just physical chains (Stoljar 2024). It requires the presence of conditions in which rational, self-directed choice is actually possible. Real education, freedom from manipulation, and recognition of one's worth as a human being rather than as an instrument of destruction are all essential factors that need to be present in a society where free will is possible. By Kantian standards, what these organizations offer women is not empowerment. It is precisely the inverse — the deliberate instrumentalization of women in service of ideological ends, masqueraded in the language of honor, sacrifice, and recognition. Kant understood that the most insidious constraints on autonomy are not always external chains, but rather internal ones. The adoption of values and self-conceptions that were never freely chosen, but carefully installed.

Throughout my research, a question I kept returning to was whether or not these women truly understood the nature of the choice they were making. Knowing that women who live under extremism are subject to profound structural oppression, I struggled with understanding whether women who gave their lives to terror truly understood the nature of the choice they were making. Did they act as an escape from an unbearable reality? Or did they genuinely, freely choose destruction?

Through my research, I encountered testimonies of female Palestinian suicide bombers, accounts from female Palestinian prisoners convicted of terror-based offenses, and videos of ordinary women praising martyrdom or vowing to repeat the acts of October 7 "again and again and again." At first, I thought I might conclude that not all women who commit acts of terror do so with malicious, premeditated intent. But after reviewing this material, my perspective shifted. I came to believe that these women do know exactly what they are doing, but I do not see that as the end of the analysis. I do not view them as victims of a cause. I view them as victims of the circumstances that shaped them: inadequate education, systemic indoctrination, and a society that glorifies destruction and celebrates terror as the highest form of honor.

This is where Kantian autonomy becomes not just a theoretical framework but a deeply human question. We can only make choices based on the information available to us, our lived experience, and the context in which we inhabit. If you live in a world where terror is what you are taught, what you see in the media, and what you are raised to aspire to – as the media examined in this article illustrate – are you truly making a free choice? Kant would say no. Genuine autonomy requires not just the absence of physical coercion, but access to the conditions in which rational, self-directed reasoning is actually possible. When those conditions are denied from childhood, the choices that follow are not free, they are installed.

This research answered some questions, but it ultimately generated more. It reinforced my belief that education is among the most powerful tools for building a better world – and that the most insidious form of oppression is one that convinces its subjects they are free. What kind of education would be necessary to change the status quo and open the possibility of genuinely different choices? What responsibility do we – as students, researchers, or simply as citizens who care – have in shaping that? I don't yet have a full answer. But I have a sharper awareness of the complexity, and a conviction that these are questions always worth asking.

Lasting peace cannot be built while this architecture of indoctrination remains intact. A generation raised on textbooks that depict blood-soaked paths to Jerusalem, on murals outside their schools glorifying suicide bombers, on a culture that celebrates martyrdom as the highest aspiration is a generation whose capacity to imagine a different, brighter future, is gone.

The most dangerous propaganda is not the kind that commands. It is the kind that convinces you it is setting you free.

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