Why Celebrities, Actors, Writers, And Artists Fear AI

Leslie Alan Horvitz
Photo: lesliehorvitz.com

09-15-2024 ~ *Artificial intelligence can steal your likeness, mannerisms, voice, and creative work. Can anything be done about it?*

With online access, you can easily tap into the powerful world of artificial intelligence (AI). By using Google's AI chatbot, Gemini, or Microsoft's Copilot, people can use AI to supplement or replace traditional web searches. OpenAI's ChatGPT—the generative AI that's become all the rage—can create a sci-fi novel or an innovative computer code and even diagnose a patient's condition—produced in mere minutes in response to a human prompt.

Using a text-to-image program like DALL-E, a person can create an image of a unicorn walking along a busy city street. If they don't like it, another prompt will tweak it for them or add another pictorial element.

But who owns this computer-generated content? Answering that question becomes tricky when the prompt includes the likeness or voice of someone other than the user. While regulators, legislators, and the courts are grappling with questions about the use and application of AI, they need to catch up, particularly on the issue of copyright.

"There's a video out there promoting some dental plan with an AI version of me," the actor Tom Hanks lamented in October 2023. "I have nothing to do with it." He

isn't the only one facing these issues. Actress Scarlett Johansson also found that her voice and likeness were used in a 22-second online ad on X (formerly known as Twitter).

Don't be taken in by singer Taylor Swift "endorsing" and giving away free Le Creuset Dutch ovens to Swifties—her fans. While Swift has said that she likes Le Creuset cookware, she isn't doing ads for the brand. This and many other AI-generated fake ads use celebrity likenesses and voices to scam people. These include country singer [Luke Combs' promotion](#) of weight loss gummies, journalist [Gayle King's](#) video about weight loss products, and another fake video featuring the influencer Jimmy Donaldson (known to his followers as [MrBeast](#)).

A casual listener might have mistaken the song "[Heart on My Sleeve](#)" as a duet between the famous rap artist Drake and the equally famous singer The Weeknd. But the song, released in 2023 and credited to Ghostwriter, was never composed or sung by Drake or The Weeknd. There are several instances where the voices of singers were generated using AI. For example, an AI-generated version of Johnny Cash [singing](#) a Taylor Swift song went viral online in 2023.

This raises questions about who the rightful owners of these products are, considering that they are in whole or in part produced by AI. And what rights do Tom Hanks, Scarlett Johansson, Taylor Swift, and Drake have over their likeness and voices that were used without their permission? Do they have any rights at all?

Fighting Back
Musicians and their publishers have many ways to fight against such AI-generated content. A singer whose voice has been cloned could invoke the [right of publicity](#) (considered a facet of the [right to privacy](#)). Still, this right is on record only in certain states—notably [New York](#) and [California](#), where many major entertainment companies are located.

According to an article in the Verge, singers Drake and The Weeknd could sue Ghostwriter (once his identity was exposed) using the same law that the TV game show Wheel of Fortune's longtime co-host, Vanna White, relied on to [sue](#) a metallic android lookalike used in a Samsung advertisement in 1992.

The Copyright Act
The U.S. [Copyright Office has adopted an official policy](#) that [declares](#) it will

"register an original work of authorship, provided that the work was created by a human being." Based on this, can AI content be considered to be created by a human being? In one sense, it is, yet the program usually generates content that no human being is responsible for, leaving the question largely unanswered. Congress needs to address this dilemma.

The Copyright Act [affords](#) copyright protection to "original works of authorship." However, the Constitution, which led to the establishment of the Copyright Office and the Copyright Act, is silent on that question.

The concept of transformation can be inferred from the Copyright Act—though it is not explicitly stated in the Copyright Office's criteria about whether a work infringes on the rights of another party—. In terms of AI, this means that a story or an image generated by AI is so unique and distinctive—so transformative—that no objective observer could mistake the source(s) or the content generated by AI as the original work.

So far, no one in authority has provided satisfactory answers about what regulatory frameworks are required to ensure AI's "[ethical](#)" use. Government officials and agencies don't appear to have kept up with technological advances. Kevin Roose, tech correspondent for the New York Times, said on the [podcast Hard Fork](#) that new copyright laws for AI were unnecessary. "[I]t feels bizarre… that when we talk about these AI models, we're citing case law from 30, 40, 50 years ago," said Roose. "[I]t… feels… like we don't quite have the legal frameworks that we would need because what's happening under the hood of these AI models is actually quite different from other kinds of technologies."

But what is happening under the hood of these AI models? No one is sure about that either. What the software does with the data (text, images, music, and code) fed into the system is beyond human control.

Scraping the Web to Build LLMs
Two aspects of AI concern creatives working across various fields, from books to art to music. The first is the "training" of these AI models. For instance, large language models (LLMs) are "trained" when the software is exposed to staggering amounts of texts—books, essays, poems, blogs, etc. Some of this content is collected—or scraped—from the internet. The tech companies maintain that they rely on the doctrine of fair use while doing so.

OpenAI, for instance, [argues](#) that the training process creates "a useful generative AI system" and contends that fair use is applicable because the content it uses is intended exclusively to train its programs and is not shared with the public. According to OpenAI, creating tools like [its groundbreaking chatbot](#), ChatGPT, would be impossible without access to copyrighted material.

The AI company further [states](#) that it needs to use copyrighted materials to produce a relevant system: "Limiting training data to public domain books and drawings created more than a century ago might yield an interesting experiment, but would not provide AI systems that meet the needs of today's citizens," according to a January 2024 Guardian article.

Getty, the image licensing service, has taken a dim view of the defense used by AI companies. It filed a [lawsuit](#) against the developer of Stable Diffusion, Stability AI, stating that the company had copied its images without permission, violating Getty Images's copyright and trademark rights.

In its [suit](#), Getty stated: "Stability AI has copied at least 12 million copyrighted images from Getty Images' websites... to train its Stable Diffusion model." This is a case of infringement—not fair use.

The second aspect of AI that worries artists and others is the prospect that AI's production of content and other output in response to users' prompts infringes on copyrighted work or an individual's right to market and profit from their likeness and voice.

Also, in cases where users download content, who is charged for infringement? In the case of [Napster](#), the now-defunct software company, the users were inadvertently implicated and had to bear legal penalties for downloading music illegally.

Will AI Make Writers and Artists Obsolete?
The Authors Guild and noted authors such as Paul Tremblay, Michael Chabon, and Sarah Silverman have filed [multiple lawsuits](#) against OpenAI and Meta (the parent company of Facebook), claiming that the "training process for AI programs infringed their copyrights in written and visual works," stated a September 2023 [report](#) published by the Congressional Research Service. [E-books, probably produced by AI](#) (with little or no human authorial involvement), have begun to appear on Amazon.

AI researcher Melanie Mitchell discovered, to her dismay, that a book with the same title as hers—*Artificial Intelligence: A Guide for Thinking Humans*, published in 2019—was being marketed on Amazon but was only 45 pages long, poorly written (though it contained some of Mitchell's original ideas), and authored by one "Shumaila Majid," [according](#) to a January 2024 Wired article.

Artists, too, have responded with alarm to AI's encroachment. Yet the practice of using original works by artists for training AI programs is widespread and ongoing. In December 2023, a database of artists whose works were used to train Midjourney, an AI image generator, was leaked online.

The [database](#) listed more than 16,000 artists, including many well-known ones like Keith Haring, Salvador Dalí, David Hockney, and Yayoi Kusama. Artists have protested using various means, including using the [hashtag](#) "No to AI art" on social media, adopting a [tool](#) that "poisons" image-generating software, and filing [several lawsuits](#) accusing AI companies of infringing on intellectual property rights.

"[Generative AI is hurting artists everywhere](#) by stealing not only from our pre-existing work to build its libraries without consent, but our jobs too, and it doesn't even do it authentically or well," artist Brooke Peachley said during an [interview](#) with Hyperallergic.

The use of AI was one of the major points of contention in the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) strike from July to November 2023. SAG-AFTRA represents about [160,000 performers](#). AI was also a sticking point in reaching a new deal for the Writers Guild of America (WGA), representing screenwriters.

For several months in 2023, the two unions' strikes overlapped, all but shutting down movie, TV, and streaming productions.

"Human creators are the foundation of the creative industries, and we must ensure that they are respected and paid for their work," SAG-AFTRA [said](#) in a March 2023 statement. "Governments should not create new copyright or other IP [intellectual property] exemptions that allow AI developers to exploit creative works, or professional voices and likenesses, without permission or compensation. Trustworthiness and transparency are essential to the success of AI."

In its official [statement](#), the WGA declared: "GAI [generative artificial intelligence] cannot be a 'writer' or 'professional writer' as defined in the MBA [Minimum Basic Agreement] because it is not a person, and therefore materials produced by GAI should not be considered literary material under any MBA." The MBA is the collective bargaining agreement with the movie and TV studios.

When the WGA [contract was negotiated](#) and the strike ended in September 2023, the movie studios agreed that AI-generated content couldn't be used to generate source material. This meant that a studio executive couldn't ask writers to develop a story using ChatGPT and then turn it into a script (with the executive claiming rights to the original story).

In the agreement, the WGA also "reserves the right to assert that exploitation of writers' material to train AI is prohibited by MBA or other law," [according](#) to a September 2023 article in the Verge.

Shortly after WGA settled, the actors worked out their own agreement and ended their walkout. [SAG-AFTRA subsequently signed a deal](#) allowing the digital replication of members' voices for video games and other forms of entertainment if the companies first secured consent and [guaranteed minimum payments](#).

Congress Dithers, States Act
To solve some of the challenges presented by the increasing use of AI, Congress could update copyright laws by clarifying whether AI-generated works are copyrightable, determining who should be considered the author of such works, and deciding whether or not the process of training generative AI programs constitutes fair use.

By mid-2024, Congress had made little significant progress in enacting legislation to regulate AI. According to the nonprofit [Brennan Center](#) for Justice, several bills introduced in the 118th Congress (2023-2024) focused on high-risk AI, required purveyors of these systems to assess the technology, imposed transparency requirements, created a new regulatory authority to oversee AI or designated the role to an existing agency, and offered some protections to consumers by taking liability measures. Despite sharply polarized divisions between Democrats and Republicans, there is bipartisan agreement that regulation of AI is needed.

In 2023, [two leaders of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee](#) on Privacy, Technology and the Law, Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Josh Hawley (R-MO),

who are otherwise politically opposed, "released [a blueprint for]real, enforceable AI protections," according to Time magazine. The document called for "the creation of an independent oversight agency that AI companies would have to register with" and "[proposed] that AI companies should bear legal liability 'when their models and systems breach privacy, violate civil rights, or otherwise cause cognizable harms,'" states the article.

Meanwhile, individual states are not waiting for Congress to take action. In 2023, California and Illinois [passed laws] allowing people to sue AI companies that create images using their likenesses. Texas and Minnesota have made it a crime punishable with fines and prison time.

The obstacles to enacting effective regulations are formidable despite general agreement that AI should be safe, effective, trustworthy, and non-discriminatory. [AI legislation] must also consider the environmental costs of training large models and address surveillance, privacy, national security, and misinformation issues. Then there is a question of which federal agency would be responsible for implementing the rules, which would involve "tough judgment calls and complex tradeoffs," according to Daniel Ho, a professor who oversees an artificial intelligence lab at Stanford University and is a member of the White House's National AI Advisory Committee. "That's what makes it very hard," added the Time article.

Journalists, especially those working for small towns and regional papers, don't have the luxury of waiting for states, much less Congress, to implement effective regulations to protect their work. The same holds for reporters employed by local radio stations and TV. Their jobs are already at risk. Cost-saving media moguls tend to look at AI as a convenient replacement for reporters, feeding AI with facts (the scores of a high school football game, the highlights of a city council or school board meeting) and then prompting the software to provide a publishable account—without a human reporter being involved.

AI as Co-Creator
The breathtaking pace of technological advances will likely lead to further changes in artificial intelligence down the road that we can't imagine. As a writer, I believe that despite all the problems (the AI-generated books on Amazon, for instance, which deceive customers into purchasing them rather than the originals), AI is less of a threat than a potential tool. It will help save a writer's

time—especially with research—but is not destined to replace creative writers altogether.

A 2023 [study](#) by Murray Shanahan, professor of computing at the Imperial College of London, and cultural historian Catherine Clarke of the University of London supports this position.

"Large language models like ChatGPT can produce some pretty exciting material—but only through sustained engagement with a human, who is shaping sophisticated prompts and giving nuanced feedback," said Clarke in a January 2024 Nautilus [article](#). "Developing sophisticated and productive prompts relies on human expertise and craft."

The authors see AI tools as "co-creators" for writers, "amplifying rather than replacing human creativity," [stated](#) the article. The report further pointed out that mathematicians are still in business even after the introduction of calculators. Calculators simply made mathematicians' lives easier. Similarly, using AI may change how we regard creativity.

By Leslie Alan Horvitz

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Even The National Intelligence Director Admits Government Secrecy Is A Problem

Lauren Harper ~ Daniel Ellsberg
*Chair on Government Secrec*y

09-12-2024 ~ *Up to 90 percent of info is overclassified by the US. Whistleblowers alone can't fix this systemic crisis of secrecy.*

Deception, lies and secrecy — including lies to cover secrecy — characterize authoritarian regimes. However, the politics of lying and official secrecy are no less common in democratic governments. For example, thanks to whistleblower [Daniel Ellsberg](#) releasing the *Pentagon Papers*, the public learned of the truth about the Vietnam War: U.S. military officials were systematically lying to Congress and the public while, at the same time, U.S. forces were committing unspeakable crimes against the Vietnamese people. But that's not an isolated example. [The U.S. government](#) also lied about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. If it weren't for independent journalism and courageous whistleblowers, we might have never known about [the torture at Abu Ghraib](#) and the [U.S. spying](#) on its own people and private citizens across the globe.

And with the 23rd anniversary of 9/11 upon us, we should also be reminded that there are still questions to be answered about [Saudi Arabia's role](#) behind the

attacks.

In the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, Lauren Harper, the first Daniel Ellsberg Chair on Government Secrecy at the Freedom of the Press Foundation, talks about government secrecy and the role of journalism and whistleblowers in defending democracy.

C. J. Polychroniou: I'd like to start by asking you to elaborate, in broad strokes, on the problem of government secrecy, especially national security secrecy, and the extent to which it erodes the democratic process.

Lauren Harper: Information is improperly classified [between 75 percent and 90 percent](#) of the time. This prevents information sharing — sometimes vital information — between agencies, with the public, and with Congress. It's also expensive, costing taxpayers [at least $18 billion a year](#).

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines [has reiterated that our approach](#) to classifying information "is so flawed that it harms national security and diminishes public trust in government." This trust is eroded when, for example, the CIA [refuses to acknowledge the existence of a drone program](#) that is widely reported on, including in *The New York Times,* on the basis the programs are properly classified. It also happens when a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request reveals that the U.S. Marshals Service abused classification markings [to obscure the nature](#) of its cell phone surveillance program.

Congress knows excessive secrecy is a problem. There have been three bipartisan commissions since the 1950s tasked with studying it, with the Moynihan Commission on Government Secrecy in the mid-1990s being the most important. [The Moynihan Commission](#) report underscored one of the key points about government secrecy that is often under-appreciated: it is a form of government regulation. I would frame that a little differently and say secrecy is a control mechanism, and one that prevents the public from basic self-governance.

This begs serious questions about why neither Congress nor successive presidential administrations have been able to rein in excessive secrecy, either through legislation or executive order.

I'd also add that national security secrecy is compounded by other bureaucratic challenges. Examples include agencies' records management programs, which

may allow agencies to destroy records that should be public; and technical acquisition processes, which may not take long-term records preservation or eventual public access into account.

Can any case be made in defense of government secrecy in democracies?

Yes, I think that there are real secrets that require protection, but with two important caveats. The first is that nothing should be secret forever, and the second is that there are instances where information might be properly classified, but that still warrants declassification or publication because the information is in the public interest.

To your question: Information pertaining to current weapons of mass destruction (WMD) systems is a good example of information that should usually be secret. That said, I do not think there is a place for forever secrets in healthy democracies. At a certain point, everything should be processed for declassification. For example, this rationale about WMD should not be used to keep historical records on nuclear policy secret.

A large part of the overclassification problem is that most classification decisions are subjective, and the government's insistence on keeping too many secrets erodes its ability to maintain the necessary ones. Embracing the principle and practice of temporary secrecy would help this.

The number of documents marked as "Classified" or "Secret" has been increasing dramatically since 9/11. Moreover, journalists seem reluctant to publish classified information even though the Supreme Court in 1971 ruled that the government cannot restrain the press from publishing classified documents under the First Amendment. Is it because of the decline of independent media that we see few journalists go public with classified scoops?

You raise an interesting point, which is that we have no idea how many documents are classified — whether it's at the confidential, secret, or top-secret level. The last time these numbers were published was fiscal year 2017, but the agency that reported these figures, the Information Security Oversight Office, decided to stop collecting the data because the figures it received from agencies was of such poor quality that the numbers were essentially meaningless. Currently, federal agencies can't account for how many secrets they generate and maintain, and nobody is forcing them to do so.

In terms of issues faced by the press, independent or otherwise, I think there are at least four significant hurdles. The first major obstacle is that the government has grown more adept at surveilling its employees and monitoring their communications, their devices, etc. The second hurdle is the threat whistleblowers face of prosecution under the Espionage Act for sharing classified information with the press. And after the Julian Assange case, journalists justifiably fear they'll be prosecuted as well. The third is related, which is the failure to pass the PRESS Act, which would shield journalists from federal court orders to disclose their sources and from federal government surveillance of their communications. The final barrier is the deference shown to government claims that documents are properly classified in the first place. As I said above, most classification decisions are subjective, and an interagency panel that reviews agency classification decisions historically overturns them 75 percent of the time. Yet we collectively seem to take the government's claim that information is classified at face value, and that needs to change. Journalists need to question the validity of classification decisions more; so does Congress, and so do the judges that rule in these kinds of cases.

Reporting on excessive secrecy also needs to be an ongoing beat. Think of it this way: People in the intelligence community and elsewhere work tirelessly their entire careers to keep information secret. Occasional reporting on specific examples of excessive secrecy is not enough to challenge that systemic tide.

In a system like ours, where powerful vested interests have a dominant presence in every realm of public policy and government officials withhold information in order to deceive the public, are whistleblowers democracy's last defense?

Whistleblowers and advocates for whistleblower protections are key lines of defense, but they face serious challenges. For example, the Department of Justice spied on congressional aides in an attempt to identify agency whistleblowers. That has to have a serious chilling effect on government whistleblowers who are considering working with Capitol Hill — and on members of Congress who would consider leaking to the press. (It's also worth mentioning that while there are established whistleblower protections in the executive branch, there is no corollary for the legislative branch.)

Whistleblowers are important, but their protections are not as robust as they should be, and these individuals should not face — or be expected to carry — the

burden of fixing a system-wide crisis.

We need more tools at our disposal. A key one is continuing to fight for the Freedom of Information Act to work the way it should, and that requires mandating that agencies actually embrace automation. We also need language — either in statute or executive order — that clearly defines what "damage to national security" means when agencies are making classification decisions.

Another potential tool to help reduce government secrecy is exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to declassify large swathes of older documents. I'm not at the point where I am an evangelist on the use of AI in declassification and FOIA decisions, because we run the risk of AI being trained on poor-quality human decisions. So while it's worth exploring,AI is an area in which the government needs to work with civil society to make sure the technology doesn't just exponentially increase bad declassification decisions.

In your opinion, why did it take so long to open up the government's secret files on the potential link of the Saudi government to the 9/11 plot? And why is it that the government has only released a copy of a document on the case that has been heavily redacted? Do we have here yet another case of government secrecy over the 9/11 terrorist attacks?

The same reason the government usually resists disclosing uncomfortable information. It wants to avoid facing public scrutiny or damaging a relationship with a foreign government whose alliance the U.S. government still maintains is critical in achieving its foreign policy goals.

And yes, we have secrecy surrounding 9/11 — just take a look at the 9/11 Commission Report and how many footnotes in it mention documents that are still classified. More broadly, we still have entrenched government secrecy about the post-9/11 world the U.S. created. For example, *The New Yorker* just published photos of the 2005 massacre of 24 civilians carried out by Marines in Haditha, Iraq, and which spawned one of the largest war crimes investigations in U.S. history. *The New Yorker* sued for photos, which were taken by Marines in the aftermath of the massacre, to try and understand why murder charges against the Marines were dropped. The FOIA lawsuit for the release took four years; but others had filed FOIA requests for records about Haditha and those photos nearly 20 years ago, and the government never released them. Most alarming? The

commandant of the Marine Corps said in 2014 that he was proud that the photos had never been released, and that he'd learned — presumably about the dangers of release — from the Abu Ghraib prison photos.

We still know very little about the CIA's torture program. Jose Rodriguez, who ran the CIA's torture program and whom the former CIA head, Gina Haspel, [reported to](#), famously [said in 2005](#) that "the heat from destroying" the video evidence of waterboarding Guantánamo prisoner Abu Zubaydah "is nothing compared to what it would be if the tapes ever got into public domain." Moreover, the Senate Intelligence Committee's full report on the CIA's torture program is [still secret](#), and the CIA never faced any meaningful repercussions [for spying on Senate](#) staff trying to investigate.

What are we doing wrong when: 1) government officials think we are better off destroying or burying evidence of our actions, and 2) there is no meaningful ramification for agencies and officials for engaging in bad behavior?

Source: https://truthout.org/articles/even-the-national-intelligence-director-admits-government-secrecy-is-a-problem/

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Social Change (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*: *The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice*: *Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left*: *Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

How Extensive Is The Privatization of Security?

John P. Ruehl – Independent Media Institute

09-11-2024 ~ *While attention has been brought to the privatization of warfare, the growing privatization of policing continues to progress globally.*

In August 2024, due to a $4 million budget shortfall, Idaho's Caldwell School District terminated its $296,807 contract with the local police department, [opting instead](#) for armed guards from Eagle Eye Security. The new $280,000 contract is just a drop in the bucket of the roughly [$50 billion](#) U.S. private security industry and the [$248 billion](#) global market that is reshaping law enforcement worldwide.

While private military companies (PMCs) like [Blackwater](#) (now Academi) and

[Wagner](#) have gained notoriety in war zones, private security companies (PSCs) are rapidly expanding in non-combat settings. Despite [some overlap](#)between the two, PSCs generally protect assets and individuals. Often [collaborating with law enforcement](#), the effectiveness and ethical standards of PSCs vary widely, and armed guards are [increasingly common](#). Security guards in the U.S. [in 2021 outnumbered police](#) by about 3:2.

Public policy is still playing catch up. Unlike police forces, PSCs operate under contract rather than direct taxpayer funding. They also don't have the same level of regulation, oversight, or accountability. Criticisms of the police—such as excessive force and inadequate training—are frequently directed at private security officers as well. Many former police officers with controversial histories find employment in PSCs, where barriers to entry are low. Turnover, meanwhile, remains high, while wages are minimal. Yet the sector's ongoing expansion appears inevitable.

[Government forces](#) and [private security forces](#) have been a part of society for millennia. Government forces mainly responded to unrest rather than preventing crime, often relying on volunteers. Private security options included hiring guards and bounty hunters, while [communal efforts](#) like the "hue and cry"—where villagers collectively chased down criminals— were also common ways of enforcing security. With increasing urbanization, though, traditional law enforcement methods became less effective, prompting the creation of the first modern police force, the London Metropolitan Police, [in 1829](#). Distinct from the military, more accountable to city authorities and business interests, and focused on crime prevention, this model was adopted by Boston [in 1838](#) and spread to nearly all U.S. cities by the 1880s.

The emergence of public police forces coincided with the birth of the modern private security industry. Founded in the U.S. [in 1850](#), the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, as it was eventually called, is considered the first modern PSC. With its nationwide reach, investigative expertise, and role in safeguarding companies, Pinkerton distinguished itself by protecting businesses from theft, vandalism, and sabotage. Its controversial role in events like the [Homestead Strike](#) of 1892, when the company "essentially went to war with thousands of striking workers," led to greater regulatory scrutiny, but the company continued to drive industry growth.

After World War II, the rise in PSC use [within U.S. residential communities](#) boosted demand, further accelerated by the racially tinged civil unrest of the [1960s and 1970s](#), which spurred private initiatives to police cities. The 1980s [brought deregulation](#) and professionalization, as many corporations established in-house security departments and PSCs prioritized hiring former law enforcement officers over those with military backgrounds.

Today, private security has a global presence, providing services ranging from bouncers and bodyguards to crowd control units and specialized armed teams. PSCs are [generally cheaper](#) than using police forces, and the widespread adoption of surveillance and other technologies has increasingly leveled the playing field. However, private personnel primarily serve as a visible deterrent, [discouraging crime through their presence](#) rather than direct intervention. They are often focused on monitoring and patrolling, which can divert criminal activity rather than resolve it. As the demand for private security grows, debate continues over their role and broader societal impact.

U.S. ratios of police staffing to civilian population [peaked around the early 2000s](#), and police agencies say shortages are [now widespread](#). As police departments have struggled to boost their ranks, PSCs have filled the gap. Allied-Universal, [with 300,000 American employees](#), is one of the largest private employers in the country. Meanwhile, for high-net-worth individuals like Mark Zuckerberg, [personal security expenses](#) can exceed $14 million annually.

PSCs have stepped in to respond to a variety of situations, including protests at universities. [In January 2024](#), Apex Security Group personnel dismantled pro-Palestinian encampments at UC Berkeley, later clearing similar sites at Columbia University in April and UCLA in May. Many PSCs, however, pursue more lucrative long-term contracts. UCLA has paid Contemporary Services Corporation (CSC) for campus patrols for years, and UC San Francisco spent $3.5 million on CSC in 2023, according to watchdog group American Transparency.

PSCs are also widely employed to target the unhoused and address shoplifting in California. Following a rise in the state's homeless population by [40 percent since 2019](#) and an increase in [petty crime](#), PSCs [have secured valuable contracts](#) with local governments, private businesses, families, and individuals. The Bureau of Security and Investigative Services oversees the sector in the state, but incidents still raise concerns. In May 2023, an Allied Universal guard [fatally shot](#) Banko

Brown, an unarmed Black person suspected of shoplifting. The San Francisco district attorney's office chose not to file charges, sparking public outcry.

In Portland, police budget cuts spurred by defunding initiatives following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests led to the disbanding of special units and a wave of [officer resignations and retirements](#). 911 hold times [increased fivefold](#) from 2019 to 2023, as [more lenient crime policies](#) allegedly contributed to a rise in crime rates.

In response, thousands of private security personnel now patrol the city, with the number licensed to carry firearms rising by nearly 40 percent [since 2019](#). More than 400 local businesses pay [Echelon](#), a Portland-based PSC, to deploy dozens of guards around the clock. Echelon and its personnel have attempted to build relationships with the homeless and people suffering from addiction and mental illness by providing food, responding to overdoses, and de-escalating conflicts. While crime in Portland [has gone down](#) since its peak in 2022, this [reflects nationwide trends](#) and comes as the city has [attempted to reinstate](#) police numbers.

American PSCs are expanding their roles across the country. In Las Vegas, Protective Force International [formed its own squad](#) in May 2024 to clear out squatters from an apartment complex, in addition to its other security services in the city. In New Orleans, Pinnacle Security is one of many firms operating, with [roughly 250 security guards](#) patrolling neighborhoods, businesses, and government buildings.

In Chicago, [a 2021](#) accusation by Mayor Lori Lightfoot that businesses were failing to take adequate theft prevention measures spurred greater private initiatives. The Fulton Market District Improvement Association, a local [group supported by local restaurateurs and developers](#), launched private patrols with P4 Security Solutions in 2024. P4 personnel operate both on foot and by car and provide security to other Chicago neighborhoods, with plans to expand further.

Private security, however, is not just a U.S. phenomenon. PSCs are well established globally, no more so than in Latin America. From the 1970s onward, the War on Drugs fueled massive transnational criminal empires and widespread police corruption. As military dictatorships ended in the 1990s, the transition to democratic governments in Latin America often resulted in weak institutions,

leading to instability and security challenges. In response, private security boomed, primarily serving the wealthy.

Today, Latin America is home to more than 16,000 PMCs and PSCs employing more than 2 million people, often outnumbering police forces in poorly regulated markets. Their rapid expansion has led to serious issues, including criminal infiltration of PSCs in Mexico and El Salvador and claims of extrajudicial killings in Guatemala. Western resource companies, in coordination with local authorities, have also used PSCs to safeguard their operations and confront protesters in the region.

Latin America has typically been a source of recruitment for the private security industry, with many U.S. PMCs employing personnel during the War on Terror. Recently, the region has also become a market for foreign PSCs. Chinese PSCs, while restricted domestically, are increasingly involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the region, as well as in private ventures.

Zhong Bao Hua An Security Company, for example, has contracts with businesses in El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Panama. Tie Shen Bao Biao offers personal protection services in Panama, while the Mexico-Chinese Security Council was established in 2012 to protect Chinese businesses and personnel from violence.

The collapse of security states in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, combined with the adoption of capitalism, created fertile ground for both PMCs and PSCs. In Bulgaria, early PSCs were often founded by sportsmen, particularly wrestlers, with connections to organized crime. By 2005, a United Nations report estimated that 9 percent of working men in Bulgaria were employed in private security—a pattern found across the former Eastern Bloc.

Though growth has been slower in Western Europe, PSCs have still expanded. France recently deployed 10,000 security guards across Paris for the 2024 Olympics, only for many of them to strike over working conditions weeks before the opening ceremony.

The European Union has increasingly relied on PSCs to manage its migrant crisis, generating massive profits for the industry. Private actors were quick to label migration as a security threat while supporting policies that promote instability abroad. Major arms dealers and security firms like Airbus and Leonardo, for example, sell weapons in conflict zones that fuel violence and displacement. They

then profit again by selling security equipment to European border agencies.

While violence has [decreased across Africa](#) in recent decades, localized instability has led to [a surge in the security industry](#). The distinction between PSCs and PMCs is often blurred on the continent, with PSCs frequently finding themselves undertaking quasi-military roles such as convoy protection, [protection of natural resource extraction](#) sites in hostile areas, and armed confrontations.

Chinese PSCs [have become more prevalent](#) to compensate for the security gaps left by African governments for BRI investments, contrasting to [Russia's use of conflict-oriented PMCs in Africa](#). Regulation varies, with minimal oversight in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and [more stringent controls in Uganda](#).

South Africa's PSC industry in particular has flourished since the end of apartheid in the 1990s. Rising crime and [falling police numbers](#) have led citizens to rely [more on the private sector](#) for safety and asset protection. According to the [Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority](#), there are [2.7 million registered private security officers](#) working in South Africa, [outnumbering police 4:1](#). Services include patrolling neighborhoods, providing armed guards, and tracking and recovering stolen vehicles.

The PSC industry's rise has been fueled by gaps in state security measures. However, in areas where PSCs operate, crime rates frequently remain high due to their focus on protecting private property and individuals rather than maintaining public order. Financial incentives can also lead to problems being managed superficially rather than addressing underlying issues. Additionally, [PSC employees frequently face](#) burnout, low pay, and negative working conditions. As PSCs [intersect with private prisons](#), this has raised further concern over their expanding influence and overlapping roles.

Despite its growth in recent decades, the PSC industry's progress has proven reversible in the past. [By 2001](#), Argenbright Security controlled almost 40 percent of U.S. airport checkpoints, but the creation of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) after 9/11 centralized airport security back under government control, with limited private sector involvement.

Nevertheless, the industry is likely to continue expanding, particularly as new initiatives find uses for them. India, which has the [world's largest private security](#)

[force](#) at approximately 12 million, is expected to continue seeing strong industry expansion, especially in securing its increasing number of private communities, colloquially termed "[gated republics](#)."

Private security already plays a major role in [private cities](#), which are becoming more prevalent [worldwide](#). In these cities, governance is largely handled by boards and CEOs rather than elected officials, and profit motives often overshadow public needs. The safety divide between rich and poor is further exacerbated, as security becomes a commodity instead of a public concern.

In Honduras, the island of Roatán is at the [epicenter of a clash](#) between the government and local communities on the one hand and international entrepreneurs behind Próspera, a company developing a private city on the island, on the other. The escalating tensions highlight the realities of under-resourced government forces facing off against well-funded companies backed by heavily armed private guards.

As the role of private security continues to expand, regulations must evolve at the same pace. In the U.S., with regulations primarily established at the state level and lacking uniformity, there is a need for greater oversight to address potential issues effectively. Failing to do so will undermine public accountability by allowing private companies to operate with minimal restrictions, as well as deepen societal divides.

By John P. Ruehl

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The Growth Of Malignant And Exclusionary Social Movements

09-11-2024 ~ The U.S. and many other societies are cycling into situations of toxic polarization today; discussion, let alone consensus, often appears impossible and the advantage goes to exclusionary social movements built on malignant rather than [goodwill impulses](#). As Heritage Foundation president Keith Roberts [stated](#) in July 2024, "[W]e are in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be."

As recently as a decade ago, violent social movements were gaining ground primarily in countries and regions that were struggling economically as they integrated themselves into the neoliberal global economy: examples include Russia, Hungary, and other states of the former Eastern Bloc, Turkey, India, and Greece. More recently, however, toxic polarization has also threatened to engulf countries at the core of the liberal democratic political grouping, including France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the U.S.

In every case, the malignant social movement aims to overthrow a political order built—at least notionally—on principles of inclusion and goodwill, which the movement blames for its followers' loss of economic and political status within their societies. What's most striking, even counterintuitive, about this takeover is its seeming inexorability, due to the failure of parties of the center and left to offer coherent alternatives—and the resulting landscape in which extreme positions are steadily normalized.

The result is a crisis of democracy, stunting people's faith in collective self-government owing to its inability to help address practical problems such as climate change, economic inequality, and mass migration. To reverse this trend, we must first understand the conditions that brought it about.

Nine Developments That Produce Toxic Polarization

Toxic polarization becomes possible, if not inevitable, when a convergence of political, economic, and social conditions activate three [powerful forces](#):

Malignant bonding: An impulse to solidify communities built on resentment, bigotry, and a desire to exclude those who are "different";

The scarcity mind: A psychological state that frames social life as a zero-sum game pitting oneself and one's social affinity group against a racial, ethnic, or class-based *other*; and

Trans-historical trauma: The fears and compensating behaviors that accumulate over many centuries of physical and emotional violence and become encoded in our collective behavior.

When they converge, these conditions lay the groundwork for a conventional wisdom built on limited assumptions about what can be achieved by society. This in turn produces a deep sense of alienation from the existing order, especially among the dominant racial, ethnic, and class-based groups, which in turn generates new, exclusionary social movements. By alienation, we mean a feeling of isolation and disconnection from the larger society or from what that society is becoming. Alienation can quickly turn into a lack of sympathy and lead to open hostility toward the supposedly undeserving portion of the population.

The pivotal forces in this process are social movements, which are the incubators and carriers of the zeitgeist. Exclusionary social movements, which come to the fore in periods of toxic polarization, always either exist or are latent. So are inclusionary social movements, which aim to build on a very different set of impulses: empathy, goodwill, good-faith communication, mutual aid, and an openness to finding common ground in inclusive and widely beneficial change.

Traditionally, these two types of movements either clash or coexist, but neither seizes the upper hand for more than a limited period. Today, however, we are witnessing the convergence of nine key developments, some of them dating back decades, which favor the rise of powerful and possibly long-lasting exclusionary social movements:

Decreased economic progress and social mobility: The developed world has witnessed a decline in economic expansion and social mobility stemming from the outsourcing of jobs and vastly unequal growth patterns in the developing world.

Rising global levels of migration, partly due to the imposition of neoliberal economic policies, complemented by insurgencies in the Middle East and parts of East Asia, have caused dominant ethnic groups in receiving countries to feel threatened. Often, the concern is with "job theft" or crime, but the underlying impulse is racial or cultural prejudice.

Self-inflicted austerity: Four decades of fiscal austerity, rationalized by neoliberal economics and concentrated primarily on social spending, stalemate and stigmatize previously successful efforts to bring underprivileged and socially marginalized groups into the circle of prosperity.

Over the past two centuries, the state has emerged as the core agency for delivering on the promises of the inclusive or goodwill agenda. Austerity has the knock-on effect of "starving the state," causing programs that large sections of the population depend on to deteriorate along with the goodwill agenda they were founded on. Benefits are curtailed, service worsens, and the citizenry become disgruntled or even alienated from the system that created and built loyalty through them.

A deteriorating retail encounter with the state: An additional effect of constraints imposed by austerity and rising debt is a decline in the state's delivery of services. Bureaucratic agencies become less efficient and responsive and more impersonal. Also, the physical infrastructure deteriorates. These developments leave residents feeling further alienated from the state.

Rising debt at all levels: While the severity of debt burdens is often debatable, they reinforce austerity at the government level and hold back households' and governments' ability to invest for the future, further weakening inclusive movements. Over the past 50 years, these debt burdens have come increasingly under the control of global banks, investors, and multinational institutions: a "debt industry" that sees them as an opportunity to exploit rather than a means of equitable growth and development.

A sense of national decline: Political and economic collapse, stalemated wars that cost money and lives and lead to crises in national morale, and the erosion of a previously exalted geopolitical status give rise to a sense of decline within the society. Fifty years of failed wars, from Vietnam to Iraq, have been costly in blood and treasure, but are remembered in the American popular imagination as gallant

missions that would have succeeded if the cause had not been betrayed by defeatist politicians.

Fear of loss of potency: This is fed by a fear of declining fertility, especially within the dominant ethnic group; declining birth rates contribute to a sense that their overall position in society is crumbling. This creates a platform for theories like the "[Great Replacement](#)" to take hold, leading in turn to further marginalization of ethnic minorities and migrant communities and a new wave of racial bigotry and violence.

Among men within the dominant ethnic group, the decline in birth rates aggravates misogyny based on a zero-sum, scarcity-based belief that women, by claiming their rights, are infantilizing and castrating them. This sometimes results in a violent backlash against women's rights.

Energy, environmental, and technological crises: Global warming generates fears that the current living model is unsustainable, or that the crisis is a hoax intended to persuade people to accept a lower living standard. Fears of nuclear warfare endure but are now accompanied by concerns about new, high-tech forms of warfare and surveillance being used against people. The increasing role of sophisticated, computer-based systems in nearly every aspect of daily life creates a deepening fear that many long-time occupations will be eliminated or downgraded, damaging millions of workers' confidence in both their livelihood and sense of personal worth.

Growth of corporate and financial power: As union power declines and business evolves into a new model in which companies are managed as a collection of salable assets rather than productive enterprises, people grow more alienated from the capitalist system. On the right, people are encouraged to blame stigmatized groups (the Jews, the Chinese, the Arabs) for wielding economic power against them and covertly encouraging their "replacement" by migrants.

Inclusionary movements lose their capacity for movement-building: Social movements built on goodwill, while in the ascendancy, come to rely on the state to address challenges related to inclusion, through policies and programs that address socioeconomic inequality and marginalization. But with the state on a starvation diet, the leadership of these movements no longer have the means to address their inclusionary goals; their policies and programs become—or appear

to become—untenable. The leadership can no longer deliver results for their popular base.

Focused, in an electoral democracy, on winning elections, the leadership seek a new formula and new backing that will enable them to remain in power. They concede that capital is in the driver's seat and that challenging its interests and ambitions is futile, leading to a shifting of focus to crafting technocratic, "third-way" policies such as welfare reform and marginally milder alternatives to closing the border. These fail to win back the movement's base, instead creating an opening for exclusionary movements to expand their popular support.

Over time, the leadership of the exclusionary movement are emboldened to claim the accomplishments of the inclusionary movement as their own, seizing control of the historical-cultural narrative. In this telling, the abolition of slavery, the vast expansion of the middle class in the postwar decades, and the end of legal segregation become examples of America's greatness rather than the outcome of decades of struggle against violent opposition from exclusionary movements.

When it refuses to buy into this version of the story, the inclusionary movement is demonized for failing to celebrate America. ("The American people rejected European monarchy and colonialism just as we rejected slavery, second-class citizenship for women… and (today) wokeism," the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 "Mandate for Leadership" declared. "To the left, these assertions of patriotic self-assurance are just so many signs of our moral depravity and intellectual inferiority.")

Exploiting Alienation
The scarcity mind informs both the framing of the nine developments just described and the response to them. Some are quite real—declining economic growth, austerity, the resulting rise in migration and insurgencies, the climate crisis, and the rise of corporate power—and some reflect a psychological state—fear of the *other*, fear of debt in the abstract, and fear of national decline. Collectively, they nurture a profound feeling of alienation.

As alienation increases, people grow more desperate to be seen and heard, to belong, and to feel that the powers directing society are on their side—and not someone else's. These impulses generate new, exclusionary social movements, fueling a zeitgeist that spreads malignant bonding and toxic polarization, and

which can then be used to forge a dynamic and passionate new political thinking of the right.

Alienation gives malignant bonding a powerful, long-lasting pull, at least while the conditions that facilitate it persist. In our time, Roberts's "second American Revolution" takes its place within a pattern of self-renewal that began with the 1968 "silent majority" election of Richard Nixon in a campaign built on coded racism ("law and order") and extends to the 2016 and 2020 elections that brought Donald Trump to power and then solidified his right-wing populist MAGA movement.

Starving the state helps sustain this cycle as it accelerates the delegitimation of the inclusionary agenda. To gain power, however, a social movement needs resources and a conduit to the institutional and financial apparatus of capitalism and the state. For this, it needs the support of at least a portion of what we might call the Third Force: the elites, including propertied individuals who amass capital and control access to it and the institutions that defend and promote their interests.

The Third Force typically finds it easiest to form alliances with exclusionary rather than inclusionary movements, since the former find their organizing principle in imagined scarcity and dreams of a lost golden age and, therefore, seldom question existing wealth arrangements. Additionally, exclusionary movements fetishize power, making them useful partners in controlling marginal social elements.

At the same time, often-chaotic exclusionary social movements need the organized, disciplined institutional structures and expertise that the Third Force can build for them:

– Think tanks that can turn ideological preferences and resentments into policies (example, the Heritage Foundation);

– Media and messaging platforms (example, Fox News, Newsmax, and social media influencers);

– Advocacy groups (example, the Federalist Society); and

– An electoral machine and fundraising capabilities that can pull together a group

of well-to-do donors behind a populist leader (example, the Republican Party, political action committees).

Over time, these resources enable exclusionary movements and their leaders to generate new elites, operating on a somewhat different set of assumed principles than the previous elites, but still desiring to establish a new status quo. The nature of this new set of arrangements always depends greatly on the movement's relationship with the Third Force.

The success of this cycle of self-renewal blocks progressive political forces from implementing changes that might address the concrete issues giving rise to feelings of alienation: economic stagnation and austerity, the loss of workers' power and the rise of a corporate-financial hegemony, and technological fears.

A Way Forward for Inclusive Movements?
An exclusionary movement built on alienation and malignant bonding, when combined with the resources of the Third Force, can radically change the direction of society, potentially reversing decades of social and economic progress. It can also, as we have just seen, change the direction of the rival inclusionary movement, neutralizing it while setting it up as the enemy for supporters of the exclusionary movement to rally against.

Even in the long periods when inclusionary movements have been ascendant, their rivals work to undermine them. In the 1960s and early 1970s in the U.S., when it seemed that many inclusionary goals, ranging from socioeconomic equality for people of color to universal health care, were within reach, the seeds of a powerful reaction opposing these goals were already sprouting. But inclusionary leaders often ignored or dismissed them. Real or perceived crises were then exploited, often very successfully, by exclusionary social movements as grounds for pinning the blame on their opponents.

One reason why this strategy is effective for the exclusionary movements is that attacks on vulnerable groups—women, migrants, racial and ethnic minorities, and gender nonconformists—are easily rationalized and emotionally gratifying to embattled working people who are used to occupying a more favored place in society. Another and equally important reason is that inclusive social movements often respond by emphasizing the gap between society's goals and its achievements, rather than highlighting its real accomplishments as reason to

believe it can do better. This approach easily devolves into blaming and shaming the exclusionary movement's target audience, which that movement can then easily exploit.

Our next article will address the following questions related to the inclusionary movements: What makes them—despite generating mass support for long periods—susceptible to this cycle, and what does this tell us about the requirements for making them successful in the long run? Why have the inclusionary movements not been able to sustain and renew themselves to the same degree as their exclusionary rivals? What holds them back, and how can they find the capacity to do so?

By Colin Greer and Eric Laursen

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Editor's note: This is the second of three articles on the role of social movements in bringing about transformative change.

The first article: https://rozenbergquarterly.com/widening-the-we/

Why Children's Rights Are Critical For Climate Policy And Environmental Activism

09-10-2024 ~ *Birth equity is essential for ecological security.*

The *actual* cause of the climate crisis is the anthropogenic emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the start of the industrial revolution. But the *proximate* cause—the underlying activity that sparked the climate crisis and the intertwined environmental crises—is how we have built society, starting from when humans are born.

Despite the threat of the [sixth extinction](#), [ecosystem collapse](#), [air](#) and [water pollution](#), and the numerous associated [health impacts](#), few environmental activists or politicians recognize the proximate cause.

The climate crisis has fundamentally been fueled by countries treating future generations as a means to sustain their economies instead of as an intrinsic part of their nations. Society is set up to view children as workers, consumers, and taxpayers rather than as empowered citizens with an influential voice in their democracies. This ill-advised social doctrine is the proximate cause of the climate crisis. We must take remedial measures and seek justice for the natural world—humanity and all species—through legal means that [address children's rights via birth equity](#).

By shifting the focus to children's rights as a fundamental aspect of policy evaluation, we can reshape climate policy, save countless lives, and redefine wealth entitlements.

This is especially important since extreme temperatures will lead to more suffering for already vulnerable populations worldwide. According to international studies, these extreme weather conditions are likely to [impact](#) ethnic minorities more and will lead to the "[greatest risks](#)" for people from developing countries. To protect future generations from heat waves, the [attenuation of democracy](#), and the [reduction of representation ratios](#), children's rights and the rights of individuals must drive policymaking.

If we addressed these factors, particularly [intergenerational justice](#), climate policy would be different, saving [countless lives and trillions of dollars](#).

Why Advocacy Organizations Need to Focus on Family Planning
Advocacy organizations working to bring about positive social, economic, and environmental changes should consider including family planning in their goals. Including birth and development equity in their work is essential to ensuring meaningful changes for future generations. Ignoring this aspect might undo the positive impact these organizations might otherwise have.

The climate crisis goes beyond emissions; it is a multifaceted catastrophe, with efforts to mitigate it being undone on all levels as children enter the world without access to birth and development [equity](#). For example, [not using children's rights as the basis](#) for family planning systems has allowed ecocidal growth and also diluted the role of each person in governance and their capacity to halt the crisis.

Family policies should be integral to animal protection, child welfare, environmental protection, human rights, and democracy to secure children's futures.

Impact Fraud: Good Work Is Being Undone
Instead of focusing on increasing the economic wealth of nations, governments should ensure that women and their families have access to child welfare resources consistent with the Children's Rights Convention. Unfortunately, family planning policies have failed to achieve this. Instead, children (primarily of color) enter the world with [no functional protections](#) and are exposed to environmental and socioeconomic conditions that are not conducive to helping them survive and thrive.

According to a July 2022 Pew Research Center [study](#), almost half of U.S. parents

felt the government was doing "too little" to resolve issues that concerned them, while 54 percent gave the same reply regarding the government's response to addressing problems faced by children.

Evidence [of ubiquitous and horrific child abuse worldwide demonstrates this](#), along with the push for mindless growth, which comes at the cost of environmental damage. According to a 2020 [study](#) published in the Journal of Population and Sustainability, "more than three-quarters of the reductions in carbon emissions achieved since 1990 by increased efficiency and reducing carbon dioxide emissions from energy production have been canceled out by the effects of a growing population."

[Studies](#) also show that the increasing financial burdens and "climate change fears" are deterring people from having children. According to a 2021 article in the Lancet, 39 percent of young people globally were reluctant to have children due to climate change.

This constitutes fundamental [threshold harm](#) on at least seven distinct or incommensurable levels (welfare, equity, human rights and democracy, environmental, reproductive rights, efficiency, and trust).

A February 2024 press release by UNICEF is a reflection of how we are failing child welfare globally, with 1.4 billion children not having any "[basic social protection](#)." "Fewer than one in ten children in low-income countries have access to child benefits, leaving them vulnerable to disease, missed education, poor nutrition, poverty and inequality."

The family policies many support are quietly doing more harm—[undoing climate mitigation efforts](#) that will lead to 4 million people [dying](#) between 2000 and 2024—than other policies are doing good. This dynamic can be labeled "impact fraud."

"Overall, the effects of global climate change are predicted to be heavily concentrated in poorer populations at low latitudes, where the most important climate-sensitive health outcomes (malnutrition, diarrhea, and malaria) are already common, and where vulnerability to climate effects is greatest. These diseases mainly affect younger age groups, so… the total burden of disease due to climate change appears to be borne mainly by children in developing countries," [research](#) by Australian epidemiologist Anthony McMichael and his team

concluded.

These policies position us to benefit from a coercive legal system of entitlements without paying the high costs. We can also meet our obligation to future generations by ensuring children are [born and raised in conditions that protect their rights and guarantee birth and developmental equity](#).

Impact fraud can be measured against a few simple metrics, like whether we invest enough in children, whether states are capable of holding functional constitutional conventions, or the concept of child rights-based legitimacy (the idea that children's rights logically precede and enable human rights and are thus the basis of political obligation and state legitimacy).

A Fatal Decision: The United Nations Human Rights Conference of 1968
The climate crisis is less about emissions or population growth. It should be viewed as more of a [policy mistake made by world leaders in 1968](#) (when the United Nations held its International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran) that allowed society to benefit at a fatal cost to future generations. At the time, politicians and policymakers conflated the disparate acts of having children and choosing not to as covered by autonomy rather than birth equity and children's rights.

The human rights policy of 1968 hid actual costs and favored wealthy families that relied on a growing class of workers and parental autonomy. Therefore, it chose cyclical inequity and unsustainable growth over the [inclusivity that creates genuine political autonomy](#). This obscured the overriding nature of birth equity as the first human right.

At the most fundamental level, the policy cemented by United Nations agencies in 1968 limited the interventions regarding the decision to have children—their number, the resources they deserve, the conditions in which they are born and raised, their level of influence in [setting the rules of democracy, and the actual impact of population on the nonhuman world, etc](#).

Indeed, no one can justly benefit from a system when the reason for preventing intervention is based on the value of autonomy, pointing to the misconceived logic behind this thinking. It placed greater value on the rights of people to decide whether or not to have children rather than the rights of children.

People—Not Documents—Constitute Nations
The current and widespread concept of reproductive autonomy is the antithesis of self-determination—an inversion of autonomy where some children are born into horrible circumstances, and others live in extreme wealth but are controlled by others.

People, not documents, constitute nations. If liberalism has struggled to find a way to include oneself in a system yet remain free, the easy answer would be this: You have to care enough about each child born into the world to position them so that you will both be empowered. You must be empathetic enough to care about the children born into unfortunate circumstances and their impact on the nonhuman world they need to survive.

The Act of Having Children Is Not a Private Act
Our current policy [treats children as means to be used by others](#), substitutes coercion for inclusion in rulemaking, and is the genesis of the fallacy of personal autonomy irrespective of our accessibility to intergenerational wealth. Any person having a child does so while being part of a political system, making this choice hardly a personal or private act for parents.

[Maintaining the status quo family policy](#)—including the greenwashing that hides its impacts—has killed many simply because we hid liability and did not move the extreme wealth that was made at the cost of pursuing these policies.

Because of these mistakes, people were not valued, which allowed consumption, population growth, inequity, and exclusive political systems to grow, which fundamentally drove the current child welfare crisis. Some (primarily white people) benefited at a cost to others (and controlled the basic criteria for cost/benefit analysis) by never meeting their most fundamental obligations: Ensuring birth and development conditions consistent with children's rights.

A few benefitted from a coercive legal system of entitlements, [the legitimacy of which was falsely premised](#) as a form of inclusive freedom.

'Distractivistism'
The animal law/animal rights movement can lead us toward ecocentrism and help shift the focus to nature's integral role in ensuring the survival of future generations.

We cannot protect nonhuman animals without accounting for how the children we have and raise will individually and collectively relate to them as vulnerable entities outside of functional legal protection and as the inhabitants of the ecologies that allow humans to be free and thrive.

Protecting animals requires more meaningful action than prosecuting animal cruelty, setting a precedent through legal cases, or introducing a new vegan product. This means animal law implementation should not be limited to discussions or hijacked by "distractivists." We must recognize that animal personhood is integral to human reproductive rights, and our family planning policies must reflect that.

A more fundamental vision aligns animal rights with other social justice movements because it shifts focus from legal coercion to ensuring that all beings inhabiting the planet are treated well.

The anthropocentric approach we currently follow perpetuates a cycle of growth and environmental destruction instead of concentrating on reversing the climate crisis by adopting a bottom-up approach centered around ensuring that children and animals thrive.

The animal rights movement's claims of success are the most inaccurate when we factor in the impact of family policy on animals. More animals have died from unchecked human population growth than have been saved by dietary change. Focusing on food without first focusing on family, inclusion, and legitimacy turns a fundamental justice movement into a racket of selling vegan products to a tiny percentage of consumers and leads to low-impact campaigns that are examples of distractivism.

Moreover, funders have driven animal organizations toward growth-based food because they are invested in the companies that make it. This is another example of turning the focus away from pressing issues like animal welfare.

Animal rights should thus not ask how humans should treat nonhumans, which is the arrogant and anthropocentric mindset that led to the climate crisis and threatens the existence and survival of humans and nonhuman animals alike.

Major animal protection organizations have been publicly called on to assess whether their approach to family policy harms animals more than their other

work does good, and they have had no response. Activists like Wayne Hsuing have [advocated for truth and change](#) in this area to avoid undoing the work done to protect nonhuman animals.

Animal law must concentrate on policies, like family law, which have the most significant impact, not sensational or profitable policies premised on our ability to replace other species. It is the most unifying form of justice around a zero baseline to avoid harming others.

But this will not work if wealthy funders silo the movement and base assessments of legitimacy on whether the law protects their current entitlements or focus on low-impact precedent, sensational victories, or on cases and statutes, the benefits of which are being undone by inequitable families. These funders live in a fictitious juridical world where calling something nature or saying it has rights has some magical impact, while in the real world, [pro-natal policies](#) have been [undoing the work](#) done to create more equity and hiding life-saving reparations.

Living in that top-down fantasy world clouds the high ideal of a legitimate system that protects nonhumans. Such a system would need to be more inclusive [and thus aligned with minimal "social sources" conceptions of positive law](#), consistent with reasonable representative ratios.

Most people define law as unique because it comes from the participation of its subjects. But of course, that depends on several factors, like how many people are involved, whether they are represented, whether their votes are diluted, etc. By most measures, current legal systems are [far too crowded and attenuated from their members to be participatory and legitimate](#).

Redefining State Sovereignty Around Birth Equity
A [petition before the United Nations](#), filed by our group, Fair Start Movement, would redefine state sovereignty and legitimacy around the most primary value, child rights/birth and developmental equity, as defined by the metrics above, and require certain things of member nations. This is not altruism but creating freedom through equitable relations that ensure we show the trust democracy or relative self-determination requires.

Today's extreme wealth was made at a cost to that value and is [owed to those who have paid the most to ensure "increased economic prosperity."](#)This way of functioning has also violated the fundamental human right to matter. [And those](#)

[who have benefited are trying to hide this fact](#) to ensure they continue to gain from this unequal system.

This policy and outlook change would set a baseline for any climate harm evaluation that does not scam victims out of what they are owed—self-determination, prioritizing reparations as the first human right, and providing conditions that ensure maximum protection for children.

Reforming the baselines can be accomplished through existing programs that invest in women. Examples include [Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policy](#) reforms, requiring an objective standard for social and environmental claims that match the actual harms to infants and mothers, and getting high-profile entities to admit their prior use of terms like sustainable was inaccurate given the growth they embraced.

In the field of family planning, storytelling has had an enormous impact and can be used to increase demands for equity reparations as activists model them.

[Tax reforms](#), baby bonds, child welfare, and minimum income policies are also geared to incentivize and support the birth of children at a time, place, and with resources that ensure each child's development conditions are minimally consistent with the Children's Convention and ensure birth equity. Children's rights must also be aligned with animal rights or ecological restoration rather than human rights.

Even if ethicists cannot agree on this standard, it should be used provisionally to avoid more irreparable harm. All of this work cascades from an action currently before the [United Nations seeking to concretize equity/self-determination as the basic norm underlying human rights](#). There are a [variety of national, state, and local model statutes to implement this change](#).

At a corporate level, nonprofit and for-profit companies can be certified, ensuring they are not benefiting at a deadly cost to others.

Requiring restorative or [ecocentric](#) environmental policies and birth and developmental equity, as included in constitutional rights to personal freedom or the ability to control the influence others have over us is another step in this direction. Environmentalism failed because it treated the environment as a human resource rather than the homes of nonhuman families and communities that value

autonomy.

Creating a system of child welfare entitlement, consistent with [intergenerational justice](#) and [political legitimacy](#), would require identifying a [series of thresholds](#) for [family planning entitlements](#):

– A [minimum level of welfare](#).

– A [minimum level of equity](#).

[– Restoration of the nonhuman world](#) and climate.

This work could, in the long run, help prevent mass violence where those who lash out feel disempowered and are unable to access the justice system because they were never included in it in a meaningful way.

We can avoid continuing to make the deadly mistake described above by asking ourselves and others one question: What are we doing to ensure that the conditions all children are born and raised in, including their environment and resources, help them become self-determining individuals? Also, what are we doing to ensure that the benefits of our work are not undone?

We must make conscious choices to improve the planet on which we raise our children by respecting nonhuman beings and the environment. Learning the importance of co-existing in harmony is essential to breaking away from our unhealthy lives and policy choices. We must also choose to place greater value on individuals over senseless growth.

By *Esther Afolaranmi and Carter Dillard*

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The Surprising Ways Inventions And Ideas Spread In Ancient Prehistory

Brenna Hassett –
Photo: en.wikipedia.org

09-10-2024 ~ *You can learn a lot about humanity from the first technological revolutions of more than 10,000 years ago.*

The human capacity for invention is unparalleled. We have developed technologies that have allowed us to survive and thrive far beyond the ecological niches that constrained our ancestors. While our innovation has allowed us to break loose from the constraints of our home continent, Africa, and even our

home planet, the actual way in which our species adopts new technologies remains a subject of huge debate among those scientists who study the past. Does one hominid ancestor start to shuffle upright, and the rest follow? Does the first human to loop a piece of string through a shell bead inspire the rest of the species to create the world's first jewelry? Or do different animals take up the same new adaptation at different times, because it solves a problem that appears in many places?

We know that in some of our closest living relatives, the primates, new technical skills are passed on through direct learning. Macaques, in particular, are responsible for innovative behaviors that have been transmitted through their societies by individuals who have seen and observed them and then adopted them as their own. This is true of behaviors as varied as "hot tubbing" by the macaques of Japan's northern Hokkaido island and the habit of dipping sweet potatoes in the sea to "salt" them developed by macaques on Koshima island further south.

Many of the technological innovations that have had the greatest impact on our species were first seen about 10,000 to 15,000 years ago in a region that archaeologists refer to as the "Fertile Crescent." The region encompasses a swathe of land crossing the countries between the easternmost Mediterranean Sea and the Sinai, Arab, and Syrian deserts and up into the Zagros Mountains of what is now Iran. It is a region of famous firsts in terms of radical changes to our species lifestyle: settling down, cultivating plants, and taming the animals we eat are all first attested in this strip of relatively abundant land.

It was along the shores of the Sea of Galilee where we have the first evidence of the wild ancestors of today's wheat being exploited more than 20,000 years ago, at the site of Ohalo II, reconstructed from the microscopic remains of shattered seeds still clinging to a grinding stone after millennia. From 15,000 years ago, in a corridor stretching up and down the eastern Mediterranean we call the Levant, there comes the first signs of a new way of life for humans; one that involves staying in the same groups and homes all year round, rather than following food around the landscape as we had done for the 300,000 years prior. Those seeds from Ohalo II have grown into entirely new shapes by the time they are uncovered in these new inventions, called villages, and by around 9,000 years ago this new human-friendly type of wheat was well on its way to becoming our first domesticate (domesticate that wasn't a dog—those we have had for probably 30,000 years). Meanwhile, over the last 10,000 years or so, goats, sheep, pigs,

[and eventually cattle were all brought into these new human habitations](#), and bred into the shapes that suit us rather than them: better to eat or easier to manage.

What is even more remarkable about these radical changes in a species that had been living as foragers for hundreds of thousands of years was how fast these new innovations "spread." Archaeologists in the 20th century dedicated huge amounts of time to tracking the movements of new technologies through the evidence of ancient houses, pots, and bones to work out how people from the Near East had "invaded" Europe with their culture of domestication, and even when the idea of a mass invasion was put to rest, some still claimed that [people themselves carried the new ideas of domesticated life](#). The way we saw human inventions was as hot-tubbing macaques at a larger scale: one clever inventor and her friends and family following behind.

This has large implications for human knowledge. Did it take people literally passing on new skills to spread farming, domestic animals, and year-round lifestyles to all corners of the globe? Is this the only way our species learns something this life-changing?

We are not, as it turns out, macaques. Good scientific evidence has given us dates for a [farming and animal revolution in China that happened just a thousand or so years later](#), but for a totally different crop: rice. The invention of cultivated plants occurred independently, as did other similar innovations like domesticating animals. In fact, around the world, there was an endless series of radical revolutions, some earlier, some later, but all bringing plant and animal life under human management: [from the potato and the alpaca in South America to pearl millet and cattle in West Africa](#).

This phenomenon is called "independent invention," and it is our strongest evidence yet that every innovation our species has made has been a response to a place and time; that some technologies travel far and wide but, where they don't, we are perfectly capable of inventing them again.

By Brenna R. Hassett

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