

Why Corporations Choose Lawlessness To Fight Unions



Sonali Kolhatkar

05-19-2024 ~ *Workers at companies like Apple and Starbucks face armies of union-busting lawyers advising employers to repeatedly violate labor laws.*

Workers in Towson, Maryland, have earned the distinction of becoming the [first Apple retail workers in the nation](#) to vote to strike over failed union negotiations with their employer. The approximately 100 Apple workers were also the first in the nation to successfully form a union. They did so in 2022, as the [Coalition of Organized Retail Employees](#) (CORE), joining the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). [Two-thirds](#) of the store's workers voted to join the union, a resounding success at a company that has long staved off union activity.

Apple could have embraced the Towson store union, respecting the legal right of its workers to bargain collectively for their rights. Instead, the company chose a depressingly familiar path of using its economic power to break labor laws and resist the union at all costs.

Among Apple's earliest tactics, a bold one even by corporate standards, was to offer [all but the Towson store workers](#) new educational and medical perks, saying that the nascent union would have to negotiate for those perks while nonunion workers would be able to enjoy them immediately. The IAM CORE members claimed it was a "[calculated](#)" move by Apple, timed just ahead of a second retail

union vote at a store in Penn Square, Oklahoma, ostensibly as a warning to those workers, and any others considering union drives, that they could lose out. The National Labor Relations Board, which under President Joe Biden has tended to adhere to its mandate by [actually protecting workers](#) more often than not, [accused the company](#) of violating the workers' labor rights. Luckily, the bid failed and a majority of Penn Square's Apple workers [chose to unionize](#).

Apple's ugly maneuver echoed that of [Starbucks](#) corporation a year later. The coffee giant increased hourly pay for all but its union workers. The [NLRB](#) also ruled against Starbucks.

Both Apple and Starbucks may have learned such machinations from [Littler Mendelson P.C.](#), the notorious union-busting firm that both corporations have retained to counter worker organizing. Starbucks alone has made use of the services of [110 of the law firm's attorneys](#) to aggressively resist organized labor at their stores. A former National Labor Relations Board attorney Matthew Bodie called the massive army of anti-union lawyers "unprecedented." On its [website](#), Littler boasts of the work it has done to "shape workplace practices in a direction that is favorable to employers."

Union busting is lucrative, raking in [more than \\$400 million in revenues](#) a year for anti-union law firms like Littler Mendelson and [Morgan Lewis](#) (which is Amazon's go-to union buster). It's no wonder that a large part of their work is advising corporate employers on how best to break laws. Starbucks, for example, is a [repeat offender](#). And so are [Apple](#) and [Amazon](#).

The practice of labor law violations in countering unionization is so widespread that the [Economic Policy Institute](#) found in 2019 that "Employers are charged with violating federal law in 41.5 percent of all union election campaigns." Given that these are officially deemed violations that have gone through the process of reporting and adjudicating, the number is likely an underestimate.

The reason these major corporations choose lawlessness is that often it works to their benefit. A company like Apple may well see millions of dollars toward union-busting lawyers as money well spent. After all, breaking the law costs very little, with [fines for labor law violations](#) capped at meager amounts. There are likely cold, hard calculations behind the [cost-benefit analysis](#) of breaking labor laws versus allowing workers to organize for what they want.

Even though workers in [two Apple stores](#) have successfully unionized, Apple prevailed in Short Hills, New Jersey where workers organized under the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and [failed](#) to win a union vote. Ahead of the vote, CWA [accused](#) Apple of illegal anti-union retaliation against one of the Short Hills employees leading the union drive. To Apple, such illegal behavior was likely worth the price. While individual employees have their livelihoods at stake, the company has nothing to lose but a few thousand dollars.

It's not just about money but also power (which ultimately translates into more money). Workers wanting union representation aren't just fighting for better pay and benefits but for humane treatment. Corporate profiteering is built on worker insecurity, the ability to hire and fire at will, and offering unpredictable shifts that best serve the company. Indeed, [shift scheduling](#) is a key sticking point in IAM CORE's negotiations with Apple for its Towson store workers who voted to strike.

There are good reasons why corporations fight unions: hundreds of studies point to the negative [impact](#) that unions have on corporate profits. Conversely, there is a [clear correlation](#) between unions and higher wages, benefits, and worker protections. Even more encouragingly, unions lead to better wages [even for non-union employees](#), putting upward pressure on employers to compete with unionized workers.

Many modern corporate employers who fight unions market themselves as having [liberal values](#) and being pro-worker. Apple [touts itself](#) as one of the biggest job creators in the U.S., responsible for 2 million jobs in all 50 states, and boasts that "unlike with many companies, both full- and part-time employees are eligible for such benefits as health insurance, matching retirement contributions, and an employee stock purchase plan."

But, when forced to live up to their stated ideals, such corporations transform into profit-hungry gangsters. "Progressive-branded companies therefore offer free, built-in leverage to worker organizing campaigns," wrote labor journalist [Hamilton Nolan](#). "There is nothing that will force an employer to live up to all the stuff it said about caring for employees faster than a demand for union recognition."

Some companies choose to lean into their stated liberal values, most notably [Ben and Jerry's ice cream](#), which refreshingly decided to embrace the newly formed

Scoopers United union instead of unleashing union-busting law firms on its workers.

Even Microsoft, a major tech company that has a history of being what the New York Times called a “[poster child for corporate ruthlessness](#),” is seemingly choosing the path of union acceptance. The company’s vice chair and president, [Brad Smith](#) announced in 2022 that Microsoft would work collaboratively with unions.

The Times [speculated](#) that Microsoft’s decision to embrace unions was an attempt to appease the pro-labor Biden administration ahead of a corporate acquisition of a video game company. Regardless of its reasoning, working with organized labor instead of against it is [good for society](#), even if it’s bad for individual corporate bottom lines.

The good news is that in spite of union membership rates continuing to [drop precipitously](#), the percentage of people who see unions in a favorable light has [increased to 71 percent](#), and among young people a whopping 88 percent. The number of workers [petitioning](#) to join unions has jumped, as has strike activity. The only thing standing in the way of converting the union dreams of Apple workers and others into reality is corporate willingness to break labor laws.

By Sonali Kolhatkar

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Source: Independent Media Institute

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Procter & Gamble, Mondelēz, And Nestlé Are Among 10 Of The Leading Consumer Brands Driving Global Deforestation



05-19-2024 ~ *Despite corporate commitments, deforestation rates remain high, and community land conflicts continue.*

Since the turn of the century, there has been a consistent average annual loss of [3 to 4 million hectares](#) (7.4 to 9.9 million acres) of tropical forest globally. This puts us far from reaching the goal of [zero deforestation by 2030](#), a target embraced in 2021 by 145 countries during the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow. Besides damaging the local environment, deforestation threatens our societies and economies by elevating carbon emissions and exacerbating the climate crisis. Land use change—mainly deforestation—contributes as much as a [fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions](#). So, solving the climate crisis means ending rampant deforestation. And while national commitments are essential, the climate solution can only come from a collaboration between all stakeholders, and that includes, importantly, the private sector.

“Though countries need to take the lead, solving the climate crisis is not up to them alone. Non-state actors—industry, financial institutions, cities, and regions—play a critical role in getting the world to net zero no later than 2050. They will either help scale the ambition and action we need to ensure a sustainable planet, or else they strongly increase the likelihood of failure. The planet cannot afford delays, excuses, or more greenwashing,” said Catherine McKenna, chair of the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Expert Group on the

Net Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities, in a 2022 [report](#) that explored, in part, the role of business in achieving net zero emissions.

However, big multinational brands pose a major problem. Despite commitments to improve their supply chains, deforestation—as well as [violence against those people defending land rights](#)—remains increasingly high worldwide.

Deforestation rose 3.2 percent worldwide in 2023, according to a [report](#) published in April 2024 by Global Forest Watch, a forest monitoring project of the World Resources Institute, a Washington-based nonprofit research organization.

In 2020, [227 lethal attacks](#) on land and environmental defenders were recorded by Global Witness, an international NGO that investigates the links between natural resource exploitation and human rights abuses.

Major Consumer Brands Are Failing

“[Keep Forests Standing](#),” a 2023 report by my organization, [Rainforest Action Network](#) (RAN), a nonprofit environmental group, revealed that many companies are still profiting from destructive practices, failing to bridge the gap between their public promises and their harmful actions.

Our report identified ten multinational corporations as significant contributors to deforestation and human rights abuses through their supply chains: Colgate-Palmolive, Ferrero, Kao, Mars, Mondeléz, Nestlé, Nissin Foods, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever. While some progress has been made, particularly with policies like [No Deforestation, No Peatlands, No Exploitation](#) (NDPE), implementation remains incomplete, especially in regions like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Producing a ‘scorecard’ for each brand, we urged them to take concrete actions to protect forests and communities. The scorecard uses rigorous criteria to assess policies and transparency in reporting. Unfortunately, in 2023, none of the evaluated brands achieved an ‘A’ grade, with Procter & Gamble, Mondeléz, Ferrero, and Nissin Foods performing the worst.

These brands wield considerable economic power, influencing global markets for ‘forest-risk commodities,’ particularly agricultural products such as palm oil, soy, cocoa, coffee, wood, pulp and paper, and beef.

Effective government regulations certainly help reduce the effects of climate change. However, global brands must move beyond empty promises and take decisive steps to address their role in driving deforestation and human rights violations. We need a genuine commitment and meaningful action from business leaders to protect forests and communities for future generations. Consumers and all of civil society play a crucial role in holding these brands accountable and demanding action to halt deforestation and rights abuses.

Trends and Developments

In the early 2020s, alarming environmental data highlighted the escalating crises facing our planet: 2022 saw [forest loss](#) equivalent to the size of Switzerland, and in 2023, record-breaking temperatures occurred, with [over a million species teetering on the edge of extinction](#). Amidst these enormous challenges, some hope has emerged from regulatory developments and corporate claims—albeit with reservations.

The [European Union Deforestation Regulation](#) (EUDR) represents a potentially pivotal shift in accountability for forest-risk commodities. Mandating traceability to land plots and imposing fines for deforestation carried out after 2020, the regulation demands robust due diligence from importing companies. Even so, major brands lag in compliance, exposing investors to significant risks. There remains substantial room for improvement when it comes to achieving true transparency and genuine corporate support for the EUDR.

Meanwhile, brands such as Mars, Nestlé, and Ferrero asserted they had achieved or were approaching 100 percent deforestation-free supply chains. Presenting limited evidence and overlooking loopholes, these assertions carry little weight. Their claims lacked independent verification, often relying on consultants with vested interests. Unilever stood out as the only brand demanding independent verification from its suppliers, though it falls short in its non-compliance protocols. Other brands relied on self-reported data or flawed certification systems, raising doubts about the credibility of their claims. This is classic greenwashing.

False assurances, if accepted at face value and with a lack of public transparency, allow brands to sidestep accountability and avoid finding systemic solutions. Genuine progress requires expanded reporting, particularly with third-party verification, to ensure adherence to ecological and human rights standards. As

the world grapples with environmental crises, private-sector brands must demonstrate a tangible commitment to halting deforestation and respecting human rights. Otherwise, their claims ring hollow.

Corporations have been slow to accept responsibility for upholding human rights and land rights. Unilever's [comprehensive policy](#) to protect Human Rights Defenders sets a precedent by acknowledging the need for corporations to combat violence against those defending land rights. Other major brands lack clear commitments in this regard.

While investments in landscape initiatives are increasing, particularly in palm oil production, only a fraction prioritize securing land-tenure rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. In the Indonesian district of [Aceh Tamiang](#), growers, buyers, and end consumers of palm oil have united behind the local government to help make the entire jurisdiction a sustainable source of commodities, thereby protecting the [Leuser Ecosystem](#), an ancient Indonesian forest ecosystem known as the "[world's orangutan capital](#)." Initiatives like this show promising results in reducing deforestation but underscore the need for broader enforcement of policies throughout supply chains.

Despite many companies adopting No Deforestation, No Peatlands, No Exploitation (NDPE) policies, challenges persist in translating these commitments into tangible outcomes. Deforestation rates remain high, and community land conflicts continue, especially in areas of logging and agribusiness expansion.

Critical reforms are necessary to truly bridge the gap between corporate policies and real-world impact. NDPE policies must become mandatory across all supply-chain tiers, covering all forest-risk commodities, and enforced at the corporate group level. Setting ambitious targets and independent verification of compliance are essential steps toward credible corporate responsibility.

Consumer awareness is growing, and consumers increasingly care about how brands behave. A [2020 survey](#) by McKinsey & Co. found that "[a]lmost two-thirds of consumers are self-proclaimed 'belief-driven buyers' who will choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues." The survey also found that three in four millennials consider sustainability when buying goods.

With a growing global awareness of environmental and human rights issues, consumers, investors, and activists have the power to hold brands accountable

and drive meaningful change toward sustainable and equitable supply chains.

Essential Elements of a Robust Forest-Risk Commodity Policy

In the early 21st century, a collective effort by communities, consumers, and international NGOs revealed how major global brands were driving deforestation and human rights abuses. Pressure from these groups has led many companies to adopt the NDPE policy standard. However, claims of reduced deforestation rates, particularly in places like Indonesia, are disputed, and as late as 2024, not all forest-risk sectors had implemented NDPE policies.

To ensure credible change, NDPE policies must address all elements of forest protection, prohibiting deforestation, forest degradation, and human rights violations. Deadlines for halting these activities must be clearly defined and observed. Furthermore, adopting cross-commodity NDPE policies is crucial, as threats to forests and communities often stem from commodities used in manufacturing products.

For instance, a chocolate bar has several ingredients, such as palm oil, cocoa, and sugar, each with its own environmental impact. A brand may have policies addressing palm oil but lack them for cocoa. Forest-risk commodities are all linked to deforestation and ecosystem degradation, and as such, they all require attention.

Multinationals can transform forest-risk commodity supply chains by setting comprehensive and cross-commodity NDPE policies. Only then can they take concrete steps toward mitigating environmental harm and respecting human rights. This collective effort is crucial for preserving forests and the communities that depend on them for generations to come.

The fight against deforestation and human rights abuses involves tracing the intricate web of connections between powerful corporations and the destruction they cause. While many big brands have adopted NDPE policies, their commitments often fail to effect real change. A key issue is the lack of enforcement across corporate conglomerates, allowing destructive practices to persist unchecked.

RAN's approach focuses on holding conglomerates accountable for their actions despite attempts to deflect responsibility. By scrutinizing ownership structures, we can identify those truly responsible for deforestation. Even with such scrutiny,

though, corporations can find loopholes. For example, they can source from one arm of a corporate group. At the same time, another is actively involved in forest destruction and claims innocence because the two arms operate under different names.

To ensure credibility, NDPE policies must encompass all elements of sustainability and set ambitious, time-bound targets for compliance. Unfortunately, many brands lack such targets, relying on insufficient action plans or certification systems. Ambiguities in "[Net Zero](#)" approaches further complicate matters, potentially enabling greenwashing and delaying real progress.

Ultimately, achieving real change requires transparent and accountable policies enforced across entire supply chains. Without meaningful action, forests and communities remain at risk, highlighting the urgent need for corporate responsibility and genuine commitment to ending deforestation and human rights violations.

Evaluation of Brands

As mentioned above, RAN's "[Keep Forests Standing](#)" scorecard assesses ten major global brands in terms of their efforts to combat deforestation and human rights abuses in their supply chains. The 2023 evaluation included new criteria such as supply chain transparency and advocacy for regulations to end deforestation-linked commodities. Grades were nuanced with pluses and minuses, with a top score of A+ for brands that scored 24 points out of 12 evaluated elements.

Despite the urgent need for action amidst climate chaos and ecological damage, no brand had yet earned an 'A' grade. The worst performers, including Procter & Gamble, Mondeléz, Ferrero, and Nissin Foods, received an 'F.' Unilever led the pack, while Nestlé, PepsiCo, Kao, Colgate-Palmolive, and Mars showed moderate progress.

However, Ferrero, Mondeléz, Nissin Foods, and particularly Procter & Gamble were labeled as laggards, with Procter & Gamble even weakening its supplier requirements in its new policy. The brands were categorized into leaders, middle-of-the-pack, and laggards, emphasizing the need for significant improvement across the board.

Overall, while some brands had made strides, significant gaps persisted,

especially in ensuring third-party verification and comprehensive NDPE policies. Here are the brands and the grades they received:

Unilever: C

By strengthening its policies and investing in landscape programs, Unilever maintained its leadership position.

Mars: D

Mars lacked third-party verification but issued guidance on land rights.

Nestlé: D

Nestlé claimed progress in achieving deforestation-free supply chains but lacked third-party verification.

PepsiCo: D

PepsiCo committed to human rights defenders and disclosed palm oil refineries but awaited verification.

Kao: D

Kao clarified its NDPE policy, disclosing monitoring systems.

Colgate-Palmolive: D

Colgate-Palmolive improved its NDPE policy, emphasizing supplier adherence.

Ferrero: F

Ferrero remains a laggard without NDPE policies for high-risk commodities.

Nissin: F

Nissin Foods revised its procurement policy but missed setting NDPE practices as a requirement.

Mondelēz: F

Mondelēz also lagged, lacking comprehensive NDPE policies.

P&G: F

Procter & Gamble regressed with weaker protections in its wood pulp supply chain.

Recommendations

Major brands driving deforestation and human rights abuses need to drop empty promises and clean up their act. They must outline basic policies enforcing cross-commodity NDPE practices across all supply chains, setting a standard for others to follow. Grievance disclosure is improving, yet transparency on actions against violators like [Royal Golden Eagle Group](#) in Indonesia still needs to be improved. [Forest Positive Coalition](#)'s investments in landscape programs are crucial.

Increasingly, consumers worldwide are [demanding tangible actions](#), not just promises. A 2020 [survey](#) by Boston Consulting Group found a notable increase in environmental consciousness, with approximately 70 percent of individuals more aware of the link between consumption habits and environmental decline since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, 87 percent of respondents expect corporations to play a role in addressing environmental concerns, with 77 percent saying that public subsidies should be contingent upon such efforts.

Still, as of 2023, despite worsening climate crises, all the brands we evaluated had yet to address their role in deforestation and rights violations adequately.

To survive in an increasingly aware consumer market that values sustainability and environmental protection, brands must establish ambitious traceability targets and transparent monitoring systems. Human rights monitoring and community consent require credible verification beyond mere certification.

In 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres issued a “code red for humanity” following the release of a worrisome [report](#) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. “The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible,” he [warned](#).

“The viability of our societies depends on leaders from government, business, and civil society uniting behind policies, actions, and investments ... We owe this to

the entire human family, especially the poorest and most vulnerable communities and nations that are the hardest hit despite being least responsible for today's climate emergency.”

By Laurel Sutherlin

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Ravaged By Floods: Afghanistan's Desperate Plight



Map en.wikipedia.org

05-15-2024 ~ *Unprecedented flash floods wreak havoc in Afghanistan, leaving devastation in their wake and plunging the nation into crisis.*

Nearly [315](#) people have died, and over [1,600](#) have suffered injuries in catastrophic flash floods that swept through various provinces in Afghanistan on Friday, May 10. Authorities have declared a state of emergency in response to the situation. Northern Baghlan province bore the brunt of the devastation, with a death toll of over 300 and thousands of houses either destroyed or damaged. Torrential rains have wreaked havoc in several provinces, including Takhar, Badakhshan, Ghor, and Herat.

Flash floods happen when heavy rain overwhelms normal drainage. Climate change, which warms the atmosphere, boosts extreme rainfall, increasing the likelihood of these events. These floods have had a deep impact on the population, as many have lost homes and livelihoods. Rescue teams are working on the ground, but reaching flooded areas has become tough.

Meanwhile, the UN Secretary-General, [Antonio Guterres](#), expressed his solidarity with the people of Afghanistan and extended his condolences to the families of the victims. He added that the UN was collaborating with local authorities to provide assistance.

Afghanistan ranks among the [10 most vulnerable](#) countries to climate change and has been experiencing a rise in extreme weather conditions, particularly floods, droughts, and sand and dust storms. These phenomena have led to the loss of lives and livelihoods, as well as significant damage to infrastructure. Yet, despite being one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, Afghanistan was not represented at COP27, the crucial 2022 UN Climate Change Conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. Nations acknowledged the need for finance to tackle climate-related loss and damage, agreeing to establish a fund and funding arrangements.

Drought and Extreme Weather Conditions

In 2022, [Afghanistan confronted its most severe drought in 30 years](#), worsening an already challenging scenario in a nation where drought ranks as the most frequently reported disaster among households. Rising temperatures are swiftly altering precipitation patterns, resulting in reduced water accessibility for the people. This scarcity not only impacts livelihoods but also escalates disease

outbreaks and prompts displacement within communities. Over the years, the mean annual temperature has experienced a substantial increase, increasing glacier and snow melt, which serve as crucial water sources for rivers during the summer months. Between [1960 and 2008](#), the mean annual temperature climbed by 0.6 degrees Celsius, with an additional rise of 1.2 degrees Celsius from 2009 to 2016, amplifying the challenges confronting the country.

A substantial number of Afghanistan's primary rivers originate in the central highlands, specifically in Bamyan and Daikundi Provinces. Nevertheless, these critical water sources are currently facing significant challenges due to unpredictable rainfall and rapid alterations in the quantity and timing of snowfall at elevated altitudes. Persistent drought conditions are leading to the depletion of surface-water sources such as springs, while also causing a decline in groundwater levels for hand-dug and shallow wells. In [Kabul Province](#), various wells have dried up resulting in an acute water shortage.

Amid the severe droughts and rising temperatures, Afghanistan is experiencing significant fluctuations in extreme weather patterns. In August 2022, neighboring Pakistan received more than three times its typical rainfall, making it the wettest August since 1961. While not to the same degree, Afghanistan also encountered unusually intense heavy rains and flooding during the same month, predominantly impacting the central, eastern, western, and southeastern regions of the country.

This type of weather is making it harder for people to get enough food, leading to more malnutrition and sickness. It's even worse because the economy is struggling, and the effects of 40 years of war have made things tough. Half of the population doesn't have enough to eat, [and 6 million](#) people are very close to starving.

In Afghanistan, the prevalence of child stunting is alarmingly high, with [41 percent](#) of children under the age of five affected. Additionally, the rate of wasting, which represents severe acute malnutrition, is also remarkably elevated at 9.5 percent. Anemia affects one in three adolescent girls in the country.

Since the Taliban's takeover in 2021, the Afghan economy has contracted by [27 percent](#), leading to economic stagnation. [Unemployment has doubled](#), and only 40 percent of the population has access to electricity. Sectors like finance have essentially collapsed, and there are no major sources of economic activity such as

exports or public expenditure, leaving small and medium enterprises and farmers as the lifeblood of the faltering economy.

What Has Led to This?

One of the main reasons for Afghanistan's crisis was the long-lasting war that damaged the country inside and out. To address climate change and the economic crisis, the country requires significant financial resources. However, strict measures from the U.S. and the Taliban's policies have prevented this from happening. Similar to numerous nations impacted by global warming, Afghanistan has made minimal contributions to the issue and will require substantial international assistance to withstand its effects.

Before August 2021, Afghanistan relied heavily on foreign aid, accounting for 75 percent of its economy. When the Taliban took over on August 15, 2021, donor governments, led by the U.S., told the World Bank to stop providing around \$2 billion in international aid. This aid had been used to pay salaries for millions of teachers, health workers, and other essential staff, as well as for various projects funded by organizations like the International Development Association. These funds helped many Afghan families, including those who were very poor, by providing cash-for-work opportunities, cash distributions, and support for their livelihoods.

However, when this aid was cut off, countless Afghan households lost their main source of income. Additionally, budgetary support from organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was also stopped. As a result, the Afghan Central Bank lost its ability to work with international banks and financial institutions like the World Bank, IMF, and ADB.

The bans on female education and Afghan women working in NGOs and the UN have severely harmed Afghanistan's long-term economic and social progress. They have hastened the departure of educated women and men, leading to a brain drain. Moreover, these restrictions have dampened donors' willingness to offer ongoing humanitarian aid. Additionally, the Taliban's successful implementation of a ban on opium poppy cultivation has led to approximately \$1 billion in lost annual income for rural Afghan households. Consequently, the nation is increasingly dependent on coal exports, leading to illegal mining in various areas and raising climate concerns.

This series of events in Afghanistan paints a dire picture of struggle and hardship. The devastating flash floods, coupled with the ongoing economic crisis and the long-lasting impacts of war, have left the country reeling.

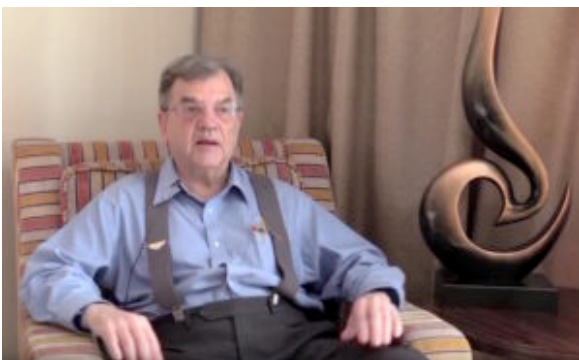
By Pranjali Pandey

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Source: Globetrotter

Seven Features Of Ancient Enterprise



Michael Hudson

05-15-2024 ~ *The changing context for enterprise through the centuries reminds us that business activities are not universal but fluid and alter according to society's practical priorities and ethics.*

There are multiple differences between antiquity's economic practices and those of the modern world, and these should be borne in mind when considering the changing context for enterprise through the centuries. Whereas modern business

largely operates on credit, in archaic and classical times handicraft workshops were located on basically self-sufficient landed estates, including those of the large public institutions. Such industry was self-financed rather than operating on credit, which was extended mainly for long-distance and bulk trade.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs in antiquity either headed wealthy families or sought fortunes by managing other people's money, which typically was provided subject to a stipulated return. Regardless of the source of their capital, they coordinated a complex set of relationships whose institutional structure evolved throughout the second and first millennia BC.

The Importance of Land

From Babylonian times down through late Republican Rome, commercial income tended to be invested in land. But there was no price speculation on credit until the late first century BC in Rome. Land was the major savings vehicle and sign of status. The largest estate owners shifted subsistence land to growing cash crops, headed by olive oil and wine in the Mediterranean, and dates in the Near East, harvested increasingly by slaves.

Lending Was Mainly for Commercial Trade Ventures

We do not find banking intermediaries lending out people's savings to entrepreneurial borrowers. Throughout the Near East, what have been called "banking families" such as the Egibi are best thought of as general entrepreneurs. They did hold deposits and make loans, but they paid the same rate of interest to depositors as they charged for their loans (normally 20 percent annually). There was no margin for arbitrage, and no credit superstructure to magnify the supply of monetary metal on hand.[1] Promissory notes circulated only among closely knit groups of *tamkaru*, so a broad superstructure of credit was only incipient, and did not come to fruition until modern times with the development of fractional-reserve banking from the seventeenth century onward.[2] Most lending was for commercial trade ventures—in which the creditor shared in the risk as well as the gain—or took the form of predatory agrarian loans or claims for arrears on taxes or other fees owed to royal or imperial collectors. Down to modern times, small-scale personal debt was viewed as the first step toward forfeiting one's property, a danger to be entered into only unwillingly. The dominant ethic was to keep assets free of debt, especially land.

Moneylending in classical Greece was mainly in the hands of outsiders, foreigners

such as Pasion in Athens. In Rome the elite left banking to low-status individuals headed by slaves or freedmen, ex-slaves who “confine[d] their activities to bridging loans and the provision of working capital,” operating only “on the margins of trade and industry.”[3]

Ancient Entrepreneurs Were Not Independent Specialists Throughout antiquity entrepreneurs pursued a broad range of activities, organizing and managing voyages, fields, workshops, or other productive units. They rarely acted by themselves for just their own account but as part of a system. Traders and “merchants” tended to work via guilds, such as those organized by Assyrian traders early in the second millennium, and in the Syrian and “Phoenician” trade with Aegean and Mediterranean lands from the eighth century BC on. Wealthy “big men” such as Balmunamhe in Old Babylonian times, Assyrian traders in Asia Minor,[4] the Egibi and Marushu in Neo-Babylonia, Cato and other Romans spread their capital over numerous sectors—long-distance and local trade, provisioning the palace or temples with food and raw materials, leasing fields and workshops, moneylending and (often as an outgrowth) real estate.

As late as the second century BC when we begin to pick up reports of the Roman *publicani*, they had not yet begun to specialize. Despite the fact that collecting taxes and other public revenue must have required a different set of skills from furnishing supplies to the army and other public agencies, most *publicani* acted opportunistically on an *ad hoc* basis. “What the companies provided was capital and top management, based on general business experience,” observes Ernst Badian,[5] probably with a small permanent staff of assistants and subordinates. An entrepreneur might run a ceramic workshop, a metal workshop, or the like, as well as dealing in slaves or renting them out. Richard Duncan-Jones[6] concludes: “The term *negotiator* was widely interpreted, including not only merchants, shopkeepers and craftsmen but moneylenders and prostitutes.”

Market Development and Patent Protection Were Alien Concepts

There was no such thing as patent protection or “intellectual property” rights, and little thought of what today would be called market development. Artistic styles and new techniques were copied freely. Moses Finley[7] cites the story, “repeated by a number of Roman writers, that a man—characteristically unnamed—invented unbreakable glass and demonstrated it to Tiberius in anticipation of a great reward. The emperor asked the inventor whether anyone shared his secret and was assured that there was no one else; whereupon his

head was promptly removed, lest, said Tiberius, gold be reduced to the value of mud... neither the elder Pliny nor Petronius nor the historian Dio Cassius was troubled by the point that the inventor turned to the emperor for a reward, instead of turning to an investor for capital with which to put his invention into production.”

Entrepreneurs Worked in a War-Oriented Environment

Even when entrepreneurs played a nominally productive role, they worked in a war-oriented environment. A major source of fortunes was provisioning of the army, mainly with food but also with manufactured goods. Frank[8] notes that during 150-80 BC “we hear of only one man... who gained wealth by manufacturing, and that was in public contracts for weapons during the Social War (Cicero, *in Pis.* 87-89).” On the retail level, Polanyi’s paradigmatic example of free price-making markets was the small-scale food sellers who followed Greek armies. Provisioning armies with food was indeed the main commercial activity, with the most economically aggressive being the public contractors who supplied Roman armies on the wholesale level. Contracts were set at auctions that became notoriously “fixed” by the first century BC.

Enterprise Was Considered Déclassé

There was a basic conflict between social ambition for high status and the aristocratic antipathy to engaging directly in business ventures. “Although Aristotle asserted that ‘unnatural’ *chrematistike* (money-making) knew no bounds,” Humphreys concludes, “the general impression given by our sources is that the majority of Athenians were quite ready to give up the effort to make money as soon as they could afford a comfortable *rentier* existence, and that even the few who continued to expand their operations could not pass on the same spirit to their sons. The result was small-scale, disconnected business ventures, assessed by the security of their returns rather than their potentiality for expansion.”

The same was true in Ancient Rome. Reflecting the disdain in which active participation in money-seeking commerce was held by their aristocratic ethic, most of the shippers engaged in Rome’s maritime trade were foreigners or ex-slaves owning one or two small sailing vessels.

Enterprise Was Tied to Long-Distance Trade

The most typical form of enterprise was long-distance trade. Its organizational

pattern changed little from the epoch when Mesopotamia's temples and palaces provided merchants with commodities or money.

Opportunities for making money evolved as a by-product of this mercantile role. In Old-Sumerian documents, Leemans [9] notes, "*damkara* are only found as traders. But when private business began to flourish after the beginning of the Third Dynasty of Ur [2112-2004 BC], the *tamkarum* was the obvious person to assume the function of giver of credit." By the time of Hammurabi's Babylonian laws, in many cases "*tamkarum* cannot denote a traveling trader, but must be a money-lender." Leemans concludes [10]: "The development from merchant into banker [that is, a moneylender or investor backing voyages and similar partnerships] is a natural one, and there is no essential difference between these two professions—surely not in Babylonia where in principle no distinction was made between silver (money in modern terms) and other marketable stuffs. In a society whose commerce is little developed, trade is only carried on by merchants, who buy and sell. But when commerce increases, the business of a merchant assumes larger proportions."

Notes:

[1] Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East by Michael Hudson and Marc Van De Mieroop (eds.), 2002, pp. 345-347.

[2] Randall Wray, ed., 2004. Credit and State Theories of Money: The Contributions of A. Mitchell Innes by Randall Wray, 1995. See especially the articles by Ingham and Gardiner.

[3] David Jones. 2006. The Bankers of Puteoli: Finance, Trade, and Industry in the Roman World by David Jones, 2006, p. 245.

[4] Trade and Finance in Ancient Mesopotamia: Proceedings of the First MOS Symposium J. G. Dercksen, ed., 1999, p. 86.

[5] Publicans and Sinners: Private Enterprise in the Service of the Roman Republic by Ernst Badian, 1972, p. 37.

[6] The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies by Richard Duncan-Jones, 1974.

[7] The Ancient Economy by Moses Finlay, 1973, pp. 147: 871.

[8] An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome. Vol. 1, Rome and Italy of the Republic by Tenney Frank, ed., 1933, p. 291.

[9] The Old-Babylonian Merchant: His Business and His Social Position by W.F. Leemans, 1950, p. 11.

[10] The Old-Babylonian Merchant: His Business and His Social Position by W.F. Leemans, 1950, p. 22.

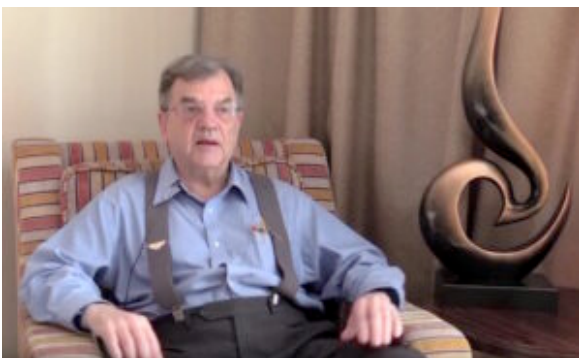
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Parallels Between Archaic Entrepots And Modern Offshore Banking Centers



Michael Hudson

05-12-2024 ~ *Offshore banking and tax-avoidance centers are nothing new; they've been with us for millennia.*

A discussion of the origins of urbanization may provide some insight into the

character of modern social problems by highlighting the long historical dynamic at work. It may not be out of place here to point out that anti-states are well known in the modern world, above all in what the U.S. Federal Reserve Board classifies as eleven offshore banking centers. Five such enclaves are in the Caribbean: Panama, the Netherlands Antilles (Curaçao), Bermuda, the Bahamas, and the British West Indies (Cayman Islands). Three enclaves—Hong Kong, Macao, and Singapore—were founded to conduct the China trade. The remaining three are Liberia, Lebanon, and Bahrain at the mouth of the Persian Gulf—the island which Bronze Age Sumerians called Dilmun when they used it to trade with the Indus valley and the Iranian shore.

Nothing would seem more modern than these offshore banking and tax-avoidance centers. They are the brainchildren of lawyers and accountants in the 1960s seeking to weave loopholes into the social fabric—to provide curtains of secrecy (“privacy”) to avoid or evade taxes, and to serve as havens for ill-gotten earnings as well as to facilitate legitimate commerce.

Whereas modern nation-states enact laws and impose taxes, these enclaves help individuals evade such regulations. And whereas nation-states have armies, these centers are the furthest thing from being military powers. They are antibodies to nationhood, yet more may be learned about Ice Age, Neolithic, and even Bronze Age gathering and meeting sites by looking at these modern enclaves than by examining classical city-states such as Athens and Rome.

Timeless Features of Entrepots

1. They Lack Political Autonomy

Instead of being politically independent, the modern offshore banking centers and free trade zones are small former colonies, e.g., the Caribbean islands as well as the Chinese entrepots. The Grand Cayman Island was a Jamaican dependency until 1959, when it chose to revert to its former status as a British crown colony so as to benefit from what remained of imperial commercial preferences. Liberia and Panama are U.S. dependencies lacking even their own currency system (both use the U.S. dollar). Hong Kong did not gain title to its own land until Britain’s leases expired in 1997. Panama did not gain control of its canal until 1999.

In sum, whereas political theorists define the first characteristic of modern states (and implicitly their capital cities) as being their ability to enact and enforce laws,

offshore banking centers are of no political significance. In the sense of being sanctuaries from national taxes and law authorities, such enclaves are in some ways akin to the biblical cities of refuge. If they are not sanctuaries for lawbreakers in person, they at least provide havens for their bank accounts and corporate shells.

2. They Occupy Convenient Points of Commercial Interface Between Regions

Typically, entrepôts are on islands or key transport navels such as the Panamanian isthmus. They are separated as free ports politically, if not physically, from their surrounding political entities. They often are centers of travel and tourism (“business meetings”) and for gambling. In antiquity they typically were centers for sacred festivals or games such as were held at Delphi, Nemia, the Corinthian Isthmus, or Olympia (whence our modern Olympic games originated in a sacred context).

3. They Enjoy Sacred (or Legal) Protection Against Attack

Although Delphi and Olympus were landlocked (as was Çatal Hüyük), they were centrally located for their local regions. They served as religious and cultural centers, whose festivals and games could be conveniently attended by the Hellenic population at large. Even visitors who were citizens of mutually belligerent city-states enjoyed sanctuary. Of course, today’s enclaves no longer claim sacred status, except for the Vatican and its Institute for Religious Works promoting money-laundering functions [1]. Their commercial focus has become divorced from the religious setting associated with international commerce down through medieval Europe with its great fairs. And indeed, their attraction is especially to wealthy individuals avoiding the tax laws and criminal codes of their own homeland.

4. They Are Militarily Safe

Although today’s enclaves rarely have armies of their own, they are militarily safe. Thanks to their unique apolitical status, and indeed to their ultimate dependence on larger powers, their neighbors have little motive to attack them and every reason to use them as business channels and even for government transactions such as arms dealing, money laundering, and related activities not deemed proper behavior at home. The resulting commerce thrives free of regulations and taxes, conducted in militarily safe environments without the cost of having to support standing armies, and hence less need to levy taxes for this purpose, or to monetize national war debts.

5. They Are Politically Neutral Sites

To create such enclaves has been an objective of mercantile capital through the ages. It patronizes the world's politically weakest areas as long as they do not do what real governments do: regulate their economies. The search for "neutral territory" expressed itself already in the chalcolithic epoch, many millennia before private enterprise developed as we know it. The result of this impetus is that neolithic towns such as Çatal Hüyük, Mesopotamian temple cities such as Nippur, island entrepôts such as Dilmun, the Egyptian Delta area, Ischia/Pithekoussai, and the biblical cities of refuge share the following important common denominator with today's offshore banking centers: Instead of being centers of local governing, legal, and military power, they were politically neutral sites established outside the jurisdictions of local governments.

6. They Create Forums for Rituals of Social Cohesion

Whether the status of these urban sites was that of sanctified commercial entrepôts or amphictyonic centers, they provided a forum for rituals of social cohesion to bolster their commerce. These rituals included the exchange of goods and women (intermarriage)—commerce and intercourse in their archaic sexual meaning as well as in the more modern sense of commodity exchange.

I have cited above the archaic practice of conducting trade via island entrepôts. The sacred island of Dilmun/Bahrain in the Persian Gulf represents history's longest lasting example of such an enclave. It served as an entrepôt linking Sumer and Babylonia (whose records refer prominently to the "merchants of Dilmun") to the Indus civilization and the intervening Iranian shore. Its status as a sacred as well as commercial center may have been promoted by the fact that its waters were a source of pearls, prized as sacred symbols of the moon (being round, pale, and associated with deep water). It also seems to have served as a high-status burial ground for prosperous individuals, or at least for parts of their bodies. Lamberg-Karlovsky[2] reports that there are more fingers and other limbs than full skeletons, as the Sumerians partook piecemeal in the island's sanctity (although some commentators believe that this may be simply the result of grave robberies through the centuries[3]). In any event, these social and commercial virtues helped make Dilmun one of the most expensive pieces of Bronze Age real estate, not unlike modern Bahrain.

7. They Facilitate Commercial Development

The sacred status of such entrepôts facilitated commercial development in ways

that did not abuse Bronze Age sensibilities, much like the sacred status of temples did when they became the major economic and textile production centers. While creating the economic conditions and organization of large-scale enterprise within traditional social values and order, Bronze Age institutions provided leeway so as not to stifle commercial development with overcentralized control. This may be part of the reason why trade was conducted *outside* the city gates. The philosophy was to create “mixed economies” in which institutional and private sectors each had their proper role.

Notes

[1] David A. Yallop, *In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I*, 1984, pp. 92-94.

[2] C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky “Dilmun: Gateway to Immortality,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Jan 1982, 41(1), pp. 45-50.

[3] P.R.S. Moorey, “Where did they bury the Kings of the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur?” *Iraq*, 46, 1984, pp. 1-18

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Trump

Loyalists

Preview

Strategies To Upend 2024 Election



05-10-2024 ~ *Not just challenging voters' credentials in battleground states. But attacking every step in running elections.*

As the 2020 presidential election entered its final stretch, Christina Bobb was not just covering it as a TV newswoman for the pro-Donald Trump One America News Network (OANN). The tall, dark-haired, clear-speaking ex-marine and lawyer was working to overturn it.

Bobb believed that Democrats and election officials colluded to fabricate thousands of voter registrations, illegal voters, forged ballots, and finessed the vote count until Joe Biden was the victor in 2020's battleground states.

Yet it was Bobb and Trump loyalists who were feverishly plotting and pushing to alter the presidential election's outcome, as she detailed in her 2023 book, [*Stealing Your Vote: The Inside Story of the 2020 Election and What it Means for 2024.*](#)

Publicly, Bobb kept reporting for OANN. Under the radar, she "joined" Rudy Giuliani and others in Trump's orbit who pursued ways to nullify the results. She wrote that she was on the call with Trump when he urged Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to "[find 11,780 votes.](#)" Bobb said that she coordinated "the litigation efforts in Arizona, Michigan, and New Mexico," including, apparently, a slate of fake Electoral College members who forged and sent paperwork to Congress certifying that Trump had won Arizona.

In April, Bobb and [17 others](#) were [indicted](#) on multiple felonies in that electoral hijacking scheme by Arizona Attorney General Kristin Mayes, a Democrat. Only weeks before, on the same day Trump secured the 2024 Republican nomination, Bobb was [named](#) the Republican National Committee's senior counsel for election integrity. Beyond the surreal twist that a politico indicted for attempting to overturn a swing state's presidential vote will now lead a national party's efforts

to police elections, Bobb's book previews the lawfare and conspiratorial mindset that is already shadowing 2024's presidential election.

In her book, Bobb complained about "inflated" voter rolls, "ballot trafficking," and "ballot harvesting," which are conspiratorial pejoratives that imply fabricating voters, forging ballots, and stuffing ballot boxes. As States Newsroom [reported](#) in April 2024, the RNC and its allies have already sued in five states—including Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Nevada—to challenge their voter rolls' accuracy, and, in turn, voters' credentials. In Georgia, a Republican bill empowering mass challenges of voter registrations was signed into law on May 7. (The American Civil Liberties Union has vowed to [sue](#) to block last-minute voter purges.)

Bobb's book also targeted the way that elections are run. She disparaged "centralized" counting operations ("makes cheating easier") and complained of local election officials "removing" Republican workers and restricting GOP's observers ("so that they could cheat"). She said that Democrats will spread "misinformation" ("an information war against the American people"), run "out the clock" after Election Day, and collude with the media to change "the Narrative."

"The media and the Left insist that there were *no crimes* committed, and they love to point to the courts, claiming that all charges of criminal activity have been proven wrong," she wrote of 2020. "The real story, however, is quite different."

The real story of 2020's finale, contrary to Bobb's assertions, was that Trump loyalists would not accept his defeat and were running blind. They presented their "evidence" to courts overseen by Democratic and Republican judges and [lost every substantive legal challenge](#). Their evidence—sworn statements by individuals who claimed they had witnessed misdeeds and voter fraud—was not deemed credible and was rebutted by factual evidence provided by experienced and informed experts.

Nonetheless, Bobb's belief that hidden hands are again plotting to steal votes is not just taken as an article of faith in Trump circles. It is emblematic of a new development in the GOP's "election integrity" circles, which Mimi Marziani, a political science and election law professor at the University of Texas at Austin, recently [characterized](#) as "throwing the kitchen sink" at elections officials, the courts, and the public.

In recent years, these self-taught grassroots Trump activists—who distrust almost everyone who has run an election, [including Republicans](#)—have discovered the details of election administration. These are the often-repetitive steps, procedures, and technologies used in elections. The activists assume the worst will happen at any point. They distrust almost everything about every stage in the process.

As Marziani recently [told](#) Votebeat’s Texas reporter, “They’re not actually trying to have a different person elected... They’re trying to set some sort of precedent to destabilize free and fair elections.”

“If someone really wants to interfere with our elections, they will find a way to accomplish that,” wrote Erica in April, the curator of the Election Education channel on Telegram, a platform favored by Trumpers. “The security measures the election officials repeat over and over are a false sense of security when we can’t verify any of them for ourselves.”

Telegram’s ‘Election Education’

That online comment hardly seems threatening. But what I found on the channel, which leaders of national groups seeking to defend 2024’s elections said they had not seen via emails, was stunning. Bobb’s book puts forth broad conspiracies and talking points. The Election Education channel has weaponized the details beyond anything I have seen.

I have studied and covered voting rights, election administration, voting system technology, election procedure, and disinformation for two decades. This winter, I worked for nearly two months as a county election official during California’s presidential primary, where I had an up close look at many of the practices targeted by Bobb and her fellow travelers. I understand the frustrations of not getting timely, easily understood explanations and evidence about what happened in any close election. I’ve faced many tight-lipped officials as a journalist.

But the Election Education channel is a repository that catalogs the fine print of running elections and sows doubt about almost everything. It is filled with scores of graphic charts that put forth almost every imaginable conspiracy. It makes hundreds of blunt accusations that are difficult to unwind and begin to respond to—because running an election isn’t so simple.

The graphics include topics such as: “Ballot Harvesting Hot Spots,” “Known

Election Fraud Maneuvers,” “Election Observer Tips,” “Take-Aways from 2020 Elections,” “What Could Possibly Happen to a Mail-In Ballot?” “Bring Election Accountability to Your Local Elections Office,” “Why Aren’t Change of Addresses Being Updated in the Voter Rolls?” “Our Elections are Under Attack!” and “Voter Authentication Not Required When Voting by Mail.”

The channel’s messages are not unique in Trump land. They are signs of our polarized, tribal, and political times. The channel’s curators believe they are educating Trump’s base. Their most popular posts are regularly seen by tens of thousands of viewers, according to Telegram’s counter. But they are blissfully unaware of what they do not know. In contrast, the longer I have been around elections, the more I have realized how much more there is to know.

For example, below the assertion that anyone who wants to interfere will find a way is a chart entitled, “Election Fraud Work-Arounds: The Art of Cheating Without Getting Caught.” It is one of 50 graphics posted so far in 2024, has been viewed by 26,000 people, and bluntly lists a half-dozen scenarios to cheat to “Pass Post-Election Audits,” “Pass Logic and Accuracy Tests,” “Add Late Ballots to the Count,” and “Use Uncertified Systems.”

These technicalities are steps that occur during the set-up and running of elections. Like all propaganda, their assertions start with a thread of truth. A factual process or procedure or an election record or computer system is cited. But the messages and messengers invariably go on to assume that specific steps will be secretly sabotaged.

For example, under “Add Late Ballots to the Count”—which implies that Democrats or colluding officials are stealing votes—are six conspiratorial scenarios. One might “alter or don’t require [a] USPS [Post Office] time stamp.” One might “use ‘blank’ ballots later to vote” or “backfill the votes via adjudication [a process where officials review ballots if there’s more than one vote in a single contest to ascertain the voter’s intent].” One might “alter chain-of-custody records [concerning the handling and inventorying of ballots].” One might exploit the “ballot curing period [when voters can correct mistakes or return to an election office with more identifying information] to insert votes” or “use early votes to calculate how many more ballots are needed to win.”

Accusations like these sow doubts. It is virtually impossible to factually respond to

people who say that no matter what evidence is presented, that something invisible is happening elsewhere to corrupt the process. But that's their mindset.

"Election fraud does not require the assistance of election staff," said a chart entitled, *How an Election can be Stolen without Poll Worker's Knowledge*. "Poll workers can do everything right and still have the election stolen from them. There are people in this world who will stop at nothing to gain or maintain power."

How Impactful Might This Be?

As a longtime journalist, I don't criticize individual citizen activists. But I can't help but notice the blind spots in this movement and its methodology.

Bobb's assertions and Election Education's graphics are not just overclaiming and propagandist. They are also not fully knowledgeable about their topics and targets. One can notice what is not mentioned. They never say how many voters or votes might be affected in their latest conspiratorial scenario. They never mention what steps, security measures, bureaucratic redundancies, observer scrutiny, and time crunches would prevent their feared subterfuge from pragmatically occurring. They are self-taught and unaware of their shortcomings—unintentionally, or perhaps more cynically, they are aware and don't care.

This winter, I learned things as an election official that I had not known until I worked on the inside. Election administration is not easily understood nor is it often well-explained. That encourages propaganda. But an absence of understanding does not mean the process is implicitly corrupt and untrustworthy. Today's voting systems are not black boxes. They are filled with data and voter- and ballot-centered evidence that is—and can be—repeatedly verified.

But Trump's base doesn't want to believe that he lost in 2020 and might lose again in 2024. That mindset raises some big questions about their latest messaging. Will efforts such as the Election Education channel's targeting and disparaging of the process's fine print and the officials who run elections lead to protests and unrest this fall? There are only several dozen swing counties in all of the swing states. It doesn't take more than a few dozen protesters to show up at a single site, call the media, and be noisy and disruptive.

But succeeding as a propagandist is not the same as being better-informed and

smarter about the electoral process. Nor does it mean Trumpers will be pursuing better-informed legal challenges after Election Day—should a statewide or federal election come down to a margin of several thousand votes.

When asked about potential impacts in 2024, several former officials who are involved in defending elections said that they had not heard of the Telegram channel. One was wary of giving the channel too much attention, as GOP activists have a history of hyping their vigilantism and then barely showing up on Election Day, and afterward.

Apparently, the channel is being tracked by some disinformation watchers. The channel's curator has posted that one contractor working with election officials has tagged some of its posts. But that surveillance only seems to stiffen the belief of Trumpers that Democrats and many officials are plotting against them. And they think they know how.

On April 28, Election Education asked readers how they thought 2024 would be stolen. "What is your theory on how elections are stolen in your neck of the woods? We know they are all possible, but curious what you think the biggest factor is," it said.

Nearly 4,800 people replied. That's more respondents than most national polls. "Mail-in ballots," replied 30 percent. "Machine vote flips," said 22 percent. "Injecting votes using dirty voter rolls," said 17 percent. "Machine is set for certain outcome," said 10 percent. Their answers were seen by 16,500 viewers.

A few days later, a new graphic appeared. "They are INFLATING the voter rolls because they know we have been STUDYING the MACHINES! Do NOT get BLINDSIDED." Below, it said, "Remember, there are multiple ways they can accomplish their goal of stealing an election."

By Steven Rosenfeld

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Source: Independent Media Institute

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