

Why China's New Map Of Its Borders Has Stirred Regional Tensions



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
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10-17-2023 ~ China's release of its standard map has produced outrage and alarm in several countries, yet Beijing remains steadfast in continuing its historical approach toward its borders.

In the waning days of August 2023, closely following a BRICS summit and mere days ahead of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and G20 meetings, Beijing [revealed its latest](#) seemingly innocuous “standard” map. Having been released regularly [since at least 2006](#), China's standard maps are aimed to eliminate “problem maps” that do not affirm China's territorial integrity. But the 2023 edition invited ripples of condemnation throughout China's near abroad and beyond, as it repeated Beijing's claims on divisive territorial disputes with its neighbors—including the Philippines, which has seen its struggle with China over a small shoal in the South China Sea [escalate significantly over recent weeks](#).

The release of China's map, coupled with its aggressive border strategies, has

created enormous uncertainty across the Indo-Pacific. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, various actors are wrestling with how to effectively counter China's actions.

China's perception of maritime and international laws as [products of Western customs](#) has underpinned its level of adherence to them. "[Stealthy compliance](#)" allows China to ambiguously accept international law while interpreting it flexibly to advance its territorial claims. Beijing will also explicitly reject international law, exemplified by its dismissal of a tribunal in The Hague that challenged China's assertions in the South China Sea [in 2016](#). Regularly publishing maps helps assert China's claims to domestic and international audiences, without putting Beijing in a position where it has to enforce them simultaneously.

Beijing's strategy has effectively thwarted regional and Western responses and prevented the outbreak of major conflict. Inflaming territorial disputes serves as a bargaining chip in bilateral negotiations and lays the groundwork for potential future claims as China's strength is expected to increase. Channeling nationalist sentiment outward has also [bolstered the Chinese government's](#) domestic legitimacy and diverted attention from contentious issues like Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong.

However, the response to China's 2023 map reveals growing backlash to Beijing's approach to its border issues and questions over its long-term sustainability.

China has periodically unveiled its nine-dash line map [for decades](#), delineating its claims in the South China Sea. The [mystery shrouding whether these claims](#) pertain to water rights, land features, or both, has kept the region on edge. Regardless, they symbolize China's desire to reduce U.S. control over regional shipping lanes, secure rights over natural resources, and project power beyond its first island chain into the expansive Pacific.

China's latest map took a bold step by reintroducing a tenth dash east of Taiwan—a largely dormant claim [since 2013](#). The move not only reaffirmed China's ownership of Taiwan but also extended China's reach beyond Taiwan's recognized territorial waters, a direct challenge to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Reasserting this claim may point to growing confidence in Beijing of being able to impose its various claims in the region. China's map also continued to emphasize China's rights to the Senkaku Islands,

disputed with Japan. Both Taipei and Tokyo [vehemently criticized China for the map's release](#).

China and ASEAN had meanwhile been negotiating a code of conduct for the South China Sea, [reaching an agreement in July](#) to accelerate the process. The release of the 2023 map just days before the ASEAN summit in Indonesia naturally triggered swift rejection from member states such as [Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam](#), which have longstanding wariness of Chinese maritime territorial ambitions.

China occupied the Paracel Islands, contested by Vietnam, [in 1974](#) and engaged in a brief skirmish with Vietnam over the Johnson South Reef [in 1988](#). The Philippines was meanwhile forced to concede Mischief Reef to China [in 1995](#) but later stranded a warship on the Second Thomas Shoal [in 1999](#) to enforce its claims there. Chinese forces steadily took control over the Spratly Islands (including by creating artificial islands) [over the last decade](#), while the [2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff](#) saw China gain effective control over a shoal against the Philippines. Malaysia has also seen increasing naval confrontations with China [in recent years](#).

[Under former Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte](#), Manila pursued a more hospitable approach to China and its territorial claims. But since 2022 under President Bongbong Marcos, the Philippines has taken a [renewed confrontational strategy in confronting China](#), including blocking Chinese attempts in recent weeks to deny resupply efforts to the Filipino warship [on the Second Thomas Shoal](#). Vietnam has also drawn [closer to the U.S. in recent years](#), largely in response to China, and the 2023 map may also convince Malaysia to do so as well.

However, not all ASEAN states are willing to coordinate with the U.S. and confront Beijing. Indonesian officials [downplayed the 2023 map's significance](#), and days later [inaugurated a China-backed](#) high-speed rail project. Similarly, Brunei raised limited objections to the map, reflecting its pledge with China made [in July 2023](#) for greater cooperation. Many other ASEAN member states maintain [substantial trade ties](#) with China, tempering their willingness to take a firm stance even amid the release of another provocative Chinese map.

China's coast guard, navy (now the [world's largest](#)), and [militarized fishing fleets](#) also deter countries from escalating disputes in the South China Sea. However,

resisting China's territorial claims is complicated because many countries are also embroiled in disagreements with one another. Taiwan, for instance, [claims Japan's Senkaku Islands](#), while Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines [have their own disputes](#). By inflaming its own border disputes, China often exacerbates other existing conflicts, and other countries may opt to avoid involvement because they fear it could lead to more tension with their other neighbors.

China's land border disputes were also thrust into the spotlight with the unveiling of its 2023 map. Longstanding border issues with ASEAN member [Myanmar persist](#), but Myanmar's internal strife and [economic reliance on China](#) have rendered moot any serious opposition to Chinese border policies.

Instead, China's most serious border dispute is with India, involving a poorly defined 2,100-mile international [border that was never demarcated](#). China and India both claim sovereignty over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. In 2020, the two countries had their [first deadly skirmish](#) in 45 years, with another violent clash [in 2022](#). Beijing and New Delhi have also [authorized infrastructure projects](#) in the disputed regions to solidify their claims and ease logistical issues. India [lodged an official diplomatic protest](#) against China for its 2023 map, extinguishing any hopes for a potential thaw in India-China relations that had been suggested after the BRICS summit in South Africa in August.

India has also supported Bhutan in its territorial disputes with China. [Bhutan requested and received Indian assistance](#) in 2017 to repel Chinese troops and construction workers that had entered Bhutan, while China made new territorial claims in Bhutan [in 2020](#). But in a surprising turn of events in April 2023, [Bhutan appeared to partially acquiesce to China and explore concessions](#) by agreeing to a [joint technical team](#) with China to address their territorial issues.

India's attempt to rally regional opposition against China has also been complicated by Nepal, which has territorial disputes with both China and [India](#). Nepal's [protest against China's 2023 map](#) also criticized the inclusion of several territories as part of India which it claims as its own. Beijing has [consistently accused India](#) of encroaching on Nepalese territory to undermine New Delhi's territorial claims and take away attention from its own dispute with Nepal.

China's 2023 map further stirred controversy by reviving a settled dispute with

Russia. Although both countries resolved longstanding border disputes in the 1990s and 2000s, China's latest edition claimed [a small island](#) that was divided between the two countries in 2005. [Russian officials dismissed the map's claims](#), stating the issue had already been resolved.

Marking the island as such may have been a retaliatory gesture by China in response to a Russian map from 2022 showing [Aksai Lachin and Arunachal Pradesh in India](#). It also likely appealed to nationalist elements within China critical of Russia's territorial gains from [unequal treaties](#) during the 19th and 20th centuries. But China's assertiveness also serves as a signal to Russia as its [dependence on China has grown since its invasion of Ukraine](#). The Kremlin's tepid response reflected its increasing unwillingness to confront Beijing.

Barely three weeks after the release of China's map, China and Syria, an important Russian ally, announced the formation of a [strategic partnership](#). Together with [competing Chinese and Russian interests](#) in Central Asia, the 2023 map marks another subtle but notable test for the Sino-Russian [no-limits partnership](#) announced in February 2022.

China's assertions are also bolstered by the United States' historical wavering on international law. The U.S. was [accused of breaking international law](#) by the International Court of Justice by mining Nicaraguan harbors and supporting rebels in the country in the 1980s. Furthermore, the U.S. has [yet to ratify the UNCLOS](#), a significant maritime framework. Washington's [inability to mediate](#) the 2012 dispute between the Philippines and China encouraged Beijing to test the United States' willingness to defend the region. As the U.S. seeks to rally countries into conducting [freedom of navigation exercises](#) in the region, China will increasingly aim to disrupt them and establish squatter's rights.

Concordantly, Beijing will continue to block attempts to "[internationalize](#)" its territorial disputes, opting for multilateral or bilateral talks where it can leverage its strengths. Keeping these disputes ongoing (or reigniting them) puts pressure on its neighbors and fuels nationalist sentiment in China, with claims likely to escalate if Beijing perceives its position as stronger.

However, China's increasingly [aggressive foreign policy under President Xi Jinping](#) runs the risk of turning the country into a regional antagonist. Central Asian states, which also [solved their territorial disputes with China](#), are also likely

increasingly nervous. [The riots in China](#) against Japanese businesses during heightened tension over the Senkaku Islands in 2012 serve as a stark reminder of how exploiting nationalist sentiment can spiral out of control and damage China's reputation as an attractive place for investment. For the U.S., successfully rallying the region becomes much easier when it can highlight China's self-interested actions.

China's enigmatic and assertive border strategies have far-reaching implications for regional and global stability. While its tactics have yielded short-term benefits, they carry the risk of escalating disputes into conflicts and generating significant international backlash. The current geopolitical landscape remains dynamic, with major powers and smaller countries grappling to find an effective response to Chinese calculations.

By John P. Ruehl

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G7 Versus BRICS: Power Struggles Are Not Class Struggles



Richard D. Wolff

Class struggles interact with but are different from power struggles. The ancient conflicts between city-states Athens and Sparta were power struggles, while within each, slaves and enslavers engaged in class struggles. Britain and France were absolute monarchies in late European feudalism fully engaged in power struggles. At the same time, class struggles between lords and serfs internally agitated both “great” powers. Now, after slavery and feudalism have largely ended and capitalism prevails globally, great power struggles exist between the G7 and BRICS and among their member nations, as well as other nations. At the same time, class struggles exist between employers and employees in all nations. Power and class struggles condition and shape one another. Both have been and remain core aspects of history; so too have ideological habits of confusing and conflating them.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany’s monarch, [said](#) in 1914 as World War I began, “I no longer recognize [political] parties, I recognize only Germans.” He used nationalism to unify a class-divided Germany to help win the war. The Kaiser had been shaken by more than the increasingly serious struggles among world powers over colonies, world trade, and foreign investment. He was stunned too by the rise of Germany’s Marx-inspired Socialist Party across the decades before the war. Germany’s class of capitalist employers had been similarly shaken and stunned. For a country increasingly and deeply split between labor and capital, German nationalism was the employer class’s strategy both to thwart socialism and win the war. Key to that strategy was getting people to think (and self-identify) in terms of national and ultimately military struggles, and not class struggles.

Germany’s strategy failed. It lost World War I, the monarchy ended, and its Socialist Party became Germany’s postwar government. Socialism emerged from the war far stronger in Germany than it had ever been. Much the same was true for World War I’s other combatant nations. More or less all of them had used

nationalism to mobilize their war efforts and to undermine and displace class consciousness. For the war's winners, nationalism may have served its purpose for them to achieve victory. Yet, it did not vanquish or banish socialism. Instead, socialism captured its first government (Russia) and split into socialist and communist wings that each drew mass attention and engagement. Both wings spread globally and quickly in the 1920s and even more in the 1930s as capitalism imposed its worst crash ever on most nations across the world.

Now, a century later, power struggles intensify and sharpen across global capitalism. The power of the United States, hegemonic during the Cold War, is now declining. The earlier decline of Europe, punctuated by the loss of its colonies and two deeply destructive world wars, continues. Both Europe and the United States face the stunning, unprecedented speed of China's economic growth and concomitant rise to global power status. Already, China's network of alliances, especially the BRICS, confronts the United States and its alliances, especially the G7. The rise of China and the BRICS adds to their power struggles with the United States and the G7. That rise is also realigning power relations between the Global North and Global South and, in one way or another, among all nations and within international organizations.

Class struggles have likewise continued in all societies, thereby evolving in different forms and foci. Most importantly, socialists now focus decreasingly on the struggle between private property and free markets as capitalism, versus state property and state planning as socialism. Many socialists reacted to 20th-century experiences with state power in the USSR and the People's Republic of China by shifting their focus. State power and planning, while not dismissed as socialist goals, were seen increasingly as insufficient by themselves. Something more or different was needed to yield the post-capitalist system that socialists could and would embrace. Socialists refocused their priorities on the transformation of workplaces. Based on a critique of the capitalist hierarchy inside factories, offices, and stores—and its social effects—socialists increasingly stress proposals to democratically reorganize production there. Each worker in an enterprise will have an equal vote to decide what, where, and how to produce as well as how to dispose of the product (or net revenues where the product is marketed). The democratization of all workplaces (households as well as enterprises) becomes a central thrust of what socialism has come to mean.

This kind of socialism grew out of but also challenged the macro, state-focused

socialisms of the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, where state-owned-and-operated enterprises continue to organize production around the employer-employee dichotomy, they invite socialists' criticisms much as private-owned-and-operated enterprises do. The same applies to democratic socialisms or social democracies where enterprises remain privately owned and operated but are subject, along with markets, to heavy state supervision, taxation, and controls. Enterprises' private versus state forms, important as their differences are for other reasons, often do not differ in class terms. Both typically display the employer/employee internal organization of production. If going beyond capitalism to socialism means a transition to micro-level workplace organizations that are democratic, then such transitions apply to both public as well as private enterprises.

This newly emerging socialist focus challenges both the United States and China, the G7 and BRICS, despite the different balances of state and private enterprises among them. Further, the now fast (and thus dramatically) changing power relations among them have impacts on every nation's class struggles. For example, G7 sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine war, and their inflationary impacts on Europe and the United States, have sharpened employer versus employee struggles as a result of those inflationary and anti-inflationary policies in many nations across the world. One of those policies—sharp interest rate rises by the U.S. Federal Reserve—is squeezing nations with large dollar-denominated external debts. The squeezed nations' employers and employees react in ways that often intensify their class struggles.

One major past and present problem has been the widespread tendency to confuse or conflate power and class struggles or else to see one and be blind to the other. Partly, these problems resulted from nationalist efforts, like Kaiser Wilhelm II's, to repress class consciousness. While other problems emerged when cultures refused or rejected class consciousness perhaps because of their mass media's dependence on capitalist owners and advertisers. Often both socialists and anti-socialists contributed to the confusion and blindness. That happened when the Cold War (1945-1990) and its lasting legacy effectively persuaded many on both sides to equate socialism, communism, and the USSR as one pole versus capitalism, democracy, the United States, and the "West" as the other pole.

In today's newly emerging international economic order, contending nationalisms are again strong. Power struggles once again capture headlines: U.S. versus Russia and China, the G7 versus BRICS, and the Global South versus Global

North. Power categories not only displace class categories from analytical debates about major world affairs but that displacement also invades discussions about nations' internal affairs. Power struggles are routinely mistaken for class struggles. Or class and class struggles disappear altogether from discourses.

The rise and struggles of the BRICS against the G7 should not be confused with class struggles. No government among them is committed to replacing capitalism with socialism in the sense of transition beyond the employer-employee mode of internal workplace organization. Nor is any government among them committed to replacing capitalism in the older senses of moving systemically from private to public enterprise ownership and from markets to planning. Yet within all of them, there are groups and movements that are committed to replacing capitalism with socialism in accordance with one of its definitions.

Karl Marx and others saw the conflict between the British Empire and its North American colony, culminating in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, as primarily a power struggle, and not a class struggle. Those wars did not pit slaves against enslavers, nor serfs against lords, nor employees against employers; they were power struggles. However, within them, moments of such class struggles did occur. The Napoleonic wars were power struggles, yet within them too, struggles of serfs against lords often occurred. The Napoleonic wars among feudal powers both weakened them all and stimulated capitalist classes to push for an end to feudalism across Europe. In the last two centuries of wars against colonialism and neocolonialism—power struggles—there were many class struggles interwoven with them.

The power struggles now between the G7 and BRICS will interact with the class struggles going on within both blocs. The leaders, ideologues, and mass media of both blocs focus chiefly on those power struggles. The advocates of class change must clearly differentiate power from class struggles if they are to focus mass consciousness and activism on the latter. Thus, the BRICS bloc is surely challenging the G7's and the U.S.'s hegemony in the world economy. The power struggle of competing blocs is not, however, a socialist movement challenging capitalism. Nor is China or the Global South now mounting such a challenge. The power struggles of China, BRICS, and the Global South against the U.S., the G7, and the Global North may provoke new class struggles as well as influence all those already underway. How they do so will depend in part on how we understand and engage with the difference between power and class struggles.

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‘Sacrifice Zones’: The New ‘Jim Crow’ That’s Sickening And Killing People Of Color



Reynard Loki

A product of entrenched, historic racism, “sacrifice zones”—designed to site pollution hot spots within communities of color—are a front line in a largely silent, often deadly, and steadily growing health crisis across the United States.

The [Black Lives Matter](#) movement and the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) have highlighted how systemic racism disproportionately places danger and harm on low-income and minority populations. One harsh reality of this systemic racism is the existence of “[sacrifice zones](#)”: Communities located near pollution hot spots that have been permanently impaired by intensive and concentrated industrial activity, such as [factories](#), [chemical plants](#), [power plants](#), [oil and gas refineries](#), [landfills](#), and [factory farms](#).

As noted by the [Climate Reality Project](#), an environmental nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., “These areas are called ‘sacrifice zones’ because the health and safety of people in these communities [are] being effectively [sacrificed for the economic gains and prosperity of others](#).”

Designated by corporations and policymakers, these areas are a product of [environmental racism](#): the systemic social, economic, and political structures—including weak laws, lack of enforcement, corporate negligence, and limited access to health care—that place disproportionate environmental health burdens on specific communities based on race and ethnicity.

Because people of color and low-income groups in the United States are [most likely](#) to live in sacrifice zones, they [breathe polluted air](#), [drink contaminated water](#), and are exposed to a variety of [toxic chemicals](#) and [particulate matter](#). More than [50 percent](#) of residents who live near hazardous waste are people of color, with Black Americans [75 percent](#) more likely to live near these sites. Considering these facts, it is no surprise that communities of color have a [higher chance of dying from environmental causes](#) than white people.

“Thirty-nine percent of the people living near coal-fired power plants are people of color, so what’s absolutely true is that there are a disproportionate number of people of color living next to these plants,” then-senior director of the environmental and climate justice program at the [NAACP](#), Jacqueline Patterson, [told](#) Yale Environment 360 in June 2013. Speaking after the release of an NAACP report on the disproportionate effects of coal-fired plants on minorities, Patterson further added that “[s]eventy-eight percent of African Americans live within 30

miles of a coal-fired power plant. We also discovered that Latino communities, as well as Indigenous communities and low-income communities, are more likely to live next to coal-fired plants.”

Entrenched Inequity

Sacrifice zones are a consequence of an “[extractive development model](#)” supported by self-serving government officials who want to create job and income opportunities provided by polluting industries rather than avoiding irreversible damage caused by these industries to communities of color. “Sacrifice zones are the result of many deeply rooted inequities in our society. One of these inequities takes the form of unwise (or biased) land use decisions, dictated by local or state officials, intent on attracting big industries to the town, county, or state, in an effort to create jobs and raise tax revenues,” wrote Steve Lerner in his 2012 book [Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States](#). “When decisions are made about where to locate heavily polluting industries, they often end up sited in low-income communities of color where people are so busy trying to survive that they have little time to protest the building of a plant next door. Those who make the land use decisions that govern sacrifice zones typically designate these areas as residential/industrial areas, a particularly pernicious type of zoning ordinance.”

“In these areas, industrial facilities and residential homes are built side by side, and few localities have adequate buffer zone regulations to provide breathing room between heavy industries and residential areas,” Lerner continued.

The polluting environment results in an increased [prevalence](#) of health problems among residents living near heavy industries. “The health impact of this patently unwise zoning formula is predictable: [R]esidents along the fenceline with heavy industry often experience elevated rates of respiratory disease, cancer, reproductive disorders, birth defects, learning disabilities, psychiatric disorders, eye problems, headaches, nosebleeds, skin rashes, and early death. In effect, the health of these Americans is sacrificed, or, more precisely, their health is not protected to the same degree as citizens who can afford to live in exclusively residential neighborhoods,” [stated](#) the book.

The [Center for Health, Environment & Justice](#), a nonprofit environmental activism group based in Falls Church, Virginia, [asserted](#) that “[d]ue to redlining, low property values, and other social factors, these communities have historically

consisted of [low-income] and/or minority populations.”

The group pointed out that “federal air policies regulate facility emissions one stack at a time and one chemical at a time. Impacted communities, however, are exposed to the cumulative impact of multiple pollutants released over an extended period of time from a cluster of facilities.”

Executive Action

President Joe Biden has made environmental justice a priority in his administration, issuing an [executive order on how to tackle climate change](#) on January 20, 2021, his first day in office. In the order, Biden directed the federal government to “advance environmental justice” where agencies “failed to meet that commitment in the past.”

On January 27, 2021, Biden signed another [executive order](#) that created a [White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council](#) to address the environmental impacts of systemic racism specifically. “We must deliver environmental justice in communities all across America,” the order [said](#). “To secure an equitable economic future, the United States must ensure that environmental and economic justice are key considerations in how we govern.”

A [separate executive order](#) directed federal agencies to prioritize racial equity in their work, which incorporates racial and environmental justice across the federal government. However, without congressional action on the legislative front, another president could reverse these orders.

Biden’s [\\$2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure plan](#) includes provisions that address longstanding racial inequities, including “[\\$20 billion to ‘reconnect’ communities of color to economic opportunity](#).” In addition, the proposal provides for funds to replace lead water pipes that have [harmed communities of color in cities like Flint, Michigan](#), and to clean up environmental hazards that have harmed Hispanic and tribal communities.

Launched in January 2021, Biden’s [Justice40 Initiative](#) encompasses [146 programs within the Department of Energy](#) (DOE)—far more than any other federal department. Together, these programs instruct the DOE to make decisions and fund renewable and fossil fuel projects with the consideration of how they will affect historically disadvantaged communities.

“We at the Department of Energy historically have done a terrible job, honestly,” [said](#) Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm at Greentown Labs, a Houston incubator for startups, in March 2023. “Only 1 percent of funding has gone to small, minority, and disadvantaged businesses.” She added, “We have had these structural inequalities, inequities in the past, and we’re trying to remedy that through embedding sort of structural equity into these programs.”

“We’ll create good jobs for millions of Americans... and we’ll do it all to withstand the devastating effects of climate change and promote environmental justice,” Biden [said](#) in his 2022 State of the Union address.

Progress at the federal level has been slow, even though the executive branch has been aware of the systemic issues for decades. In a 2004 [report](#), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said that “the solution to unequal protection lies in the realm of environmental justice for all Americans. No community, rich or poor, [B]lack or white, should be allowed to become a ‘sacrifice zone,’” while quoting Robert D. Bullard, who was then a professor at Clark Atlanta University.

On April 21, 2023, President Biden signed an [executive order](#) directing all federal agencies to work toward “environmental justice for all” and improve the lives of communities across the nation that have been most impacted by climate change and toxic pollution. The order established a new White House Office of Environmental Justice to coordinate revitalized efforts across the government meant to achieve environmental justice.

“For far too long, communities across our country have faced persistent environmental injustice through toxic pollution, underinvestment in infrastructure and critical services, and other disproportionate environmental harms often due to a legacy of racial discrimination including redlining. These communities with environmental justice concerns face even greater burdens due to climate change,” the April 21 [order](#) stated.

Kristine Stratton, president and CEO of the [National Recreation and Park Association](#) (NRPA), praised the order. “NRPA commends the Biden administration for its action that prioritizes a renewed commitment to the climate, ensuring healthy communities and environmental resilience for all,” Stratton [said](#) in a press statement. “We are thrilled to learn of the establishment

of the Office of Environmental Justice at the White House, to help coordinate efforts toward protecting vulnerable communities impacted by environmental injustice. We must ensure all people benefit from spaces that are not only resilient and regenerative but also transformative at the community level.”

Criticism of Federal Regulation

In an [opinion piece](#) published by the Houston Chronicle on April 2, 2023, Robert D. Bullard, the founding director of the [Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice](#), criticized federal regulators for paying lip service to impacted communities of color. He wrote: “Communities of color and low-income communities have long felt the adverse impacts of the fossil fuel industry and the climate crisis it caused, but most of those communities didn’t have a seat at the environmental justice roundtable,” referring to a March 2023 meeting of stakeholders organized by the [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission](#) (FERC) “to better incorporate environmental justice and equity considerations into its decisions.”

Bullard pointed out that FERC—an [independent federal agency](#) within the Department of Energy that regulates the interstate transmission of electricity, gas, and oil, as well as natural gas terminals and hydropower projects—has approved “roughly 20 new or expanded gas export terminals... slated to come online in communities across the Gulf Coast within the next decade.” These projects will only worsen the already heavily polluted, hazardous, and unhealthy region known as “[Cancer Alley](#)” (named for the region’s elevated cancer rates) for the minority groups living in these fenceline communities.

Using data processing software and Environmental Protection Agency modeling tool, ProPublica mapped the spread of cancer-causing chemicals from various sources throughout the U.S. between 2014 and 2018. It [found](#) that areas where a majority of the residents were people of color experienced 40 percent “more cancer-causing industrial air pollution on average than tracts where the residents are mostly white.”

“The commission [FERC] offers little more than pleasantries with regard to justice and equity as it races to approve more polluting facilities in Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other communities of color across the country. Nothing has changed. Our communities are still being sacrificed,” [wrote](#) Bullard. According to him, if FERC’s actions were truly fair and equitable, then the farce of holding an

environmental justice roundtable wouldn't be needed, and the commission would not be approving export gas projects if it were actually serious about mitigating the negative ecological impacts suffered by the BIPOC communities as a result of these projects.

Calls for Legislation

On April 6, 2021, the [Hip Hop Caucus](#), a nonprofit advocacy group that tackles issues relating to health care, education, and environmental and social justice, launched a [public petition](#) urging Congress to pass legislation that protects communities of color from the health risks posed by environmental degradation.

The petition is cosponsored by several other advocacy groups, including [Progress America](#), [Friends of the Earth Action](#), [Coalition on Human Needs](#), [Evergreen Action](#), and [Progressive Reform Network](#). "Corporate polluters demand human sacrifices," wrote Mike Phelan, a spokesman for Progress America, in an email about the petition sent on April 3, 2021. "They each have a choice between profits and pollution?and every time, they choose profits."

In her 2014 book [This Changes Everything](#), Naomi Klein wrote about sacrifice zones, stating that "running an economy on energy sources that release poisons as an unavoidable part of their extraction and refining has always required sacrifice zones—whole subsets of humanity categorized as less than fully human, which made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable."

Natural Disasters Increase Racial Inequality

Natural disasters like earthquakes and [those tied to climate change](#), like wildfires, floods, and hurricanes, actually increase racial inequality.

A 2018 [study](#) by sociologists Junia Howell of the University of Pittsburgh and James R. Elliott of Rice University in Houston, Texas, found that white Americans who experience disaster accumulate significantly more wealth than any other group after experiencing a natural disaster.

"If you're white, over time, you're actually going to accumulate more than if you never had that disaster in the first place. But for [B]lack people, for Latinos, for Asians—it's not true," [said](#) Howell to LAist.

Ironically, while people of color are more likely to [experience](#) the negative impacts of climate change, they support and participate in climate action more

than white people.

Environmental Racism: Clear and Present Danger

In 2018, scientists at the EPA's National Center for Environmental Assessment released a study in the American Journal of Public Health (AJPH) called "[Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status](#)." The report confirmed that environmental racism presents a clear and present danger to people of color across the United States, as they are much more likely to live near polluters.

The study found that poor communities (those living below the poverty line) have a 35 percent higher burden from particulate matter emissions than the overall U.S. population. The health burden carried by nonwhites was 28 percent higher than the overall population, while African Americans had a 54 percent higher burden. The researchers cited economic inequality and historic racism as significant factors that determined the location of facilities emitting particulate pollution.

Particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter that are inhaled can [become](#) embedded deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream. Such particle pollution exposure can cause a number of health impacts, including [aggravated asthma](#), [decreased lung function](#), [irregular heartbeat](#), and [heart attacks](#). For people with heart or lung disease, [inhaling](#) these particles can even lead to premature death.

Referring to the study published in the AJPH, then-director of the Environmental Justice Program at the [Sierra Club](#), Leslie Fields said, "This report illustrates how people of color and people with limited means have been grossly taken advantage of by polluters who don't care about the misery they cause," according to a [statement](#) issued by the environmental nonprofit in 2018. "The disadvantages that come with those health issues, like missing school, create a cycle of poverty and lack of access to opportunity that spans generations and shapes every part of the experience of being a person of color or low-income person in the United States."

Examining the study in an [article](#) for Colorlines, Ayana Byrd wrote that environmental racism "has been called the [new Jim Crow](#) and continues to target Black, Latinx, Native, Asian, and other communities of color, subjecting them to generations of poor health outcomes."

While executive actions from the White House can help to tackle environmental

racism and bring the issue into the national conversation, eliminating the existence of sacrifice zones beyond a presidential term requires strong legislation from local, state, and federal lawmakers.

By Reynard Loki

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Source: Independent Media Institute

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Palm Oil: The Ingredient Behind Human Rights Abuses And Eco-Destruction That's Probably In Your Home Right Now



“Oil palm is one of the world’s most prominent and effective vegetable oils globally, and is contributing 40 percent of global trade volume in vegetable oils,” [said](#) Beatriz Fernandez, who manages the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)’s partnership in the [GCRF Trade, Development and the Environment Hub](#), during a [high-level dialogue](#) held on August 30, 2022, in Jakarta and online, to discuss the situation of the sustainable palm oil trade in Indonesia in light of the shocks to the global food system spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Center for International Forestry Research, a nonprofit scientific research organization, the challenges for the sustainable palm oil sector [include](#) “the need to align policies and development goals with the country’s biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development commitments; coordination of various certification mechanisms; and limited capacity of smallholder farmers to comply with sustainability standards.”

Another challenge is violence. In May 2020, the village Ijaw-Gbene in southern Nigeria was burnt to the ground, leaving more than 80 people without homes. According to a [report](#) by Chief Ajele Sunday, the spokesman of the people of the Okomu Kingdom, witnesses identified the perpetrators as members of the security

force employed by the Okomu Oil Palm Plantation supported by soldiers in the Nigerian army. At the time, Ijaw-Gbene was the fourth village in the region to experience such an attack.

Joseph Miyani, one of the victims of the attack, said that the company's security forces and government soldiers fired weapons "before setting our houses ablaze." He reported that villagers fled into the bush to escape the violence, even jumping into a nearby river to protect themselves. "Since that day my life has been miserable ... I don't know where to start," Miyani said. "We are now taking shelter in a church building."

Okomu is a subsidiary of Société Financière des Caoutchoucs (SOCFIN), an agribusiness corporation that operates palm oil and rubber plantations across 10 Asian and African countries. "In Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, and Cambodia, local people complain about ruthless methods wherever [SOCFIN's] subsidiaries are active," [reports](#) Rainforest Rescue, a nonprofit environmental organization based in Hamburg, Germany. "Repeatedly, after losing their lands to the company, local communities in Africa and Asia have been subject to violence, intimidation, and distress as a result of the palm oil and rubber exploitation," [writes](#) Frédéric Mousseau, policy director at the Oakland Institute, a think tank based in Oakland, California, that focuses on social, economic and environmental issues.

Though Okomu [denied](#) their participation in the attack, violence and destruction are increasingly commonplace throughout the global palm oil industry. In November 2020, the Associated Press (AP) [reported](#) on incidents of sexual abuse, rape, human trafficking, child labor, and slavery. "Almost every plantation has problems related to labor," [said](#) Hotler Parsaoran of the Sawit Watch, an Indonesian nonprofit that has investigated abuses in the palm oil sector. "But the conditions of female workers are far worse than men."

Driving Deforestation

In addition to its role in human rights abuses, the palm oil industry is also a primary driver of deforestation, which not only exacerbates climate change by releasing into the atmosphere carbon that was previously safely stored in trees cut down to make room for plantations, but threatens wildlife and biodiversity. Parsaoran told the AP that ending these abuses is the responsibility of palm oil producers, multinational buyers, governments, and the banks that finance

plantations. But there is another powerful group that supports this entire industry: consumers. As Martin Hickman [reports](#) for the Independent, unwitting consumers “may be contributing to the devastation of the wildlife-rich forests of Indonesia and Malaysia, where orangutans and other species face extinction as their habitat disappears.”

But WWF, a non-governmental environmental organization based in Switzerland, suggests that removing products with palm oil from our shopping lists isn't necessarily the best course of action for concerned consumers. “Avoiding palm oil could have worse effects because it might take support away from companies that are trying hard to improve the situation,” the group [says](#). “This could encourage companies to use other products that may have even more impact on the environment. Palm oil is by far the most efficient vegetable oil to grow as it takes less land to produce than other vegetable oils. Palm oil can be produced in a responsible manner that respects the environment and the communities where it is commonly grown.”

The group suggests that consumers should look for the RSPO label “to ensure you purchase products made with certified sustainable palm oil.” The certification was established by the [Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil](#), which was formed in 2004 to promote the development of sustainable palm oil and is supported by 99 countries. However, the RSPO has been intensely criticized by environmentalists for the very thing it was supposed to prevent: rampant deforestation for palm oil production.

Greenwashing Environmental Destruction and Animal Cruelty

In July 2020, a [study](#) conducted by researchers at Tomsk State University in Russia and the Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research in Austria showed satellite images revealing that palm oil production that received sustainable certification actually caused deforestation in Sumatra and Borneo that has threatened the habitats of several endangered mammals over the past three decades, including elephants, rhinos, tigers, and orangutans.

“We suggest that the phrase ‘sustainable palm oil’ must no longer be used to greenwash this tropical product’s reputation because it cannot certify that the production of palm oil comes from a non-recent degradation of tropical forests and endangered species habitats,” the study’s authors write. “In fact, we discovered that the current certified palm oil demand is almost fully supplied by

those bases and concessions that, in less than three decades, replaced some of the most diverse tropical forests of the world and habitats of big mammals threatened by extinction.”

“Rapid and relentless deforestation for industrial-scale agriculture, particularly palm oil and timber plantations, leaves orangutans without food and shelter, exposing them to hunters who kill orangutans and capture their babies to sell as pets,” [wrote](#) Alan Knight, chief executive of International Animal Rescue, an animal rights nonprofit based in England, in 2018. “The apes are also in danger of coming into conflict with local people as they stray into villages and onto farmland in search of food. Fires started on an annual basis as part of land clearance operations in Indonesia are also responsible for the loss of thousands of acres of rainforest and the lives of hundreds if not thousands of orangutans.”

Ingredient Labels

Made from the oil palm plant, palm oil is the world’s most widely traded vegetable oil. It is found in about [half of all consumer goods](#), including common foods like bread, cookies, crackers, doughnuts, peanut butter, and breakfast cereal, as well as everyday household products like soap and laundry detergent. Palm oil is also found in a host of cosmetics and beauty products like lipstick, mascara, body lotion, bubble bath, and anti-wrinkle creams. [The list goes on](#). Making matters worse for ethical consumers is the fact that ingredient lists rarely say “palm oil,” but rather a specific ingredient or chemical that contains palm oil, like sodium lauryl sulfate, glyceryl stearate, stearic acid, and [many others](#).

Boycotting Palm Oil

Boycotting palm oil isn’t the best tactic for ethical consumers. Not only would it be extremely difficult to avoid it altogether due to its ubiquitousness, but other options, like coconut oil, would also have the potential to destroy those very same environments currently plagued by oil palm plantations. Christopher Wille of the Rainforest Alliance [told VICE](#) that palm oil is “a bounteous and valuable crop [that is] highly productive compared to other oils, creates jobs and revenues and can be used in an amazing variety of products.” He argues that it’s not the oil palm plant that is the problem, but rather the way it’s grown. He says that ending deforestation, coupled with consumer pressure for “higher sustainable standards” and greater industry transparency about sourcing is the answer. “The hope is that companies will continue making changes to meet market demand. Some lobby for alternative oils, but all farming has a similar impact.”

Consumer pressure works. In 2020, the multinational food conglomerate Kellogg's [revised its palm oil policy](#) after more than 780,000 concerned consumers signed an online petition. "If you care about the implications of palm oil," [writes](#) Helen Nianias on VICE, "write emails to companies, ask if manufacturers are committed to zero deforestation. Be that guy. We all need to be that guy."

By Reynard Loki

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Source: Independent Media Institute

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What If UFOs Have Been A Cover For High-Tech—And Human—Defense Research

Programs?



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
Independent Media
Institute*

10-05-2023 ~ A mix of government, private, adversarial, and unexplained objects are filling up an increasingly congested U.S. airspace. Uncovering what fills it should be of greater public interest.

Could the decades-long pursuit of unraveling the UFO mystery potentially function as a cover for advanced government research and testing programs for innovative forms of propulsion and craft design? Moreover, might the recent rollout of official government hearings signal a gradual disclosure of some of those capabilities? This scenario is worth considering, as the process of investigating UFOs comes into sharper public focus.

In 2023, fascination with Unidentified Flying Objects ([UFOs](#)) and Unidentified Aerial Phenomena ([UAP](#)) has spiked. David Grusch, a former intelligence official who led the analysis of [UAPs within the U.S. military](#), told a Congressional hearing in July that the United States had been collecting non-human craft “[for decades](#).” At the first Republican debate [on August 23rd](#), candidates were asked about the president’s responsibility to provide information to the public about UFOs. And on August 31st, the Pentagon [launched a new website](#) providing the public with declassified information about sightings.

Mainstream intrigue surrounding UFOs was born following the 1947 Roswell incident, the crash of what was initially described by the U.S. military as a “flying disc” in Roswell, New Mexico, but later attributed to a weather balloon. To quell public fear and speculation, official government studies to investigate UFO/UAP reports, including [Project Blue Book](#), [Project Sign](#), and [Project Grudge](#), were launched. While the government feared air warning systems could be overwhelmed by reports, it was also wary of Soviet attempts to boost false sightings and promote conspiracy theories that could [instigate panic and allegations of a coverup](#).

During the Cold War, UFO reports became common, often coinciding with [missile and rocket tests](#) ([a habit which continues today](#)). Several [Soviet](#) and [U.S. military personnel](#) also testified that UFOs were able to temporarily take control over missile and nuclear facilities. However, [in 1997](#), the CIA revealed that the military had lied to the public throughout the Cold War about many UFO sightings to obscure its black projects and keep Moscow in the dark about technological advancements. Blaming sightings on natural phenomena like ice crystals and temperature inversions fueled public distrust toward the government and its claims about UFOs/UAPs.

Many secret military aircraft were frequently mistaken for UFOs, such as [the U-2 reconnaissance plane](#), introduced in the 1950s, which featured a gray frame that often reflected the sun. The SR-71 “Blackbird” [meanwhile started service in 1966](#) and wasn’t declassified until the 1990s. Its distinctive shape, speed, and altitude capabilities were often mistaken for a UFO. The B-2 Spirit, introduced in the late 1980s, also had a unique aerodynamic design and its ability to control lift, thrust, and drag at low speeds often gave the appearance that [it was hovering](#).

Since the Cold War, [secretive experimental military aircraft](#) have continued to generate UFO reports. But unexplained phenomena have also fueled conspiracy theories. [In November 2004](#) off the coast of San Diego, Navy pilots filmed UFOs demonstrating rapid acceleration, physics-defying sudden changes in direction, and other feats in videos eventually released to the public in 2017. And despite formalizing a UFO/UAP reporting process [in 2019](#), Navy pilots and other military personnel who have witnessed them have been hesitant to [come forward](#) due to fear of ridicule or professional repercussions.

The U.S. military’s reluctance to disclose UFO/UAP information is often linked to

the need to protect classified technology. Military agencies can choose to neither confirm nor deny such information exists. But when the government transparency website, the Black Vault, submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the Navy for more UFO/UAP videos, it was denied because it would harm national security and “[may provide adversaries valuable information](#) regarding Department of Defense/Navy operations, vulnerabilities, and/or capabilities.”

Releasing these videos without additional information may also be an effective way for the U.S. military to hint at its own new technological capacities for various strategic, political, and scientific reasons. Suddenly revealing these technologies could result in rising geopolitical tensions and trigger a reaction, while merely hinting at it may also serve as a deterrence to adversaries. Gradually preparing the public for emerging technologies is equally as important, while encouraging speculation about UFO/UAPs could divert attention away from classified projects.

By clandestinely testing experimental new technologies on their own defenses without resorting to lethal forces, military agencies can also gain valuable insights into their capabilities and vulnerabilities in real-world scenarios.

A 2021 report by the DoD’s intelligence agencies also noted [that many UFOs/UAPs were](#) “technologies deployed by China, Russia, another nation, or a non-governmental entity.” The New York Times broke the story days before an updated version was [provided to Congress](#) in 2022. An ongoing investigation by The Warzone meanwhile suggests there are a large number of [hostile drones mistaken for UFOs/UAPs](#) that the government has until recently failed to confront.

Being unable to properly identify another country’s experimental aircraft, by labeling it a UFO/UAP, would also demonstrate shortcomings in U.S. air defense systems. Similarly, releasing documentation of U.S. surveillance of other countries’ stealth aircraft and other technology would give them a better idea of U.S. military capabilities and would alert these countries that they were being surveilled.

In addition to other countries, companies are also responsible for a significant number of UFO/UAP reports. The first drones were manufactured [more than a century](#) ago in the UK and U.S., and the capabilities of the private sector have grown considerably since then. Camouflage technology has made commercial

drones [increasingly difficult to clearly identify](#), and hundreds of drones by China's largest drone maker DJI, were noted to have entered restricted airspace in Washington D.C. [in 2022](#) alone. And, of course, commercial drones can be purchased and used by other governments.

Nonetheless, much of the technological developments concerning advanced aircraft stem from the U.S. military and other agencies. Since the 1970s, NASA has expanded on [ideas developed](#) by scientist and engineer Arthur Kantrowitz to use lasers to launch satellites without fuel or an engine, with successful tests carried out in the late 1990s. The U.S. [Air Force](#) and [NASA](#) have both continued developing this technology in the 21st Century, while NASA has also explored [plasma propulsion technology](#) that may have caused numerous UFO/UAP reports.

The U.S. Navy has pushed the boundaries of technology further with the development of [laser-induced plasma technology](#), patented [in 2018](#). This innovation can generate extremely high temperatures in the air, creating plasma that can be harnessed to form intricate shapes and lifelike optical illusions, even simulating aircraft performing seemingly impossible maneuvers. Additionally, the U.S. military has developed the ability to [produce sound out of lasers](#), which would add an additional layer of realism to UFO/UAP sightings.

Over the last few years, increasing attention has also been [brought to projects by Salvatore Cezar Pais](#), an aerospace engineer and scientist who has worked for the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD). Despite lacking empirical evidence and rigorous, peer-reviewed scientific scrutiny, his alleged breakthroughs in propulsion and energy generation would serve as some of the most groundbreaking technological breakthroughs in history.

Pais's [patents with the U.S. Navy](#) relate to the development of advanced propulsion systems that could potentially lead to rapid thrust technology and an abundance of clean energy generation. This includes a "craft using an inertial mass reduction device," which was patented [in 2018](#), while a patent for a "[plasma compression fusion device](#)" was also filed but later appeared [to be abandoned](#). Nonetheless, documents retrieved by The Warzone through the Freedom of Information Act reveal that his [inventions are being considered](#) for the Air Force, NASA, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

Of course, like U.S. President Ronald Reagan's proposed "[Star Wars](#)" missile

defense system in the 1980s, Pais's patents could be designed to bait adversaries into a costly arms race. That is not to say that these countries are not already developing their own fascinating projects. China has been [drastically increasing its development](#) of plasma technology in recent years, and alongside the UK, Germany, and Japan, is [developing Active Flow Control \(AFC\)](#) technology to improve aerodynamic performance in aircraft. European entities have also recently [made breakthroughs in plasma propulsion technology](#), which may boost UFO/UAP reports across the continent.

Amid these developments, it remains crucial for the public to stay engaged and informed about UFOs/UAP – the more publicly observed the evidence is, the harder it becomes to manipulate. Considering the history of government audacity in crafting political and war propaganda, we should remain skeptical of the entities shaping narratives about extraplanetary intelligent life.

A shift toward destigmatizing and embracing a public approach to UFOs/UAP, both domestic and foreign, is essential. Alongside the Black Vault, initiatives like the [open-data Galileo Project](#), spearheaded by Avi Loeb from Harvard University's Astronomy Department, are actively seeking evidence of extraterrestrial life and pushing our understanding of outer space. By involving the public in the search for answers, we can bridge gaps in understanding and move closer to demystifying these phenomena.

By John P. Ruehl

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Source: Globetrotter

Our Recurring Flirtation With Government Shutdowns Reveals A System In Crisis



C.J. Polychroniou

Our dysfunctional political system uses the debt ceiling to inflict cruelty on the poor and the working class.

The threat of a U.S. government shutdown was averted late last Saturday night after the House passed a 45-day stopgap funding bill, which was then approved by the Senate and signed by President Joe Biden.

This is good news, because government shutdowns cause disruption to services and funding, affect millions of workers, and undermine public health and environmental safety.

Nonetheless, the manufactured crisis of the past few weeks may soon return because the bill is a short-term deal. The measure passed extends funding only until mid-November, and MAGA Republicans are bent on imposing their fiscal and policy views on the nation.

But it's more than that.

The threat of a federal government shutdown is yet more proof that the U.S. is not a functioning country when it comes to politics and governance. How can federal funding run out in the wealthiest country in the world? There is hardly any other country in the world whose lawmakers have to struggle to find ways to keep the government afloat, and then just for the next 45 days.

Indeed, the U.S. has a long history of government shutdowns, mainly because of funding gaps, which can occur any time within a fiscal year. Ronald Reagan oversaw [eight government shutdowns](#) during his time in office, while the longest government shutdown, which lasted 34 full days, occurred during Donald Trump's time in office.

Government shutdowns are truly [unique to the U.S.](#) In European parliamentary systems, government services don't stop even when there is a government crisis. Trains run, garbage gets collected and water facilities are safeguarded no matter who is in power — and even when there is *no* government. The cases of Belgium, Italy and Portugal provide ample evidence to this fact. As a case in point, Belgium has gone without a government on quite a few occasions — and for [very prolonged periods of time](#). Yet, government programs and services continued to function in a manner where Belgians could "[see no difference](#)."

But most parliamentary systems in today's world do not rely on anachronistic traditions and institutions. The Anti-Deficiency Act, which dates to the administration of Ulysses S. Grant in 1870 and was initially enacted in 1884, sought to ensure that the executive branch did not use trickery and "backdoor" spending to dilute the fact that the "power of the purse" is one of Congress's main constitutional responsibilities. There was a long-standing concern with the executive branch creating coercive deficiencies, almost from the beginning of the nation. Congress needed the Anti-Deficiency Act in order to exercise control over how federal agencies spend money. Yet, the Anti-Deficiency Act did not consider the possibility of Congress failing to reach agreements over funding bills.

Even so, the Anti-Deficiency Act did not lead to government shutdowns. For many decades, the federal government and its various agencies would continue to operate even when funding bills were not passed. Federal funding gaps emerged with the passage of the [Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974](#), which formalized and constrained the congressional budgeting process.

The [first government shutdown](#) occurred in 1976 when President Gerald Ford vetoed a funding bill for the Department of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare. It lasted for 11 days. Budget gaps however began to trigger government shutdowns with rather regular frequency after President Jimmy Carter's Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti [issued two legal opinions](#) in the early 1980s in which he argued that government operations must cease when there is a funding lapse. Civiletti's 1981 opinion in particular, which led to an amendment of the Anti-Deficiency Act by amplifying on the emergencies exception for employing federal personnel, rested on a very narrow interpretation of the Anti-Deficiency Act. It claimed that the term "emergencies involving the safety of human life" does not include ongoing, regular function of government.

By imposing restrictions on the operation of government activities, the underlying argument behind the enactment of the Anti-Deficiency Act and the major amendments that occurred in the early 1980s was protecting democracy and preventing abuses of presidential power. But this argument is deceptive because the U.S. is not a full democracy and Congress itself became an enforcer of the imperial presidency. Indeed, since 1950, Congress has willfully abdicated its constitutional duty to authorize or declare war, allowing the executive branch in the process to [make a mockery of the Constitution](#).

These laws and arguments were also made at a time when the ideas of neoliberalism were becoming hegemonic. Neoliberalism calls for austerity (reduced spending and increased frugality) in order to shrink the welfare state. In other words, it changes the role of the state by restraining the role of governments to address social problems and to respond to crises through budgetary action.

Spending laws in the U.S. are not about the enforcement of the "common good" since this is a vacuous term in the context of the nation's political and economic system. According to Kishore Mahbubani, the U.S. is "[a plutocracy, where society is governed of the 1 percent, by the 1 percent for the 1 percent](#)," and is now tinkering with fascism.

Even before Trump's rise to power, in its annual rating of democracy in 167 countries, The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index classified the United States as a "[flawed democracy](#)."

The fact of the matter is that the U.S. political system was never intended to be democratic; on the contrary, it was designed to keep “popular rule,” which is the essence of democracy, at bay. A political candidate can be elected to become the president of the United States even while having lost the popular vote by millions of votes. Donald Trump claimed a “landslide victory” in 2016 even though he trailed Hillary Clinton by nearly 3 million votes. Further, there isn’t even anything in the Constitution that grants citizens in the U.S. the right to choose their president.

So, what manner of a democracy is this which displays such blatant disregard of the “general will,” to use Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous phrase?

The Electoral College is not just an anachronism but a deeply anti-democratic method of selecting a president, which even the “father” of the Constitution himself, [James Madison](#), had opposed.

The U.S. Senate is an even more anti-democratic institution than the Electoral College. Every state is awarded two members in the upper chamber. So Wyoming, the least populated state in the U.S., has the same number of senators as California, whose population is nearly 70 times larger.

And then there is the debt ceiling, which is not the same thing as a government shutdown, but it can affect a potential government shutdown.

The debt ceiling is the absolute amount of debt that the U.S. government is allowed to carry. It is allegedly there in order to keep the nation’s finances in order; in reality, however, it has nothing to do with debt reduction and is being increasingly used instead as a weapon against social programs.

The debt ceiling is nothing but a pretext to punish poor and working-class people by depriving them of basic human rights such as housing and proper health care coverage.

Denmark is the only other country in the world that limits borrowing on absolute terms, but, unlike in the U.S., the debt ceiling there is not being used as a weapon against democracy. In fact, there it is seen as “[more of a formality](#).”

But Denmark has a multiparty system, a robust representative democracy and ranks consistently in the top 10 countries on the Social Capital Index, which is the

sum of social stability and the well-being of the entire population. The plutocratic U.S., in contrast, with its “flawed” system of political governance, [ranks 111th](#), just below economic superpower Nicaragua and above Ghana.

Having said that, what is simply amazing in government funding debates among lawmakers from both parties is that the anti-democratic nature of U.S. politics is never even brought to light. Nor is it of course an issue covered on mainstream media outlets. Indeed, if it wasn't for radical activism, issues such as imperialism, the devastating influence of money in politics, gross inequalities, the climate crisis and environmental degradation, blatant racism, the disintegrating impact of neoliberalism on the social order and the surge of proto-fascism would most likely have been kept completely out of the public eye in the U.S.

It used to be said that history is on the side of the left simply because capitalism is capable of only heightening the contradictions that it generates.

Maybe so.

However, what should be beyond dispute is that any prospect of the U.S. becoming a democracy someday depends on strengthening those political voices and social forces willing to challenge the nation's anachronistic and anti-democratic traditions and institutions. This is why we need a strong, unified political left in this country: a left unified on class struggle as the core basis for resistance to neoliberal capitalism and the primary axis for radical social change. Democracy should be extended into the economy and all people should have access to economic ease and security. We need a system of government that is responsive to people's needs, not a system of governance that leads to frequent government shutdowns and uses the debt ceiling to inflict cruelty and pain on the poor and the working class.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/our-recurring-flirtation-with-government-shutdowns-reveals-a-system-in-crisis/>

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