

The Venezuelan People Stay With The Bolivarian Revolution



Venezuela - Source:
wikipedia.org

On July 28, the 70th birthday of Hugo Chávez (1954-2013), Nicolás Maduro Moros won the Venezuelan presidential election, the fifth since the Bolivarian Constitution was ratified in 1999.

In January 2025, Maduro will start his third six-year term as president. He took over the reins of the Bolivarian Revolution after the death of Chávez from pelvic cancer in 2013. Since the death of Chávez, Maduro has faced several challenges: to build his own legitimacy as president in the place of a charismatic man who came to define the Bolivarian Revolution; to tackle the collapse of oil prices in mid-2014, which negatively impacted Venezuela's state revenues (over 90 percent of which was from oil exports); and to manage a response to the unilateral, illegal sanctions deepened on Venezuela by the United States as oil prices declined. These negative factors weighed heavily on the Maduro government, which has now been in office for a decade after being re-elected through the ballot box in 2018 and now in 2024.

From Maduro's first election victory in 2013, the increasingly far-right opposition began to reject the electoral process and complain about irregularities in the system. Interviews I have held over the past decade with conservative politicians

have made it clear that they recognize both the ideological grip of *Chavismo* over the working class of Venezuela and the organizational power not only of Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela but of the networks of *Chavismo* that run from the communes (1.4 million strong) to youth organizations. About half of Venezuela's voting population is reliably wedded to the Bolivarian project, and no other political project in Venezuela has the kind of election machine built by the forces of the Bolivarian revolution. That makes winning an election for the anti-Chávez forces impossible. To that end, their only path is to malign Maduro's government as corrupt and to complain that the elections are not fair. After Maduro's victory—by a margin of 51.2 percent to 44.2 percent—this is precisely what the far-right opposition has been trying to do, egged on by the United States and a network of far-right and pro-U.S. governments in South America.

Europe Needs Venezuelan Oil

The United States has been trying to find a solution to a problem of its own making. Having placed severe sanctions against both Iran and Russia, the United States now cannot easily find a source of energy for its European partners. Liquified natural gas from the United States is expensive and not sufficient. What the U.S. would like is to have a reliable source of oil that is easy to process and in sufficient quantities. Venezuelan oil fits the requirements, but given the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, this oil cannot be found in the European market. The United States has created a trap from which it finds few solutions.

In June 2022, the U.S. government [allowed](#) Eni SpA (Italy) and Repsol SA (Spain) to transport Venezuelan oil to the European market to compensate for the loss of Russian oil deliveries. This allowance revealed Washington's shift in strategy regarding Venezuela. No longer was it going to be possible to suffocate Venezuela by preventing exports of oil, since this oil was needed as a result of U.S. sanctions on Russia. Since June 2022, the United States has been trying to calibrate its need for this oil, its antipathy to the Bolivarian Revolution, and its relations with the far-right opposition in Venezuela.

The U.S. and the Venezuelan Far-Right

The emergence of *Chavismo*—the politics of mass action to build socialism in Venezuela—transformed the political scenario in the country. The old parties of the right (Acción Democrática and COPEI) collapsed after 40 years of alternating power. In the 2000 and 2006 elections, the opposition to Chávez was provided not by the right, but by dissenting center-left forces (La Causa R and Un Nuevo

Tiempo). The Old Right faced a challenge from the New Right, which was decidedly pro-capitalist, anti-Chavista, and pro-U.S.; this group formed a political platform called La Salida or The Exit, which referred to their desired exit from the Bolivarian Revolution. The key figures here were Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, and María Corina Machado, who led violent protests against the government in 2014 (López was arrested for incitement to violence and now lives in Spain; a U.S. government official in 2009 said he is “often [described](#) as arrogant, vindictive, and power-hungry”). Ledezma moved to Spain in 2017 and was—with Corina Machado—a signatory of the far-right [Madrid Charter](#), an anti-communist manifesto organized by the Spanish far-right party, Vox. Corina Machado’s political project is underpinned by the proposal to privatize Venezuela’s oil company.

Since the death of Chávez, Venezuela’s right wing has struggled with the absence of a unified program and with a mess of egotistical leaders. It fell to the United States to try and shape the opposition into a political project. The most comical attempt was the elevation in January 2019 of an obscure politician named Juan Guaidó to be the president. That maneuver failed and in December 2022, the far-right opposition [removed](#) Guaidó as its leader. The removal of Guaidó allowed for direct negotiations between the Venezuelan government and the far-right opposition, which had since 2019 hoped for U.S. military intervention to secure them in power in Caracas.

The U.S. pressured the increasingly intransigent far-right to hold talks with the Venezuelan government in order to allow the U.S. to reduce sanctions and let Venezuelan oil go into European markets. This pressure [resulted](#) in the Barbados Agreement of October 2023, in which the two sides agreed to a fair election in 2024 as the basis for the slow withdrawal of the sanctions. The elections of July 28 are the outcome of the Barbados process. Even though María Corina Machado was barred from running, she effectively ran against Maduro through her proxy candidate Edmundo González and lost in a hard-fought election.

Twenty-three minutes after the polls closed, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris—and now a presidential candidate in the November elections in the United States—put out a [tweet](#) conceding that the far-right had lost. It was an early sign that the United States—despite making noises about election fraud—wanted to move past their allies in the far-right, find a way to normalize relations with the Venezuelan government and allow the oil to flow to Europe. This tendency of the

U.S. government has frustrated the far-right, which [turned](#) to other far-right forces across Latin America for support, and which knows that its remaining political argument is about election fraud. If the U.S. government wants to get Venezuelan oil to Europe it will need to abandon the far-right and accommodate the Maduro government. Meanwhile, the far-right has taken to the streets through armed gangs who want to repeat the *guarimba* (barricade) disruptions of 2017.

By Vijay Prashad

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

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Source: Globetrotter

With Project 2025 And Agenda 47, The USA's Coups Come Home To Roost



C.J. Polychroniou

07-29-2024 ~ The authoritarian, dystopian settings that the U.S. created in so many places across the world are being reconceived by ultra-conservative forces affiliated with Trump for the purpose of introducing them here.

Since the rise of the United States into a global power, U.S. policymakers have been keen on halting the spread of popular government abroad by undermining democratic institutions; overthrowing or assassinating elected leaders; and installing brutal, vicious military dictatorships. Indeed, the fact of the matter is that the United States has invaded more countries, organized more coups, and installed more military dictatorships than any other imperialist power in the course of history. During the Cold War alone, Washington staged dozens of invasions, orchestrated or sponsored numerous coups that installed subservient governments, and engaged in total in [over 70 attempts at regime change](#).

U.S. involvement in foreign coups was so widespread that a common joke was that there has never been a coup d'état in the United States because there is no U.S. Embassy there. Of course, the joke was before the political era of former U.S. President Donald J. Trump and thus has lost some of its sting. Because what happened at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 was a coup attempt incited by the rhetoric of an outgoing president as part of his effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. Moreover, Trump has warned voters of a "[bloodbath](#)" for the country if he is not elected in November 2024.

The roosters have come home to roost. The U.S. is sleepwalking toward democratic collapse and into a Trump proto-fascist dictatorship. If [Donald Trump](#) gets elected in November, "[the gloves are off... its four years of scorched earth,](#)" as Republican National Committee boss Lara Trump proudly announced to an audience a few months ago. Never mind people like [John Bolton](#) who tried to

make the argument that Trump did not attempt a coup on January 6 because he is not competent enough to have done so. Those who entertain such thoughts seem to imply that it takes brilliance to destroy democracy. Yet, a reactionary revolt against democracy (or what's left of it in the U.S.) has been underway since Trump gained control of the GOP. Trump encouraged violence during his 2016 campaign and levied harsh attacks against his opponents. Upon assuming office as president, he exhibited blunt authoritarian tendencies and levied attacks against the press. And when he lost a free and fair election in 2020, he tried to block a peaceful transfer of power.

But even if Trump isn't capable enough to draw up a plan on his own for the dismantling of our democracy from within, there are plenty of extreme right-wingers able and willing to show him how it can be done. Indeed, the authoritarian, dystopian settings that the U.S. created in so many places across the world from the end of the Second World War to the present—through Washington's support of oppressive political regimes that committed massive violations of human rights against their own citizens and forced them to live under constant threat—are being reconceived by ultra-conservative forces affiliated with Trump for the purpose of introducing them here inside the United States. This is precisely the aim of Project 2025, a Heritage Foundation plan to reshape the United States in a manner consistent with the ideology and vision of [neoliberal proto-fascism](#).

Project 2025 is not Trump's plan, but a plan for Trump. It's also fair to point out that Trump has publicly denied knowing anything about the dystopian Project 2025. Yet, many of the people who worked in high-level positions during his presidency served as authors of the project. In fact, *CNN* reported finding some 240 people [“with ties to both Project 2025 and to Trump.”](#) It is thus ludicrous for Trump to claim ignorance of this extreme far-right agenda and having [“no idea who is behind it.”](#) Also, Paul Dans, director of the 2025 Presidential Transition Project at The Heritage Foundation and who had previously served in the Trump administration as the chief of staff at the Office of Personnel Management, said on a radio show during the Republican primary race last year that [“Trump's very brought in with this.”](#) Last week, the same person suddenly claimed that the idea that Trump is attached to Project 2025 is a “hoax.”

More important, while Trump and his campaign staff have pointed out that Agenda 47 is their official policy platform for the 2024 presidential election,

Project 2025 and Agenda 47 have a lot of overlap in terms of ideas and policy plans. They both contain plans for the reshaping of U.S. government and civil society that can only be described as “fascist.” They both assert that the mission they serve is to rescue the country from the influence of the radical left.

Project 2025 envisions the end of the administrative state by placing the entire federal bureaucracy under direct presidential control. In other words, the plan is for Trump to rule as a Unitary Executive, long considered a pathway for autocracy. Likewise, Trump’s plan in Agenda 47 is to dismantle what it calls the “deep state” by firing thousands of civil servants and replacing them with party hacks (though in Agenda 47 they are called “patriots who love America”). In doing so, Trump claims, federal bureaucrats and politician will be “[held accountable to the American people.](#)” Not to the president, mind you, who will now have complete control of the federal bureaucracy, but to the American people. Of course, not a single word is mentioned in Agenda 47 about how the “people” even enter the power equation of holding bureaucrats and politicians accountable to the popular will. But authoritarian leaders and wannabe dictators have always been masters of propaganda who engineer techniques of mass manipulation through the politics of illusion. And no propaganda tool is more effective in the authoritarian playbook than the one that justifies the dismantling of checks and balances as “[corrupt obstacles to the popular will.](#)”

State control over public education and teachers has always been an integral component of fascist ideology and strategy. In the neoliberal proto-fascist mentality that guides the thinking of the architects of Project 2025, the contention made however is that federal intervention in education should be severely limited and that, ultimately, the federal Department of Education should be eliminated. This is because their reactionary vision for the future of the United States would not object to the conversion of public schools into religious zones and calls for the rejection of “gender ideology” and the banning of “critical race theory.” Thus, it is of paramount importance that complete authority over primary and secondary education, including funding, transfers to the state and local level. Likewise, Project 2025 also endorses universal school choice and allowing families to access public funds to pay for private school tuition. Moreover, Project 2025 wants to ban any public education employee or institution from using a pronoun in addressing a student that does not “[match a person’s biological sex](#)” without the written permission of a student’s parents or guardians.

The call for the banning of “critical race theory” is utterly revealing of the ideological underpinnings of the architects of Project 2025. They want to see “critical race theory” forced out of classrooms because, they argue, its emphasis on the racist history of the United States “disrupts the values that hold communities together.” It’s rather shameful though that they omitted mentioning slavery as one of the values that should “hold communities together.”

As for higher education, which comes under severe attack by the reactionary minds behind Project 2025 for being “hostile to free expression” and “American exceptionalism,” student loans and grants should be placed into the hands of the private sector. They also call on the next president to downplay the value of a bachelor’s degree by removing it as a requirement for any federal job unless it is specifically demanded.

Agenda 47 is an even more extreme version of Project 2025 on the issue of education and comes much closer to authentic fascism. [Trump’s proposals for K-12 schools](#) call for, among other things, ending federal funding to any school teaching “critical race theory,” certifying only teachers who embrace “patriotic values,” firing Department of Education employees deemed radical zealots and Marxists, pushing prayer in public schools, and abolishing teacher tenure.

Trump’s Agenda 47 and Project 2025 also share the same extremist views on immigration and climate change. Project 2025 wants to demolish the entire U.S. immigration system while Trump wants to engage in draconian measures against undocumented immigrants, which includes a pledge to deport millions of undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

Regarding climate change, Project 2025 is all about a project that backs a fossil fuel agenda and wants to go so far as to eliminate the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration because it’s “[one of the main drivers of the climate change alarm industry.](#)” Trump’s stance on energy and climate as expressed in Agenda 47 is in full alignment with Project 2025 and can be summarized by three words: “[DRILL, BABY, DRILL.](#)”

Finally, both the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025 and Trump’s Agenda 47 (along with his already established record on the matter) make abundantly clear that serving the interests of a plutocracy is of equal importance to them as destroying the environment and turning back the clock on social and cultural

progress through the implementation of extreme authoritarian measures. Among other major changes to the tax system, Project 2025 calls for reducing the corporate tax to 18% and cementing the tax on capital gains and dividends at 15%. A second Trump presidency would most certainly also see another round of tax cuts targeted at the very rich.

In sum, there should be little doubt in any concerned citizen's mind that the reactionary forces in this country, led by one of the most authentic con artists in political history, are as close as they have ever been to dismantling U.S. democracy and replacing it in turn with a dystopian setting guided by the very same vision, values, and even tactics that have been the hallmark of U.S. imperialist efforts to install and support neo-fascist regimes around the globe.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/project-2025-agenda-47>

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The Science Of Twins And The Human Fascination With Them



Nancy Segal, professor of psychology, Cal State Fullerton

Fascination with twins and what [twin studies](#) tell us about human nature is universal. There is no question that behavioral and medical science advances have happened largely because twins yield a wealth of information just by being themselves.

Twin research takes place at two levels:

- (1) Studies that are strictly for twins. Such studies examine the pros and cons of twins being separated at school, dressing alike, or sharing their friends.
- (2) Studies with broad implications. Psychological analyses and medical research are conducted to understand the genetic and environmental factors affecting behavior and health which can be applied to the general nontwin population.

Twin Types

There are two main types of twins: Monozygotic (MZ, identical) and Dizygotic (DZ, fraternal). [MZ twins](#) share all their genes having split from a single fertilized egg within the first two weeks following conception (there are exceptions). [DZ twins](#) share half their genes, on average, having formed from the separate fertilization of two eggs released simultaneously. There are, however, variations within each type. For example, there are MZ twins who show [mirror-image reversals](#) and DZ twins with different fathers.

Twin Methods

The classic twin study is simple and elegant. Researchers compare the similarities and differences of identical twins to those of fraternal twins. The greater resemblance between identical twins than between fraternal twins is consistent with the view that genetic factors influence the behavioral characteristic or

physical trait under study. Of course, environmental influences also affect every measured trait.

There are variations on the classic twin method, two of them being twins reared apart and twins as couples. Identical twins reared apart offer pure estimates of genetic influence given that they share all their genes, but not their environments. Fraternal twins reared apart offer informative contrasts. Twins as couples focus on the quality and outcomes of twins' social interactions as the twins work together on a joint project or task. Comparing identical and fraternal twins in this regard tells us about the factors contributing to cooperative or competitive social exchanges.

Research

The research described below is located at the juncture of developmental psychology, behavioral genetics, and evolutionary psychology, with a focus on twin studies. Developmental psychology is concerned with the biological and environmental events, both before and after birth, that underlie changes in intellectual and physical growth. Behavioral genetics (BG) examines genetic factors affecting intelligence, personality, interests, and other measured traits. BG is concerned with variation within groups. Evolutionary psychology (EP) is concerned with how and why the mind is designed the way it is, and how this design, together with environmental events, produces behavior. EP is concerned with human universals. Twin research can assess behavioral-genetic and evolutionary-based hypotheses and questions.

Twins Reared Apart

Identical twins reared apart—the rare “elite pairs” among multiples because they cleanly separate genes and experience—have revealed genetic effects on intelligence, personality, interests, and more. One of the most striking findings from the investigators of the [Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart](#) is that the personality traits of reared-apart identical twins are as similar as the personality traits of reared-together identical twins. This suggests that personality similarity among family members living together is explained by their shared genes, not their shared environments. I also conducted a study of the relationships formed by reared-apart twins, with hypotheses generated by the evolutionary psychological concept of [kin selection](#) discussed by W.D. Hamilton. Natural selection favors genes predisposing individuals to act in ways that favor the transmission of those genes. Hamilton reasoned that close relatives should be

predisposed to act more [altruistically](#) toward one another than distant relatives, given the perception of similarities associated with shared genes.

Mirroring what we see in twins reared together, identical reared-apart twins generally form closer ties than fraternal twins reared-apart twins. This is likely due to their perceptions of resemblance. Most striking, however, is that twins as a group feel closer to their newly found twin than to the adopted sibling they were raised with since childhood. Here, a perceived lack of resemblance may contribute to this result, consistent with what kin selection would predict.

Reared-apart twins' unusual matching habits are not random events, but likely reflections of who they are. Separated twins have been observed to divide their toast into four square pieces, leaving one section uneaten; twins have been observed to enjoy typically hot drinks at lukewarm temperatures; twins who named their sons James Allan and James Alan have been seen. There are also twins who both used a rare Swedish toothpaste called Vademecum, twins who scratched their ears with a paper clip, and twins who dried their hands with three paper towels in public restrooms. These unusual behaviors were acquired *independently* by the twins before they knew they were part of a pair. These observations suggest that our own idiosyncrasies and signature quirks arise from a multitude of individually based factors expressed within the environments we seek.

Evolutionary Psychology and Behavioral Genetics: Fruitful Union or Ships Passing in the Night?

EP and BG have operated separately for too long. The reason for this separation is that BG focuses on individual behavioral differences within human groups and EP examines universal human behaviors. However, session panelists for a symposium under this title asserted that BG offers EP informative research designs for assessing evolutionary-based hypotheses and questions, especially those involving kinship relations. Similarly, EP offers BG information for understanding why some behaviors show greater genetic influence than others. There is evidence that these two disciplines are coming closer together, albeit slowly.

By Nancy L. Segal, PhD

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She is the author of nine books on twin-related topics and is currently at work on her tenth. Ongoing twin studies in her laboratory include the behaviors of young Chinese twins reared apart (due indirectly to China's former One-Child Policy), tacit coordination, behavioral problems, family relationships, and bereavement. Please visit her website at drnancysegaltwins.org to obtain her books on twin-related topics, as well as to participate in research on twins.

Source: Human Bridges

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America's Two-Party System Is A Relic Of The Past And Bad For Democracy



C.J. Polychroniou

07-22-2024 ~ An Interview on the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election with C. J. Polychroniou.

The rematch between Biden and Trump is regarded by many as the most important election in modern U.S. history. It is also a rematch between two men that many voters have serious reservations about and feel that U.S democracy can

do much better than having a raving maniac and someone who is too gaffe-prone and seems to be experiencing cognitive decline run for the highest office in the most powerful nation in the world. In this case, however, the real culprit is America's two-party system, argues political scientist/political economist C. J. Polychroniou in an interview with the French-Greek independent journalist Alexandra Boutri, because it severely limits choices for the voters and discourages competition due to a winner-take-all system. Polychroniou also addresses the nature and character of today's GOP and why a second term for Trump could turn the U.S. into a neofascist dictatorship.

Alexandra Boutri: For the next few months, U.S. elections will be under the spotlight. The rematch between President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump is pivotal for the future of democracy in the U.S., critically consequential to Washington's European allies, and potentially transformative for today's geopolitical realities. The two men also differ radically when it comes to climate change and have different approaches regarding immigration and taxes. They are also quite apart across a broad range of issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Do you agree then with the often-made claim that the rematch between Biden and Trump is perhaps the most important election in modern U.S. history?

C. J. Polychroniou: Before I address your question, let me just say that we cannot discount the possibility that we won't have a rematch between two men that many American voters don't want anyway because Joe Biden may drop out of the presidential race before next month's Democratic National Convention. Nearly two-thirds of Democrats want Biden to step aside, according to a new poll conducted by [AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#). Also, there are solid reasons why many American voters don't want to see another showdown between Trump and Biden. Trump is simply unfit for the highest office in the land, or any public office for that matter, while Biden, judging from the difficulties he is having with speech and memory, can't possibly be relied on to serve another 4 years.

Be that as it may, the 2024 U.S. presidential election is enormously important for at least some of the reasons you cited, although parochialism is what drives most American voters. This election is also unlike any other in modern history because American voters are so polarized that the threat of civil breakdown is real. This is the best evidence that binary politics is bad and possibly dangerous for contemporary democracies. American voters don't have a viable range of choices,

but the U.S. political system is set up for two major parties because of the winner-take-all politics. It is mainly the [winner-take-all system](#) that has also allowed the superrich to hijack the political system and transform the U.S. from a flawed democracy to a plutocracy.

Alexandra Boutri: You may have an excellent point here about the downsides of a two-party system, but why does polarization run so deep in today's United States?

C. J. Polychroniou: Political polarization among Americans has deep societal roots, with religion and race playing pivotal roles, but has been steadily intensifying in the last forty or fifty years. There is now such a huge gap between Democrats and Republicans over political and social values that each side fears that the other side will destroy the nation if they are allowed to dictate policy. Democrats tend to be quite liberal when it comes to social issues, but most Republicans identify themselves as social conservatives. However, it is interesting to note that an annual poll on values and beliefs conducted last year by [Gallup](#) found that more Americans identify themselves as socially conservative than at any time in about a decade, although the largest increase was among Republicans. The role of guns in society, abortion, race, immigration, gender identity and sexual orientation are among the issues that sharply divide supporters of the two parties, according to the latest findings from a [Pew Research Center](#) survey. Republicans and Democrats are also very much divided over [the role of government power](#) and [global warming](#). In sum, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Democrats and Republicans live in different worlds.

Alexandra Boutri: How would you describe today's GOP?

C. J. Polychroniou: Today's GOP is the creation of one man alone—namely Donald J. Trump. What I mean by that is Trump can shift the party in any direction he chooses because he exerts a cult of personality over his followers. He can deliver fiery anti-abortion messages at some juncture during his political life, like he did when he first run for president because he needed the support of evangelical Christians, but then decline to endorse a national abortion ban at another juncture because he fears that it would cost him votes if he did so.

Trump is not about ideology, values or beliefs. Trump is the penultimate political opportunist who will say and do anything that might help him to achieve his goals.

He is a clown, but a dangerous one who poses a real threat to democracy and the rule of law. The Republican Party has always been a reactionary political party but has now become an extreme political organization that fires up its base with lies and conspiracies. Trump employs the rhetoric of conservative populism, mocks the elite class, and pretends to be pro-worker. Never mind that Trump has no ideological convictions of his own and spent four years in office weakening unions and catering to the interests of the superrich. Most GOP voters have become blind followers of Trump and have neither the critical thinking skills nor the will to face the truth. They live in the political bubble that Trump has created for them. They would gladly take part in any political scheme conceived by Trump and even allow him to govern by dictatorial means. Moreover, virtually no Republican dares to stand up to Trump. He mocked and humiliated all his Republican rivals but in the end they all fell in line and kissed his ring. I have a hard time coming up with politicians anywhere else on the planet who are so cowardly and obsequious as the Republicans are in the “land of the free.”

Alexandra Boutri: By the same token, the Democratic Party also went from being the “party of the people” to the party of the financial elite. Would you say then that it is the Democrats who paved the path for the rise of someone like Donald Trump? Also, do you think that Biden can defeat Trump?

C. J. Polychroniou: The Democratic Party has always been a pro-business party. Until recently, the differences between Democrats and Republicans were not that great. Indeed, as Noam Chomsky used to say, “the United States has essentially a one-party system and the ruling party is the business party.” So, it was largely a myth to say that the Democratic Party was the “party of the people.” Nonetheless, Bill Clinton remade the Democratic Party to such an extent that it abandoned all pretext of being a party representing the working class. Clinton had revealed his anti-union credentials long before he made it to the White House. He had been working ceaselessly toward undermining the labor movement in [Arkansas](#) since the mid-1970s.

The working class ditched Hillary Clinton in 2016. Working-class voters, feeling betrayed by the Democratic Party and its economic policies, were a key demographic element behind Trump’s rise. Of course, it wasn’t just economics that drove white working-class voters to Trump’s camp. An equally important factor was racial and cultural resentment. Anyone who thinks that racism and xenophobia were not important factors in Trump’s rise or that they don’t figure

prominently in the support he has been receiving since by the millions of his followers needs a reality check.

What is unusual is that President Biden, who has not only been very outspoken about supporting organized labor but leads in fact the most pro-union administration since that of FDR, may not be able to count as much as he should on working-class people and even on [all union groups](#) in his effort to get reelected. And the support of union groups will be crucial in swing states. It is also likely that many progressives angry over Gaza and who also think that Biden should suspend his campaign because of his cognitive decline will abstain from voting. Of course, I have no crystal ball, but if Biden can somehow manage to focus on his record and the huge differences between him and Trump, he can win. If he fails to do so or ends up having another disastrous performance in the second presidential debate on Tuesday, September 10, Trump will win by a landslide and there will be no one to blame but Biden himself.

If Trump returns to the White House, we should all brace ourselves for major shocks. We should expect to see mass deportations, systematic efforts to undermine democracy and rights in the U.S. and even abroad, the sacking of thousands of civil servants, the dismantling of the Department of Education, the expansion of presidential power (and bear in mind that an ultra-conservative Supreme Court gave presidents total immunity from prosecution for all official acts), major tax cuts for the rich, the end of policies to tackle the climate crisis, and even a rollback of policies that have aided minorities economically and socially. This is what's behind [Project 2025](#), a blueprint of over 900 pages for a second Trump term developed by the arch-conservative Heritage Foundation. Trump has tried to distance himself from Project 2025, but many of the policies that he has said he will carry out if he returns to the White House are already included in this extremist far-right agenda.

Alexandra Boutri: One final question, and it has to do with third-party and independent candidates running for president. Could they affect the 2024 vote?

C. J. Polychroniou: One could and should be in support of third-party candidates for all sorts of reasons. The problem however with the U.S. political system is that they have no chance of winning a presidential race. I doubt that they can even shake up the two-party system. You need some form of proportional representation, like the system that exists in many European democracies, for

third parties in the U.S. to make a real impact on national politics. But third-party candidates can easily end up having the opposite than the desired effect, which is help the candidate they least want in the White House emerge victorious. This is yet another reason why America's two-party system, a relic of the past, is unquestionably bad for contemporary democracy.

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Who's A Bigger Threat To Democracy - Immigrants, Or Billionaires?



Sonali Kolhatkar

07-20-2024 ~ *Don't be distracted by the anti-immigrant rhetoric this election. The real impact on democracy comes from moneyed elites.*

When President Joe Biden said in a phone call to MSNBC's Morning Joe recently, "I'm getting so frustrated with the elites... the elites of the party. I don't care what the millionaires think," former Labor Secretary [Robert Reich](#) wrote that, "It was the first time any modern president has admitted that the elites of the party are the millionaires (and billionaires) who fund it."

While Biden's comments were in reference to the movement to oust him from the 2024 Democratic presidential nomination, it was an important admission about who really wields power in our democracy.

We may think of elections in terms of one person, one vote. But, not only do undemocratic structures such as the [electoral college](#) dilute our votes, the money that elites flaunt places a hefty thumb on the scales of who represents us. Yet, we hear more about the threat of, say, [immigrants](#) than the threat of billionaires, to our democracy.

Billionaires have tried very hard to buy influence and political power. For example, former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg donated [\\$20 million](#) toward efforts to reelect Biden this year alone. Four years ago, Bloomberg spent a [whopping \\$1 billion](#) in just four months in an attempt to be the 2020 Democratic presidential nominee. In a testament to the fact that we have a modicum of democratic accountability left within the system as it stands, he [failed spectacularly](#), as [others](#) have often done. Voters seem to have a distaste for electing the ultra-rich but have yet to disavow the de facto proxies that their money helps elect.

While billionaires remain influential within the Democratic Party, the last election for which spending records exist shows that moneyed elites overwhelmingly prefer the Republican Party. The nation's [465 wealthiest people](#) collectively donated \$881 million to influence the 2022 midterm elections, most of it to the GOP.

Now, the richest person in the world—not just in the United States—Elon Musk, has jumped into the 2024 race. His proxy, Donald Trump, in surviving an assassination attempt, earned Musk's [endorsement](#), as if that was somehow a qualification to run the nation. Musk has vowed to pour [\\$45 million a month](#) into a new Super PAC that's working to elect Trump. The amount is pocket change for someone currently worth [nearly \\$250 billion](#). Musk could spend \$45 million *a day every day this year* and it would barely make a dent in his bottom line.

According to a [New York Times analysis](#), Musk went from supporting Democrats to Republicans because he was “[a]ngry at liberals over immigration, transgender rights, and the Biden administration’s perceived treatment of Tesla.” At a meeting earlier this year that embodied the specter of a secret cabal of billionaires seeking to buy an election, Musk reportedly conversed with his fellow wealthy elites about Republican control of the U.S. Senate. At that meeting, he reportedly worried that “if President Biden won, millions of undocumented immigrants would be legalized and democracy would be finished,” as per the Times.

He's not the only one. The Republican Party as a whole has decided that [undocumented people voting](#) in U.S. elections is the single biggest threat facing the country—not billionaires like Musk raining down dollars to drown our democracy.

Undocumented immigrants are human beings, not dollar bills. And yet they hold far less sway over elections than Musk's money. There is no mass amnesty for undocumented people in the U.S. currently—this isn't [Ronald Reagan's America](#) after all. And even if there was, there is a long, complicated path from legal status to the voting status that citizenship allows.

I should know, I've been there personally, having entered the U.S. as an immigrant on a student visa before obtaining legal residency and then citizenship. My journey was far more straightforward than that of [Melania Trump](#) and still, it was 18 years before I could legally vote after first stepping on American soil.

And yet every four years, immigrants become political footballs, flayed at the proverbial whipping posts of democracy for merely existing—usually by both political parties. Right-wing voters waved signs saying “[Mass Deportations Now](#)” at the Republican National Convention, while Democrats took a less vulgar approach by appeasing anti-immigrant forces with [asylum restrictions](#), hoping it would garner voter support.

[Sean Morales-Doyle](#), writing for the Brennan Center for Justice, asks us to imagine being an undocumented immigrant in the U.S.: “Would you risk everything—your freedom, your life in the United States, your ability to be near your family—just to cast a single ballot?” Not only are there harsh penalties, including prison time, for illegally casting ballots, but even the rabidly far-right Heritage Foundation has found only [85 cases of supposed undocumented voters out of 2 billion votes](#) cast from 2002 to 2023. That works out to a 0.00000425 percent of the vote.

Let’s compare this to the influence of money on elections. The nonpartisan group [Open Secrets](#), which tracks money in politics, finds that “the candidate who spends the most usually wins.” In 2022, about 94 percent of the candidates for the House of Representatives who spent the most money won their race, while 82 percent of those running for the Senate who spent the most money won their seats. Much of their donations come from [Super PACs](#), which bundle high-dollar amounts from wealthy Americans.

While billionaires such as Bloomberg have had trouble getting *themselves* elected, they have had little trouble getting others elected—or unelected as the case may be. Already this year, moneyed interests in the form of the pro-Israel lobby group AIPAC, defeated progressive congressional representative [Jamaal Bowman](#) of New York in his primary election, and have their sights set on representative [Cori Bush](#) of Missouri next.

Should we be concerned about the imagined influence of undocumented immigrants or the actual influence of billionaire dollars on our elections? In a 2020 [poll](#), Pew Research found that most Americans felt billionaires were neither good nor bad for the nation. Only about a third felt they were bad for the nation—roughly the [same percentage](#) that fears there is an effort to replace U.S. voters with immigrants for the purposes of electoral power.

USA Today writer Marla Bautista captured Musk's role succinctly in asking, "[Can Elon Musk buy Trump the White House?](#)" It's a valid question, one that we should be centering as election season heats up.

Think of the U.S. democracy as an old, large, sailing ship attempting to cross a vast ocean with all voters on board working to steer it across to shore. Every hole in its sail, every shark circling it, impacts its ability to succeed. In such a scenario, an undocumented person attempting to vote is akin to a speck of dust on the hull. Every million-dollar donation is a wave buffeting the ship. Enter men like Musk, whose money becomes a veritable tsunami aimed directly at democracy to overwhelm and topple it, destroying everything and everyone on board.

Sure, we may have sailed successful voyages most of the time (with the years [2000](#) and [2016](#) being among the worst exceptions). But with billionaire influence becoming [larger every election](#), there's an ever-increasing chance that democracy may not reach the shore. Will we be distracted by the dust on our hull or the massive wave rising before us?

By Sonali Kolhatkar

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Is The Food Industry Concealing Possible Destruction Of The Tropics From The Public?



*Emma Rae Lierley -
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07-21-2024 ~ Millions of tons of palm oil are 'missing' from Big Food's deforestation-free claims.

Palm oil is one of the most used vegetable oils in the world and is [found](#) in a large variety of packaged products, from shampoos and lipstick to cookies and frozen pizza. Unfortunately, the production of palm oil has been linked to severe environmental and social costs, including significant rainforest destruction and human rights abuses, particularly in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, which together account for around [85 percent](#) of global exports.

In the United States, out of the seven commodities that were linked to forest destruction, palm oil was the most “significant contributor” to deforestation, [according](#) to a March 2024 report. This [report](#) by Trase, a “data-driven transparency initiative,” is based on an analysis of figures from October 2021 to November 2023. “[T]he United States’ direct imports of seven forest risk commodities... [are] exposed to at least 122,800 hectares of tropical and

subtropical deforestation. This is an area comparable in size to the city of Los Angeles,” states the report.

If any part of the palm oil supply chain is linked to the destruction of rainforests and peatlands or human rights abuses, the product is known as [Conflict Palm Oil](#).

According to a May 2024 [report](#) by my organization, Rainforest Action Network (RAN), palm oil is increasingly being used “as an animal feed additive,” however, “much of the international trade in palm oil-based animal feed is obscured for consumers and other stakeholders.”. This lack of transparency raises questions about the actual role of the world’s largest palm oil traders in deforestation and social conflict.

Responding to this crisis and bowing to consumer and [stakeholder pressure](#), many companies have adopted the “[No Deforestation, No Peatland, No Exploitation](#)” (NDPE) policy to ensure responsible production. This corporate pledge is meant to prevent further deforestation, safeguard “[High Conservation Value](#)” (HCV) areas, eliminate new development on peatlands, and protect Indigenous communities.

Hidden Palm Oil in Animal Feed

Palm oil is found in many foods and household products, but it’s also used in animal feed, especially for dairy cows, and ends up in products like milk, cheese, ice cream, and chocolate. Because it is an indirect ingredient, it is known as “[embedded palm oil](#)”—often hidden and not included in companies’ deforestation-free commitments. An analysis of 2022 data by RAN revealed that palm oil-based animal feed was the largest category of palm oil products imported to the United States.

Our [research](#) reveals that most companies—15 out of 17—importing palm oil-based animal feed into the U.S. lack NDPE policies, thereby increasing the risk of deforestation and human rights abuses. Companies must include palm oil-based animal feed in their NDPE policies and deforestation-free commitments and be transparent about using palm oil in their supply chains.

Major companies like [Nestlé](#) and [Ferrero](#) make claims about lessening the impact of deforestation across their product lines. These claims are misleading because vast amounts of palm oil are [entering](#) their supply chain as animal feed is not included in their accounting.

Dairy companies like Lactalis, Danone, and Fonterra are not taking enough action to ensure their products, such as milk, cheese, and chocolate, do not contribute to deforestation. Only Unilever provided an estimate to our researchers about how much palm oil-based animal feed forms part of its supply chain. Swedish-Danish company Arla has promised that there will be no palm oil in its milk supply network by 2028, ensuring it is deforestation-free.

Our research [estimates](#) that if Nestlé accounted for the embedded palm oil in its supply chain, its claim of being 96 percent deforestation-free could drop to 72 percent (in terms of crude palm oil equivalent).

Increasing Demand for Palm Oil-Based Animal Feed

Initially, animal feed contained palm kernel expeller (PKE), a co-product of crushing palm kernels. Now, new palm oil additives, known as “palm fat,” “palmitic acid,” “rumen-protected fats,” or “calcium salt” (when fortified with calcium), are used in cow diets to boost milk production and quality. These additives have become popular, especially in North America. In Canada, up to 90 percent of farmers use these additives for their dairy cows. (Similar U.S. statistics are unavailable because there is very little industry oversight about its use.)

Palm oil-based animal feed, especially calcium salt, was mainly exported from Indonesia and Malaysia to countries with large dairy industries, including the U.S., the European Union, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and various Middle Eastern and South American countries from 2020 to 2021. Another additive, palm fatty acid distillate (PFAD), is a product of the palm oil refining process and was previously considered a waste product.

High demand for PFAD means it’s now considered an essential part of the palm oil market. Its use is not only limited to animal feed but extends to other products as well, such as biofuels, soaps, and candles. PFAD, therefore, sells for 80 percent more than palm oil. This raises concerns about its production, leading to deforestation and peatland loss, similar to virgin palm oil. [Stearin](#), a triglyceride, is another co-product used in animal feed and foods like margarine and bakery shortening.

Tracking palm oil-based animal feed in global trade is challenging due to a lack of specific trade codes. According to our [analysis](#) of more than 30,000 shipments of palm oil products to the U.S. in 2022, feed-grade palm oil was the largest

imported category of such products, making up more than a third of U.S. palm oil imports.

Most of these products came from Indonesia, where palm oil production is closely associated with deforestation. This illustrates the significant role of palm oil-based feed in causing environmental degradation.

Embedded Palm Oil Hidden in Global Supply Chains

Many consumer goods companies that adopt NDPE policies claim their supply chains are “deforestation-free,” but they often fall short and fail to meet these expectations. Our [research](#), based on data from 2022 and 2023, indicates that only three of the ten leading consumer goods companies had NDPE policies that they implemented for all their forest-risk commodity supply networks. Additionally, none of these ten companies fully implemented NDPE policies, putting their deforestation-free claims into question.

One of the main issues is that palm oil supply chains, which comprise several co-products and intermediaries, are difficult to track. As a result, palm oil-based animal feed is often unmonitored in company reports. The best practice would be to ensure that all suppliers of palm oil products adopt NDPE policies. Some companies report on the use of soy-based animal feed but not palm oil. [The Consumer Goods Forum](#), an industry-led network of more than 400 companies, includes soy-based feed in its roadmaps, created for various commodities to ensure “forest positive production,” but omits palm oil. If NDPE policies were to cover all parts of the supply chains that use palm oil-based products—including animal feed—companies could avoid sourcing Conflict Palm Oil and making misleading deforestation-free claims.

Major Dairy and Consumer Goods Companies Feeding the Demand

Our researchers [analyzed](#) the policies of 14 of the world’s largest dairy and consumer goods companies to see if they ensure that palm oil-based animal feed in their supply chains meets NDPE standards. These companies drive demand for palm oil-based animal feed by producing dairy, chocolate, and other processed foods. The companies analyzed include Arla, Dairy Farmers of America, Danone, Ferrero, Fonterra, FrieslandCampina, Lactalis, Mars, Mengniu, Mondelez International, Nestlé, Saputo, Unilever, and Yili.

Out of the 14 major companies, only Arla has a strong NDPE policy that covers

palm oil in animal feed. However, the company won't execute the embedded palm oil part of the policy until 2028. This is later than the 2025 deadline set by the EU, where "products that contain palm oil will have to be proven deforestation-free by the beginning of 2025," [according](#) to the RAN report. The other 13 companies either have weak policies or none, which means they might still be linked to deforestation and human rights abuses.

Only seven companies, including Arla, Danone, and Unilever, admit that palm oil-based animal feed is a risk for deforestation. Furthermore, most companies don't discuss how much embedded palm oil they use. Unilever is an exception, revealing it used 30,000 tonnes of palm oil in its dairy products in 2022, though it didn't explain how it calculated this figure.

Meanwhile, some companies make misleading claims about being deforestation-free. For instance, Nestlé says 96 percent of its "primary supply chain" of palm oil was deforestation-free in 2023 but doesn't count the palm oil in animal feed. Without better policies and honest reporting, consumers cannot trust these claims. Companies must include embedded palm oil in their policies and be more transparent to ensure the protection of our forests.

The European Deforestation Regulation and Palm Oil-Based Animal Feed

In June 2023, the EU introduced regulation 2023/115, also called the EU Deforestation Regulation ([EUDR](#)). This regulation mandates companies trading in products like cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soy, and wood to ensure that these products are not linked to deforestation activities.

This policy affects companies that source their milk or dairy products from the region. European companies like Arla, Danone, Ferrero, FrieslandCampina, and Lactalis, as well as Nestlé and Unilever, have significant operations within the EU and are affected by this regulation. Danone claims 91 percent of its supply chain is deforestation-free. But if, for example, 10 percent of its dairy cows were to be given palm oil-based feed, substantial palm oil could enter its supply chain without NDPE guarantees.

Ferrero and Mars make deforestation-free claims for their palm oil supply chains but do not account for embedded palm oil in animal feed, making their claims misleading. Both companies lack transparency in their methodologies and rely on second-party rather than independent third-party verification.

Lack of Proper Regulation for Monitoring Palm Oil-Based Animal Feed Trade

Exporters are crucial in the palm oil supply chain, but it is challenging to identify them and ensure they follow the NDPE policy. RAN's [analysis](#) of customs data from 2022 found that about 25 percent of exporters shipping palm oil-based animal feed from Indonesia and Malaysia to the U.S. were either unknown or listed as logistics companies.

Among the known exporters, around two-thirds of the feed-grade palm oil products entering the U.S. during the same year were not covered by public NDPE policies. The two largest exporters from Indonesia and Malaysia, Jati Perkasa Nusantara and Nutrion International, accounted for nearly one-third of total exports of palm oil products; they both lacked NDPE policies.

While nine exporters had NDPE policies, they were not reporting adequately on their implementation. These policies are only effective with proper monitoring and independent verification. Most exporters rely on self-reported compliance instead of independent checks regarding the execution of the policy guidelines. A lack of policies and traceability means European importers will struggle to ensure their products are deforestation-free, risking non-compliance with the EUDR.

Meanwhile, according to RAN's [report](#), out of 17 importers of feed-grade palm oil products to the U.S., most were not covered by NDPE policies.

Only two importers had published NDPE policies: Wilmar International and Perdue AgriBusiness, which accounted for just 12 percent of imports. The largest importers, Nutrition Feeds and Global Agri-Trade Corporation, responsible for 57 percent of palm oil products imports, didn't adhere to NDPE commitments. Overall, 84 percent of the palm oil-based animal feed products imported by known companies to the U.S. in 2022 were not covered by NDPE policies.

The Paradox of Self-Governance

Profit-based corporations that have adopted NDPE policies are often in an uncomfortable position. By taking the pledge, a company would have to bear the financial cost of implementing it. By not taking the pledge, a company would sustain a blow to its public image. In a 2023 [paper](#) published in the Journal of Business Ethics, Janina Grabs, associate professor of sustainability research at the University of Basel, Switzerland, and Rachael D. Garrett, a professor of conservation and development at Cambridge University, United Kingdom, call this

a “paradox” in “goal-based sustainability governance” while referring to the Indonesian palm oil sector.

“You cannot have both [no deforestation and smallholder inclusion]; you can have one, you can have the other,” a large integrated supply chain company representative told them during the anonymous interviews they conducted as part of their research. “And if you want to have both, you have to put some skin in the game and say, I will support change, and it will cost me. The problem is, if your neighbor doesn’t do it, your marketing team is going to say, ‘Why do we do that? We’re going to get hit, and we’re going to lose market shares.’ It’s an uncomfortable balance to find.”

The Role of the Consumer Goods Forum

The Consumer Goods Forum comprises leaders from 400 big retailers and manufacturers, including Danone, Nestlé, and Unilever. These companies sell products worth euro 4.6 trillion, many containing palm oil. In 2010, the CGF promised to stop deforestation by 2020 but has failed to meet this goal.

In 2020, the CGF started the Forest Positive Coalition to stop deforestation in supply chains. This coalition has a [Palm Oil Roadmap](#) to ensure responsible palm oil use by adopting NDPE policies. “However, the CGF’s methodology for calculating ‘Palm Oil Deforestation and Conversion Free’ volumes does not state the need to ensure volumes include the volume of palm oil used in animal feed. This is in contrast to the methodology for soy, which details the types of ‘embedded soy’ products that need to be included,” [points out](#) the RAN report. This omission could result in misleading deforestation-free claims by its members and the Forest Positive Coalition.

To stop deforestation, the CGF must enforce NDPE policies for all palm oil products, including animal feed, and ensure transparent reporting.

Policies and Transparency Are Essential

With climate change and biodiversity loss worsening, stopping the production and use of Conflict Palm Oil and preventing environmental and social injustices globally is crucial. Companies need transparent, well-monitored supply chains to ensure adherence to global regulations and sustainability promises. It is no longer acceptable to let millions of tons of palm oil, especially in animal feed, enter the U.S. without proper tracking.

The solution to this problem is simple: All companies must adopt a strict NDPE policy that includes embedded palm oil. The Consumer Goods Forum's 400 companies and palm oil importers and exporters must also follow this policy. Brands must be honest about the products used in their supply chains and take tangible steps to stop human rights abuses and deforestation.

Transparency and companies taking responsibility for their actions are critical to protecting forests and upholding Indigenous Peoples' rights.

By Emma Rae Lierley

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