



# Fair Observer

## Monthly

November 2018

**FAIR OBSERVER**<sup>o</sup>  
make sense of the world

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# Fair Observer Monthly



November 2018

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# Is the Worst Over for Libya?

Sherif El-Ashmawy

November 2, 2018

*There are signs that a worst-case scenario has been avoided in Libya.*

The latest month-long round of inter-militia fighting south of Tripoli, which broke out on August 27 and left at least 115 people killed, had two remarkable effects.

On the one hand, the level of violence, which the capital had not witnessed in four years, highlighted the persistent volatility of the security situation and, thereby, Libya's unpreparedness to hold parliamentary and presidential elections by December 10 — as set out by the May 29 Paris declaration to which representatives of Libya's main rival factions verbally agreed.

On the other hand, the fighting provided an opening for the renegotiation of Tripoli's security arrangements.

Following several unsuccessful attempts to create stability in a country marred by violence and fragmentation since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya is entering a new transitional period. The characteristics of this period will become clearer over the coming year and will have effects on the country's governance structures and security dynamics.

Despite signs of persistent political fragmentation, entrenched disagreements between rivals and

continued insecurity across the country, there have been positive developments over the past two years that can be built upon for a successful transition to peace.

## **GOVERNANCE-SECURITY NEXUS**

While Libya's government structures are split between rival national-level sets of authorities, the most effective form of governance is often local. This is due to divisions along tribal, regional and ethnic lines as well as to the living memory of political rivalries and armed struggles since 2011.

These factors, along with disagreements between international stakeholders on how to stabilize Libya, have undermined the UN-led efforts to reunify the country's fragmented state institutions and end the turmoil.

There has been no shortage of international initiatives to broker a political settlement in Libya and bring about stability over the past 18 months. These have engaged national-level stakeholders, who mostly had limited influence over their constituencies and constrained capacity to change realities on the ground. This has undermined the effectiveness of those initiatives.

Moreover, political and security stabilization tracks cannot be separated from each other. In the absence of unified regular security forces and central authorities that Libyans across the country regard as legitimate, armed groups have significant influence over

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political institutions and figures, while political groups have their associated militias. Political fragmentation also provides an opening for a wide range of criminal and militant groups to flourish.

The international community's efforts to broker reconciliation efforts in recent months have focused on the need for Libya to move on toward adopting a constitution and holding parliamentary and presidential elections as a step toward reunifying the country.

The latest round of fighting in Tripoli further exposed the internationally recognized Government of National Accord's (GNA) weaknesses and the need to transition to a new form of governance. As elections are unlikely to be held by the end of the year, there are growing signs of a potential reshuffle of the GNA's Presidency Council over the coming months to allow a new body that better represents the Libyan stakeholders to oversee elections and efforts to reunify state institutions.

## **BUILDING BLOCKS**

Three major positive trends developed over the past two years and can serve as a foundation for the country's stabilization.

First is the partial recovery of Libya's oil production. In September 2016, the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) took over the Sirte Basin's oil terminals, and production restarted in late 2016 at the southwestern Murzuq basin's oilfields following the resolution

of communal disputes. These two developments paved the way for a steep increase in Libya's oil output, which reached 1.35 million barrels per day in October 2018 for the first time in five years.

This was only possible through a tacit agreement by which the LNA would guard the Sirte Basin's export terminals and oilfields, which account for 80% of Libya's oil reserves, while the Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation (NOC) continues to manage the sector.

Accordingly, oil revenues would also flow into the Tripoli-based central bank. Despite recurrent disruption to oil production and tensions between rival authorities over the management of revenues, Libyan factions realized the benefits of cooperation to keep oil revenues — Libya's principal source of income — flowing in.

Second, there are strong signs that designing a more efficient and sustainable security architecture is underway — though at a slow pace — and that Libya is highly unlikely to descend into another full-scale civil war comparable to that of 2014.

The latest clashes south of Tripoli prompted the GNA to implement new security arrangements that consist of the withdrawal of Tripoli's principal militias from protecting the capital's vital infrastructure facilities (such as Mitiga airport, Tripoli's port and government buildings) and handing them over to a police force. If the new arrangements



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are efficiently implemented, they would reduce security risks in the capital and diminish the likelihood of inter-militia fighting.

On the national level, there are signs that major armed groups lack the intent and capability to engage in large-scale fighting against each other. These groups are also deterred by their foreign allies from escalating hostilities to a level that would trigger another civil war.

Finally, there is a growing international momentum to find a sustainable solution to Libya's turmoil. It is true that there are competing views between international stakeholders over how best to move forward.

Different countries' drivers vary between stemming the flow of illegal migration toward Europe, preventing the creation of a safe haven for Islamic State militants in Libya, reducing instability in the Sahel region and securing business deals in the oil and gas, power and reconstruction sectors.

However, there are signs of efforts aimed at reconciling the positions of international stakeholders regarding Libya. For example, France in recent weeks has become less insistent on the need for Libya to hold elections by the end of 2018, which brings it closer to Italy's stance that advocates a more careful approach to Libya's transition.

Moreover, there is evidence that coordinated international action can

have positive effects on the ground and produce more stability.

For example, significant international pressure — including from the US — on the commander of the LNA, Khalifa Haftar, compelled him hand back the administration of the Sirte Basin's oil ports to the internationally recognized NOC (after briefly transferring them in June 2018 to an unrecognized authority based in Benghazi), thereby resuming oil exports.

While Libya's coming transition is likely to witness persistent political tensions, fragmentation and violence, the scenario of a full-scale civil war has most likely been avoided, and the country is presented with an opportunity to progress, albeit slowly, toward a more stable order.

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# Bolsonaro's Brazil: A Faltering Democracy

Helder Ferreira do Vale  
November 2, 2018

*After a radicalized and violent campaign, Jair Bolsonaro may now put Brazilian democracy itself at risk.*

On October 28, Brazil elected the extreme-right former congressman, Jair Bolsonaro, as its new president, with almost 60 million votes — 55% of valid votes cast. He defeated his contender, the leftist candidate Fernando Haddad, who received approximately 44% of the vote.

Bolsonaro's victory represents a historic setback for the country. After a radicalized and violent campaign, the newly elected president may now put Brazilian democracy itself at risk.

The president-elect's divisive rhetoric and authoritarian leadership style will do little to assuage the tense atmosphere surrounding the elections. In the final days of his campaign, Bolsonaro seemed determined to reaffirm his bigotry, which has become his trademark. Addressing a crowd of supporters, he promised to lead a purge of his leftist opponents: "Either they go overseas, or they go to jail."

Bolsonaro's praising of violence against minorities, democratic institutions and liberal practices has overshadowed Brazil's historical memory. The year 2018 is symbolic for the country. Thirty years ago, in 1988, Brazil transitioned to

democracy when it promulgated a democratic constitution, putting an end to three decades of military rule — a brutally repressive regime that targeted political dissidents. Unlike other countries in South America, Brazil never brought to justice the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity under the junta.

As a politician, Bolsonaro has molded himself in a mindset that is rooted in the traditional political culture of patrimonialism and authoritarianism. Bolsonaro is known for praising the military and has said that the only problem with the authoritarian leaders during the Brazilian dictatorship was that they "tortured rather than killed" dissenters. He has also expressed an opinion that allowing the 1988 constitution to be drafted by an elected body was a "mistake."

## SYMBOLIC YEAR

In addition, 2018 is symbolic for Brazil because 130 years ago the country abolished slavery. However, the descendants of former slaves experienced socio-economic marginalization that persists to this day.

Much of Bolsonaro's appeal rests on prejudice against the socially and economically vulnerable sections of the population. His strategy of alienating a sizable portion of Brazilians can be called "elite entitlement to privilege." It functions as an unwritten code that determines how the privileged should keep the non-elites marginalized. This

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culture of elite entitlement in Brazil is based on race. In a country that is home to the second largest black population in the world, skin color is an important element of exclusion.

Brazil never institutionalized race, but diffuses racism through veiled social mechanisms, and elite entitlement to privileges functions as an informal filter sidelining non-whites. As this filter is arbitrary, it extends exclusion to other social groups not necessarily associated with race: women, homosexuals and the poor.

For Bolsonaro, the guarantee of equal and universal rights poses a threat to the current entitlement system. For this reason, he considers rights to be a privilege. But he came to innovate, and one of his innovations is to turn prejudice into the expression of “truth,” thereby enshrining its acceptability. In Brazil today, prejudice seems to be widely authorized and normalized; the guarantee of fundamental rights is seen as a threat to rich Brazilians, who voted in vast numbers for Bolsonaro.

In post-election Brazil, the general atmosphere is not one for celebrating these historic anniversaries. Instead, Bolsonaro’s victory represents a setback for the consolidation of democracy and an attempt to alleviate poverty.

The tense and polarized elections have revealed an angry and alienated electorate. Since 2014, voters have been trying to cope with the worst

economic recession in Brazil’s modern economic history.

During this time, Brazilians have also witnessed the biggest corruption probe in Brazil’s history, known as Operation Car Wash, which uncovered schemes involving high-profile politicians from all the main political parties. The scandal involved the state-owned oil company Petrobras, used by politicians to receive kickbacks from companies granted access to lucrative government contracts. The probe suggest that former presidents Luis Ignácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, both from the Workers Party that governed Brazil from 2001 until Rousseff’s impeachment in 2016, played a central role in the corruption scheme. During the probe, several high-profile politicians tried to undermine the investigation.

In this context of permanent crisis, Brazil has increasingly showed signs that its democracy is faltering — a fact that has deeply influenced this year’s presidential elections. This situation has as its central component the inability of state institutions to respond effectively to economic and political crises, and as a result, the trust of most Brazilians in their institutions has been waning.

The widespread and desperate desire for significant change is the end result of this slow and painful process. Since 2016 Brazilians have declared themselves in favor of a change of direction in the governance of their country. The growing support for change was reflected in the elections to the

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national congress on October 8, when a veritable political renovation took place across both houses.

The new composition of the national congress suggests a swing to the right. This shift has already been seen in previous elections, when the conservative caucuses — which represent the evangelical, agribusiness and crime-fighting interests — have increased their influence. Out of the 513 lower house seats, the evangelical caucus almost doubled the amount of representatives, from 82 elected in 2014 to an estimated 150 representatives in this year's election. However, congress will remain highly fragmented, with no political party commanding an absolute majority.

## **DESIRE FOR CHANGE**

Bolsonaro's victory likewise reflects this desire. In a recent opinion poll, approximately 30% of his supporters say they voted for Bolsonaro because he promised significant changes to the status quo.

But despite the electorate's desire for change, there are strong signs that Bolsonaro does not represent anything new. Because of his incompetence and lack of democratic credentials, he existed on the fringe of politics for most of his nearly 30-year parliamentary career, serving as a largely irrelevant member of congress. It is rather ironic that today Bolsonaro can seem to represent change to a large number of his supporters.

The governability of Brazil appears uncertain. Bolsonaro's lack of a clear policy agenda only contributes to this uncertainty. During the campaign, he avoided providing clear details about policies, especially those concerning the pressing need for economic and political reforms. Added to this, Bolsonaro possesses dismal negotiation skills — an essential asset in a highly fragmented national congress, in which his party controls only 10% of the seats.

The party fragmentation in Brazil has given rise to a particular type of presidential system, the so-called "coalition presidentialism," in which the president governs with the help of a loose and unstable coalition of parties in congress. In order to keep this coalition united, the president needs to offer key ministerial positions to the main leaders of the parties in the coalition and provide concessions throughout his presidential term.

This characteristic of Brazilian politics has been considered a hindrance to governability. Despite the congressional shake-up in this year's election, it remains to be seen how Bolsonaro will balance Brazil's fragile political equilibrium.

Jair Bolsonaro will assume office on January 1, 2019. Brazilian institutions will be under great pressure to demonstrate that democracy is capable of containing the president-elect's populist ambitions. But democracy in Brazil is faltering, and averting a

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democratic decline seems today a daunting task.

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## **If You Can Change Your Sex, Why Not Your Race?**

Ellis Cashmore

November 12, 2018

*As long as people deny others the right to choose when it comes to race, they continue to dance to a tune composed by those who had a vested interest in demarcating by skin color.*

Anthony Ekundayo Lennon is a rarity — a man who is publicly denounced for saying he's black. Last year, he was awarded a "theatre practitioner of colour" traineeship worth over £400,000 (\$520,000) from Arts Council England. Ekundayo Lennon's application for the award bore the self-description "mixed

heritage" (a term the British prefer to what Americans call biracial). He was born to Irish parents, both of whom self-identify as white.

The aim of the award was to help him "deliver a comprehensive programme of talent development for future Bame leaders." BAME is what Brits use as the acronym for Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority. But the project has gone desperately wrong; instead of interpreting Ekundayo Lennon's career path as his choice, critics have accused him of deception.

In assenting to be treated as a black person, he has, like the American Rachel Dolezal, trespassed into a taboo area. Dolezal, formerly an executive of America's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was a cause célèbre when her parents announced that they both identified as white and considered her similarly. She'd identified as black since her college days and saw no problem with this.

"Race is a social construct, even if we don't want it to be," she told Patt Morrison, of the Los Angeles Times, in 2017.

She has a point: If blackness is recognized as a signifier, or physical expression, of "race," then whoever does the recognizing either accepts categories proposed by racists or understands both as "social constructs."

### **RACIST TRAP**

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Those who criticize Ekundayo Lennon and Dolezal fall into a trap laid by racists 400 years ago when they invented “white.” Yes, invented. In his *The Shaping of Black America*, Lerone Bennett wrote: “The first white colonists had no concept of themselves as white men ... The word white, with all its burden of guilt and arrogance, did not come into common usage until the latter part of the [17th] century.”

White servitude was a precursor to the exploitation of blacks; America’s colonial population consisted largely of a great mass of white and black bondsmen (indentured servants), who occupied roughly the same economic plateau and were treated with equal disdain by the lords of the plantations.

Theodore W. Allen, in his book *The Invention of the White Race*, pays particular attention to the experiences of migrant Irish, once disparaged as degenerate and not amenable to civilizing influences, yet later transformed into defenders of an exploitative order. The Irish were sneered at by English colonizers as an inferior racial group (colonization of Ireland took place through the 16th century), but were physically indistinct from the English. There were other groups that would today be recognized as white that were readily associated with savagery. But it became expedient to co-opt them as the prospect of slave rebellions surfaced.

So, if the so-called white race was an invention, how did blacks come into

being? Emerging in the 1960s, the Black Power movement supported rights and political power for the part of the American population that had been called over the years “Negroes” or “colored,” as well as many other derogatory names.

For two years from 1965, there were uprisings in practically every American city where there was a black population. The violence started in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles and eventually subsided in Detroit.

In 1966, a militant political organization called the Black Panthers grew out of Oakland, California. James Brown’s classic funk track “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” was released in 1968. It wasn’t exactly poetry, but it expressed the developing mood and idiom of the times. In this context, black people used black as a form of vengeance: In some eras, racists had used it as an expletive, as in “You black ...” and whatever noun came into their heads. So, in a sense, it offered itself as a word that turned meaning inside out. “Black is beautiful” was one of the sayings of the period — this wasn’t just a pronouncement; it was advice on how to think about yourself.

In 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus provided a kind of official stamp of approval for the word. There might have been uncertainty about whether whites were entitled to use it, but that soon clarified. By the mid-1970s, it was the only respectful way to refer to people of African heritage. The term

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“African-American” didn’t gain any traction in the popular lexicon until the 1980s. Black was no more a description of skin color than white. It could be argued that one was a sarcastic response to the other.

History and exposition are often handy correctives. But they seem to have been drowned out by the deafening screech of abuse against Ekundayo Lennon and anyone else who self-identifies as black, but whose lineal descent has no tie to Africa. It took the best part of a century before British colonizers created the inclusive white label (the first British slave settlement was established in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607) and another 360 before black came into being — at least in the way we understand and use it now.

And nearly a half-century after that, people have either forgotten or never knew both terms are human artifices, not natural qualities. Otherwise they might have another objection to Ekundayo Lennon’s venture.

## **CONTINUING NARRATIVE**

Being black means belonging to a struggle that has been incubating for over four centuries and forms an indelible part of human history. It involves the enslavement, exploitation and oppression of about 12 million Africans and their offspring and, over time, the successive generations of people who have endured persecution, lynching and brutality. Were this consigned to history, the inglorious

episode would be terrible enough. But the narrative continues in different guises to the present day, with the descendants of slaves habitually mistreated. The bedeviling practice of racism continues to motivate and justify the mistreatment of black people, and identifying as black implicates a person in a daily conflict.

Has Ekundayo Lennon or, for matter, Dolezal, been part of this conflict? No one actually asked the question, but I conjecture this is what was on people’s minds when they objected to Ekundayo Lennon’s self-description as black. Something similar might have been on Germaine Greer’s mind when she made her remark about trans women, saying that “Just because you lop off your dick and then wear a dress doesn’t make you a fucking woman.”

She was alluding to women’s history of being denied the right to own property, vote, keep their own income, be educated, serve in the military and in politics, or participate in dozens of other pursuits that men have controlled. Put another way, have transgender people and those opting to switch ethnic status paid their dues?

Those who choose to liberate their inner selves escape the prison of their natal bodies, face up to their true sexual identities and, in the process, challenge the traditional binary, are typically praised. Caitlyn Jenner, for example, was in 1976 an Olympic gold medalist in the men’s decathlon and in 2015 announced that she was a trans woman.

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Asked about her sexuality, Jenner, who has three children from three marriages, described herself as heterosexual. There was, it seemed, something almost superhumanly valiant about her transformation.

Contrast this with the case of Michael Jackson: Though his autopsy confirmed he suffered from vitiligo — a skin condition in which the pigment is lost from areas of the skin, causing whitish patches — the popular theory was that he was anguished by his dark skin and sought to lighten it. The plastic surgery procedures he elected to undergo added substance to this, of course.

Jackson was among many African-Americans who have been rebuked for even giving the impression they'd tried to conceal or expunge their skin color. Beyoncé, Kerry Washington and Azealia Banks are among the many others. Fernando Montano, the Royal Ballet star, who was born in Colombia, recently disclosed that, in his early years with the ballet company (he joined in 2006), he used lightening makeup: "I was trying to fit in, and so I used to put on light make-up, on my hands and face, so I could look like the others and blend in." The usual outcry was muted, more a recognition that some assimilation was probably necessary to his survival in a sphere dominated by whites. Ekundayo Lennon though appeared to be trying to transfigure contrarily.

The 2000s are supposed to be the century of fluidity. Some people who

attempt self-reinvention are typically admired for their courage, steadfastness and determination to pursue what they regard as their rightful status, especially sexual status. The denomination "trans" has been stripped of its historical stigma and any vestiges of negativity. But the kind of respect afforded those who try to convert their body, either hormonally or surgically because of unease or dissatisfaction with their birth sex, contrasts dramatically with the condemnation that often greets people who even seem to want to change ethnicity.

The trans debate was disorienting enough. That's why shocks are so useful — they force us to think and make choices. Fitfully, we've come to recognize that some people are just more comfortable with a sexual identity that frees rather than incarcerates them. But, when it comes to ethnicity, there appears little or no room for maneuver.

As long as people deny others the right to affiliate as they wish, they continue to dance to a tune composed by those who had a vested interest in demarcating by skin color. A world without racism will be a world without whites — or blacks.

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## Taliban Attacks on Hazara Communities Raise Fear of Mass Atrocities

Abbas Farasoo

November 13, 2018

*Afghanistan's Hazara community is caught between attacks by Taliban and Islamic State militants, and neglect by the government.*

It started with a Facebook post: "I can't bear it anymore. I am going out. Will you join me?" Within an hour, by midnight local time on November 11, hundreds took to the streets and passed security barricades to march toward Afghanistan's presidential Arg Palace. Desperate and angry, the protesters, including many women, demanded action against Taliban attacks on the Hazara communities in Ghazni and Uruzgan provinces. Tragically, the protest itself was brought to an end by a suicide attack claimed by ISIS that killed 6 and wounded 20 people near Kabul's Pashtunistan Square.

More than two weeks of relentless attacks by the Taliban, first in Khas Uruzgan and later in Jaghori and Malistan districts on the southwestern edge of Afghanistan's Hazarajat region, have left hundreds dead and wounded, and forced thousands to flee their homes.

The exact number of casualties is not yet known, but at least 25 Afghan National Army (ANA) commandos and 15 civilians were killed in a single

Taliban attack on Jaghori in the early hours of November 11.

In the past few weeks, in an obvious change of strategy, the Taliban has turned its attention on Hazarajat, Afghanistan's safest region, which had hitherto been spared. Taliban fighters first attacked Hazara villages in Khas Uruzgan district, leaving many dead and wounded, and many more displaced to neighboring districts. Then they attacked Jaghori, followed by Malistan. Outmanned and outgunned, the local people's cries for help have gone largely unheeded.

The Taliban has concentrated on the Hazara areas for different reasons. First, it wants to open a corridor to the north of the country to expand territorial control and supply lines. Second, Hazarajat has for years remained one of the most secure areas in the country, with high levels of access to education for girls and women's participation in socio-political affairs, which the Taliban wants to put an end to.

For years now, the Taliban had surrounded the western parts of the Hazarajat, impacting security, but these direct attacks are different. Third, The Hazara areas do not have defensive forces, and the government doesn't provide much security, making the areas vulnerable to the Taliban.

The attacks have increased humanitarian concerns in Hazarajat. The roads are blocked, and food and other basic materials are the main

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concern after security. The Taliban brought down communication systems, making the situation more difficult for the people and threatening the progress along democratic lines that started in the region in 2001.

## **“ETHNIC CONFLICT”**

After the initial attacks, the government in Kabul remained silent for days. When finally the office of President Ashraf Ghani responded to the incident in Khas Uruzgan, it described the Taliban attacks on the Hazaras as “ethnic conflict.” For the Hazaras, however, the president’s statement was as divisive as it was dangerous. Framing the conflict as an ethnic one creates hostility between the Hazaras and the Pashtuns in the region on the one hand, and reduces terrorist attacks to the scale of a local conflict on the other.

Facing a backlash, the statement was altered, with the contentious phrase removed the following day. Ghani also assembled a fact-finding delegation to visit Uruzgan, investigate and report its findings back to him. But the man appointed to head the delegation, Abdullah Fallah, a presidential adviser on local disputes, rebuked Ghani’s initial response, stating that what was happening in Uruzgan “was not an ethnic conflict” and that those who call it as such are “in fact helping the Taliban re-establish their Islamic Emirate.” The chief executive of the National Unity Government, Abdullah Abdullah, also rejected the president’s definition of the conflict in Uruzgan.

When the Taliban began its attack on Jaghori, catching the locals by surprise, the government remained oblivious and reluctant to act. After a day of silence, in response to mounting pressure from Hazara politicians and activists, an ANA commando unit was dispatched to the district. However, without further support from the government, the unit was exposed to a Taliban attack and lost 25 men during a single night, sparking a widespread perception of collapse of security in the region.

In recent years, the Taliban has expanded its influence in the northern parts of Afghanistan. Kunduz province fell several times to the Taliban, followed by an attack on Ghazni city in August this year. Both times, the government failed to prevent the assaults.

This provides opportunity for the Taliban to challenge the government, winning a stronger position in peace negotiations. Despite Ghazni’s strategic location 70 miles south of the capital, President Ghani took his time to formulate a response. Government failures have raised questions about the decision-making and information sharing processes within the president’s inner circle.

This has raised concerns whether those around President Ghani, who is a Pashtun, understand the situation beyond ethnic presumptions. Afghanistan has a highly centralized system, which means the president is the one making the big decisions. Under

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Ghani, the system has become more centralized and exclusive, with one-man leadership on show. Particularly, security organizations like the Ministry of Defence, the National Security Council and the National Directorate of Security are under Ghani's core circle's tribal control.

In the past, some of President Ghani's close aides have been revealed to hold a discriminatory attitude toward other ethnic communities. In September 2017, a leaked memo from the president's office set off a storm of accusation of systematic ethnic favoritism. The memo insisted that "Tajiks and Uzbeks, who work completely under us, should be appointed symbolically so that people think every ethnicity is represented here."

In November, another memo was leaked, "sparking an uproar and provoking new accusations of systemic ethnic favouritism" in the Ghani administration.

## **DISMISSED AND NEGLECTED**

In addition, the president's inner circle tends to be dismissive of reports by local journalists, and whenever local media reflect on issues the government doesn't like, it is dismissed as foreign propaganda. However, they are responsive to media reports in English, particularly by American media, as they value how their image is presented in the West. Therefore, the Afghan media reporting on the Taliban's attacks in Uruzgan and Ghazni are not considered

credible. That is why the president decided to send a delegation to Uruzgan to find out the facts.

Government inefficiency, negligence and a crisis of leadership provided an unprecedented opportunity for the Taliban to expand its control. It has intensified its attacks to strengthen its position in the peace talks. However, the government is reluctant to fight for and protect its people.

Moreover, Kabul failed to create a regional consensus against the Taliban. For example, the latest round of talks in Moscow, which took place on November 9, will not help the peace process in Afghanistan; it is instead a display of Russian regional influence and adept diplomacy.

On the other hand, the talks legitimize the Taliban vis-à-vis the American and Afghan forces, which will only help the group continue to perpetrate violence across the country.

Aside of the wider international dimensions of the war in Afghanistan, a lack of leadership and capacity at the strategic level in the government has worsened the situation. Given the history of Taliban atrocities against the Hazaras, recent attacks have provoked unease across the region.

Despite the terrible fear of further terrorist attacks against their community, as the last resort, the Hazara people came out to the streets to protest against the government negligence in

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the middle of a night, only to have their biggest fear confirmed in the most violent of ways.

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**Abbas Farasoo** is a PhD candidate at Deakin University in Australia. His research focus is on proxy wars, regional security, ethnic conflict and social movements. Previously, he has worked as chargé d'affaires and deputy ambassador at the Afghan Embassy in Australia.

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## **Do You Know What It's Like to Be an Immigrant in America?**

Tessa Lena

November 21, 2018

*Overnight, many of my friends have become great experts on the culture of my home country — a place they have never visited.*

When I was 5 years old, my Soviet teacher announced that America wanted to nuke us for our freedom, and that a missile could hit any moment. That day, I couldn't focus on my homework, and I couldn't sleep at night. I was just staring at the window in fear, waiting for the nuclear missile to fly in and burn us all to ashes. I didn't want to die.

Later on, I learned that it was a blatant lie. Nobody was trying to nuke us. When I came to the States and told this story to my American-born friends, I discovered that they, too, had lived in

fear of being nuked. We laughed about the glitch, and life went on.

Fast-forward 20 years, and the Russians are at it again. Vodka-drinking GRU operatives with heavy accents are waging cyberwar against America and inundating us with fake news. I call America home now, and I don't feel so good.

The other day somebody posted a link to a Russian restaurant with a comment, "Russian food? NO, THANK YOU." I said nothing, and bitterly unfollowed. I guess they have never tried my mom's borscht.

Overnight, many of my friends have become great experts on the culture of my home country — a place they have never visited. To avoid argument, I have trained myself not to interrupt them with passionate tirades against stereotyping. I am frustrated with being pigeonholed in a whole new way — the Russian bear now has Vladimir Putin's head — yet I know that my friends are acting in self-defense. I remember.

But there is something else I will never forget: The year is 2002, and I am in the back of an immigration van, handcuffed to two young Chinese girls who are crying at the top of their lungs, scared even more than I am. Me, playing tough, and the girls, wailing like crazy.

"I hate Chinese people. Why do they come here?" These are the words the driver utters, as he makes sure to drive

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rough so that our helpless, chained bodies hit the walls of the van.

I feel bad for the girls. They don't speak English, and in their eyes I can see undiluted animal fear. As for myself, what am I doing in the back of an immigration van, chained to two strange women, listening to a sadist in uniform? Why am I in shackles?

Sadly, I married the wrong guy. He was kind and charming when we were dating, then turned abusive on the day we got married. When he realized that he could no longer control me, he brilliantly decided to take care of the "problem" by getting me deported. "They won't believe you," he said. "You are a nobody. An immigrant. I am an American."

Do you know what it feels like when four armed men walk into your apartment, grab you by the hands, cuff you and walk you out of the door as a criminal? If you haven't lived it, I bet you don't.

As an immigrant fighting with teeth and claws for every set of papers, hopping from one visa to another, infinitely applying for something and infinitely waiting for something, you get used to excruciating uncertainty — you never know where you are going to be tomorrow, you live in-between worlds.

But I know I followed the rules. I followed the rules religiously. And there I was, in the back of a van, banging my head on the hard surface with each rough turn, and listening to the screams

of the young women chained to my arms.

Do you know what it feels like? You don't, do you? Fear and uncertainty sitting heavy inside your chest. No rights. "But Tessa, this was just a mistake. Clearly it was wrong but it was just a mistake. Mistakes happen."

Reasoning sound great when it's not about you or your family. But when you are on the receiving end, it's hard to theorize. For a long time, I thought it was just a mistake, my individual tragedy, a one-off horror, something I was going to receive an apology for — any minute now.

But as years went by, I came to believe that the way I was treated was not an exception. Xenophobia toward subhuman immigrants is the default. That's what they do. They teach us a lesson.

When the news began exploding with numerous immigrant tragedies in the past year, it broke my heart in a familiar way. I know every step of the process, and I know how much it hurts. I have seen this movie before anyone was talking about it. Inhumane treatment of immigrants is not new. Contempt toward caged animals is not new, either.

Yes, I've moved on, and when my friends make prison jokes, I laugh with them. I am no longer bleeding, but I remember. I remember crying inside of a jail cell because something is hurting unbearably, because you're scared.

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After a while, a guard checks on you, and says: "There is nothing I can do now but if it still hurts tomorrow, we will take you to a hospital."

I remember the fear of being locked up as a faceless number forever. The fear of being tortured. Food that tastes like urine. Hopelessness.

I remember sleeping on a metal bed in a cold room with next to no clothes on, begging the officer for a blanket. But no luck with that, because the officer doesn't feel like it.

I remember the hopelessness.

You are an animal who is putting on a smile so that other people think you are not afraid. The callous federal agents who try to break you down, just like they do in the movies. "You must be kidding," you say. "I am not working for any government. It's my husband, it's my cruel husband who arranged for me to be here!"

"Oh we don't care about that sort of thing," they say. "Your husband is for you to deal with. So tell me, are you going to cooperate?"

Me, with my crushed middle-class arrogance, my useless 4.0 GPA, and too little experience in street fighting, eating it all up. You are an animal who has to put on a smile so that they don't eat you. It's a mob feeling. Cruel, infectious, senseless.

In my case, it ended well. I won. I am innocent. I am in America, and I am here to stay.

But when I celebrated my victory, I did not think that years would pass, and other immigrants would be living my humiliation, while I would be freshly stereotyped based on my ethnicity.

Back in the day, I was saved by the power of friendship. As I was going through my ordeal, many of my coworkers at the time wrote powerful letters in my defense. Others chipped in for a lawyer. It took a village to save me, and I know I wouldn't have been able to win without their trust and their support.

I can't help but wonder whether they would still feel good defending me if it happened today. In the age of collective anxiety and social media, would it be acceptable to trust a Russian-American?

I don't know. Do you?

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**Tessa Lena** is an immigrant artist, writer and entrepreneur living in the East Village of New York. She is the founder of VulnerableWin, a community initiative designed to restore the art of dialogue and to help people talk to each other over disagreements and cultural differences. Her motto is, "See a fellow human."

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# Solutions to the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza Can Only Succeed if Occupation Ends

Hasheemah Afaneh  
November 22, 2018

*In the present situation, any solution deemed sustainable in science cannot be truly sustainable in the Gaza Strip, or even in Palestine.*

This past spring, I was sitting in one of the environmental policy and public health classes of my graduate studies program, and the topic of discussion was water issues and solutions around the world.

The Gaza Strip was mentioned, almost inevitably considering that close to 95% of groundwater in the area is undrinkable. I was asked to comment as the only Palestinian in my program. As I spoke, I remember thinking: “I have reiterated these statistics so many times. Palestine is fed up. Gaza is fed up. Gaza is marching.”

Every Friday since March of this year, when the Great March of Return launched, I check the notifications on my phone for different news outlets and expect to read about the Gaza Strip — the number of casualties and injured, the names and the stories of these individuals.

Every Friday, my expectations are met. There is news about Gaza, and the news is never good and never different.

Even now, if one were to Google “Gaza Strip,” one will inevitably come across a headline about “clashes” and “protests,” and even a piece titled “What is Gaza?”

On November 11, Israeli forces carried out a “special operation” that resulted in a military raid of the Gaza Strip. What resulted was the killing of an Israeli soldier, the murder of seven Palestinians, Gaza’s sky set on fire by bombs, the haunting photograph of a wedding dress hanging from the closet of a destroyed apartment and, finally, a ceasefire agreement that history indicates will be short-lived. This news, too, is never new for Palestinians. It is disappointing, heart-breaking even, but never new.

What I did notice — other than the resignation of the Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman in protest to the ceasefire — was that Israeli citizens took to the streets to protest the ceasefire. Israelis equated the cessation of hostilities with weakness of their military — a military that sits on an annual budget close to \$20 billion.

This is reminiscent of news articles and photographs published about Israelis watching and celebrating bombs dropping on an open-air prison that is the Gaza Strip during the summer of 2014.

I scroll through photographs of tires burning and banners in Hebrew protesting the ceasefire, and I wonder where were these protests, rather than celebrations, when homes, hospitals,

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schools and universities in the Gaza Strip were bombarded, the death toll rising every few hours in 2008, 2012 and 2014? Where were the protests to call on the end of the siege on Gaza and the end of the occupation of Palestine?

In an eloquent op-ed, Mariam Barghouti makes the observation that although Israel besieges Palestinians, it is also besieging Israelis to the tragic reality that they reinforce, without a second thought, all in the name of security. It is the narrative of security and of the “two sides” reiterated by Israel that further perpetuates the occupation of Palestine and moves individuals further away from ending it.

In my class, students were asked to prepare policy briefs. One of mine was on promoting hydroponics in the Gaza Strip as a sustainable method to conserve water. Hydroponics is a soilless farming technique where crops are grown in nutrient solutions as opposed to traditional farming on land, and the United Nations World Food Program has encouraged its use in various low and middle-income countries.

Benefits include using less water and gaining a source of income, while challenges include high initial costs and energy use. Furthermore, in the case of Gaza, space and movement restrictions on farmers and materials present a central challenge.

After a few weeks of researching and writing on the topic, I found myself

presenting at Xavier University College of Pharmacy 11th Health Disparities Conference. The questions from academics, researchers and students all revolved around: What is Gaza? Where is Gaza? Why Gaza? It was with one medical student that I had a deep conversation about Gaza and Palestine, and it was because he asked, “Can hydroponics truly be sustainable?” I answered “No.”

In the present situation, any solution deemed sustainable in science cannot be truly sustainable in the Gaza Strip, or even in Palestine. Solutions are only truly sustainable when root causes are addressed — when the big “P” policies, namely the Israeli occupation — are addressed. Palestinians are resilient individuals, and despite knowing this, they attempt sustainable solutions such as utilizing hydroponics. However, the reality is that even the most sustainable solutions are hindered due to the restrictions posed by the Israeli occupation.

This cannot be ignored by scientists, health professionals and lawmakers when addressing the dire statistics in Gaza: Half the population is food insecure; 80% of the population relies on international aid; treatments in hospitals are restricted because medicines are restricted. In two years, Gaza will be unlivable.

Scientists, health professionals and lawmakers must remember that while specific solutions are hypothesized and implemented, these solutions need to be



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accompanied by a larger call to end the occupation.

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**Hasheemah Afaneh** is a Palestinian writer based in the United States. She holds a master's degree in public health from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center. Afaneh blogs at [www.norestrictionsonwords.wordpress.com](http://www.norestrictionsonwords.wordpress.com) and has written for various media outlets including The Huffington Post and This Week in Palestine, among others.

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## **California Wildfires: It's Time to Tackle the Root of the Problem**

Steve Westly

November 23, 2018

The real solution to reducing California's wildfires lies in building a world-class economy that moves off carbon-based fuels to sustainable energy. Smoky skies and incinerated homes from wildfires are becoming the new normal in the United States and other countries throughout the world. Bad luck alone is not to blame. Climate change is creating drier weather and is dissipating the snow packs that feed our rivers throughout the year. This creates deadly fire conditions. Worse yet, it now costs 12 times what it did in 1985 to fight these fires, draining state and local budgets.

Californians know that we are on the cutting edge of dealing with this

problem. We need to get smart about how to be on the cutting edge of solving it.

Here are four things our government and utilities should be doing now.

Firstly, improved forest management: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and wildfire management is no different. We can start by taking concrete steps to thin our forests. This requires that we increase the logging of smaller-diameter trees that are kindling for enormous fires. We also need to increase the area in which California allows controlled burns. Governor Jerry Brown took a major step toward this with an executive order doubling the area where forest growth can be thinned with controlled burns. Governor-elect Gavin Newsom should follow his example, further increasing the area where the state allows controlled burns.

Secondly, smart watershed management: Over one-third of California's land is forested, and these forests house the vast majority of the watersheds that hold snow mass and provide water for the state well into the spring. The same poor forest management that enable major wildfires — such as allowing excessive vegetation density and overpopulation of small trees and brush — also causes the degradation of these watersheds. We should proactively manage the watersheds by reforesting areas that capture snow and doing controlled burns. Smarter management can substantially reduce wildfire exposure.

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Thirdly, utility companies also need to make fire prevention a priority. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection determined that PG&E's power lines caused 16 of the Wine Country fires that killed 44 people and caused \$10 billion in damages last year. Here is what utilities can do to be part of the solution. First, PG&E and other companies need to use new technologies such as geospatial data to ensure tree limbs are not making contact with power lines. Low cost, high-resolution satellite imagery and drone technologies will make this traditionally difficult task much easier. Second, early fire detection and early warning to residents is essential. New technologies using LiDAR are available today that can detect fires within minutes.

Utility companies also need to take a proactive role in more quickly using massive text/cell phone warning to do earlier evacuations. Third, every utility should follow San Diego Gas and Electric's and PG&E's lead by conducting strategic blackouts during high-wind events to reduce the risk of power line ignitions.

Common sense and preventative solutions are an important step to reducing wildfires, and California should lead in each of these areas. But California's most important contribution to stopping wildfires will be to continue to lead the world in stopping what is causing wildfires — global warming. We are doing this by creating an economy built on sustainable energy. In the 1970s, Californians passed catalytic

converter legislation requiring automakers to make cleaner cars. Within a decade, every automaker in the world had retooled assembly plants to meet the regulations. Similarly, in 2015, the California legislature passed a law requiring utilities to produce 50% renewable energy from our electric grid by 2030. Critics scoffed, but we will meet that goal 10 years early.

No one wants more fires. We know how to reduce their likelihood and severity, but the real solution lies in building a world-class economy that moves off carbon-based fuels to sustainable energy. That's a race we should all want California to win.

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**Steve Westly** is the founder of The Westly Group, a large sustainability venture capital firm, and previously served as the controller and chief fiscal officer of the State of California from 2003 to 2007.

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## Climate Change: The Fuel for Fire

Arek Sinanian  
November 26, 2018

*Projections for the impact of climate change on wildfire risks need to integrate the diverse strands of evidence.*

The recent Californian wildfires were devastating in their destruction of property and tragic in causing numerous

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deaths. These fires have happened many times before and are a regular event, but never as destructive as this. Therefore, the wildfires attracted international interest due to the contribution of climate change to their severity and frequency.

Similar devastating fires also took place in Greece this July and Portugal and Chile in 2017, while bushfires are a regular occurrence in Australia. Many specialist scientists have little doubt that climate change contributed to these fires and will continue to increase wildfires around the world.

So, let's look at the science and what the experts are saying. A wildfire (also known as bushfire in Australia) needs fuel, the drier the better; hot, dry and windy weather; and a source of ignition, which can be natural (such as lightning) or deliberate (arson).

Once it begins, a wildfire's extent and level of destruction will depend greatly on the force and direction of the winds, and the aridity, amount and density of fuel. The human, economic and social impacts will depend on the proximity of communities, homes and other infrastructure to the burning forests. Then there's the ongoing ecological impacts and soil erosion.

So, is climate change likely to be having any effect on any of these factors? The short answer is yes, but there are a few other factors in play, not least of which are urbanization, land management and the fact that climate change will affect

different parts of the world differently and at different times.

Here's what we know. Plants use carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to grow. It can be argued that higher atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide will lead to increased plant growth. Therefore, higher levels of carbon dioxide will provide more fuel for a potential fire. But for this to happen, there also needs to be other nutrients and water. In drought conditions, which could be one of the effects of climate change, there will be less growth.

Warmer temperatures will also lengthen the growing season of many plants. And increased average temperatures caused by climate change will contribute to fuel dryness. The drier the fuel, the more likely it is to burn. Rainfall will also influence how dry (or wet) the fuel is. So, droughts will also result in drier fuel.

Let's see what we have so far using a typical scenario for a particular part of the world, such as California. Due to climate change, there are long periods of drought, low humidity and higher temperatures. While recent growth rates may have been low due to low rainfall, higher carbon dioxide levels have balanced that and, in any case, there's plenty of fuel there to burn and it's all very dry. So the question arises: Are recent wildfires in California any worse than they have been over the past?

In a comprehensive research paper written by John T. Abatzoglou and A.

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Park Williams in 2016, the authors conclude:

*“This analysis suggests that anthropogenic climate change will continue to chronically enhance the potential for western US forest fire activity while fuels are not limiting.*

*... [and] We estimate that human-caused climate change contributed to an additional 4.2 million ha of forest fire area during 1984-2015, nearly doubling the forest fire area expected in its absence. Natural climate variability will continue to alternate between modulating and compounding anthropogenic increases in fuel aridity, but anthropogenic climate change has emerged as a driver of increased forest fire activity and should continue to do so while fuels are not limiting.”*

How did they come to this conclusion? In summary, the research used modeled climate projections to estimate the contribution of anthropogenic (manmade) climate change to observed increases in eight fuel aridity metrics and forest fire areas across the western part of the US.

They found that anthropogenic increases in temperature and vapor pressure deficit significantly enhanced fuel aridity across western US forests over the past several decades and, during 2000-2015, contributed to 75% more forested area experiencing high fire-season fuel aridity and an average of nine additional days per year of high fire potential. They also found that

anthropogenic climate change accounted for around 55% of observed increases in fuel aridity from 1979 to 2015 across western US forests, highlighting both anthropogenic climate change and natural climate variability as important contributors to increased wildfire potential in recent decades.

## **RISK OF WILDFIRES IN AUSTRALIA**

Much research is also taking place in Australia, which has seen an increase in high and extreme risk days over the past four decades. Along with more days of higher risk, climate change is also bringing an extension of the fire season.

The Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) is used in the state of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia to quantify fire weather. The FFDI combines observations of temperature, humidity and wind speed with an estimate of the fuel state. Fire weather (or FFDI) was assessed using the NARClIM climate projections for each planning region of the state.

The findings revealed that average and severe fire weather is projected to increase in the future, and the largest increases in average and severe fire weather by 2070 will occur in spring. It was also found that changes are greatest for the western part of NSW, where fire weather increases are projected to occur across all seasons. Finally, increasing fire weather conditions suggest that when fires do occur, they will be harder to control.

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It is inevitable that some parts of the world, such as Australia, will always have large fires. But with climate change, there is a higher need to practice better land management and continued research into the changing climate and wildfire behavior to avoid the catastrophic loss of life that has occurred in the past.

Understanding and responding to the impacts of climate change on wildfire risk is further complicated by the other indirect impact of climate change. That is the reality that weather and climatic conditions can no longer be predicted on historic data — or at least that such data will be less reliable.

Projections of climate change impacts on wildfire risks need to integrate the diverse strands of evidence, including the many interactions and feedbacks between many factors. Research is underway around the world to address such knowledge gaps.

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**Arek Sinanian** is the author of “A Climate for Denial” and an international expert on climate change, greenhouse gas abatement and carbon accounting, and he has extensive experience in resource efficiency, waste minimization and sustainable development. He is a member of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) expert panels of the clean development mechanism (CDM) Methodology Panel and the Accreditation Panel, providing advice on new methodologies and projects for

CDMs submitted for registration under the Kyoto Protocol.

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## **Break Up Big Tech, Say Steve Bannon and Robert Reich**

Atul Singh

November 28, 2018

*Like canaries in a mine, two iconic figures of the right and the left sing in unison about the dangers of big tech and the importance of breaking them up.*

Something strange is happening. Steve Bannon, the former chief strategist of President Donald Trump, and Robert Reich, the Berkeley professor who served President Bill Clinton, are singing from the same hymn sheet. On the surface, these two characters could not be more dissimilar. Bannon is a former naval officer who rose to eminence in Goldman Sachs before creating Breitbart and breathing fire into the right-wing populist movement. Reich is a Berkeley liberal who has been agonizing over growing inequalities of income, wealth and political power. Like Romeo and Juliet, both Bannon and Reich are falling in love with the idea of breaking up big tech.

In March, the Financial Times held the FT Future of News conference. Editor Lionel Barber interviewed Bannon who declared, “Facebook takes your stuff for free and sells it and monetizes it for huge margins. Then they write algorithms that control your life.” Bannon

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castigated the audience for not asking one tough question when Mark Zuckerberg showed up, claiming the Facebook boss “sounded like a first year associate hired in corporate development.” The audience in New York was only emulating its betters. As this author observed on Gandhi’s birthday this year, even American senators kowtow to Zuckerberg instead of holding his feet to the fire.

In his many interviews, Bannon has been arguing how most people have been reduced to serfs. The party of Davos, Bannon’s catchy name for a global elite, benefits enormously from the liquidity of central banks, the impunity of big banks and obscene asset price bubbles. The young, “the deplorables” and “the little guys” are now frozen out of the system. They have few prospects of work, little chance to get their feet on the property ladder and minimal opportunities for upward social mobility.

Reich concurs with Bannon. In his tour de force for The Guardian, Reich argues that “big tech has ushered in a second Gilded Age.” He points out that how “America’s Gilded Age of the late 19th century” led to “a raft of innovations — railroads, steel production, oil extraction.” However, Reich also cautions that this age “culminated in mammoth trusts owned by ‘robber barons’ who used their wealth and power to drive out competitors and corrupt American politics.” He worries that phenomenon is repeating itself.

Reich rightly observes, “Facebook and Google dominate advertising. They’re the first stops for many Americans seeking news. Apple dominates smartphones and laptop computers. Amazon is now the first stop for a third of all American consumers seeking to buy anything.” This means that most, if not all, small players get wiped out in this new winners-take-all economy.

As per Reich, this concentration of power is leading to “two big problems.”

First, it is stifling innovation. The rate of formation of new job-creating businesses has halved in the US since 2004. Why should anyone start something, live frugally and struggle when life in big tech has food cooked by chefs, fancy yoga classes and high six-figure salaries? Also, big tech has “sweeping patents, data, growing networks and dominant platforms,” not to mention expensive lawyers, unlimited pockets and oligopolistic, if not monopolistic, tendencies.

Second, Reich argues that big tech has too much information, too much money and too much power. Already, Facebook has employed a “political opposition research firm to discredit critics,” he says. The Berkeley professor asks, “How long will it be before Facebook uses its own data and platform against critics? Or before potential critics are silenced even by the possibility?”

Incidentally, this author has repeatedly made the same point as Bannon and Reich. In an article published in 2016,

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the author contended that the “inverse relationship between income inequality and social mobility—a phenomenon that has become known as the “Great Gatsby” curve—has come to define the US.” As inequalities in income, wealth, health, education et al. keep waxing and opportunities for social mobility keep falling, America is fast becoming “a society of tsars and serfs.”

## **NEW TEDDY ROOSEVELTS**

Bannon may be reviled and vilified, but he is bold and brilliant. Now that he is out of the White House, he has been proposing innovative solutions to some intractable problems. Earlier this month, Bannon appeared at the Oxford Union and argued that bankers who blew up the global financial system in 2007-08 should face criminal prosecution. When asked about big tech, Bannon declared, “Facebook should be broken up. Google should be broken up. We should take the data and drop it down to a public trust.”

Reich once served Clinton, who is infamous for ties to Wall Street. Now, the professor has parted ways with his former political master. In his article on big tech, Reich describes how the US fought back against the robber barons. He recounts how Teddy Roosevelt used antitrust laws to bust railroad trusts and John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil. The US Supreme Court backed Roosevelt and the rest is history. Reich argues. “It is time to use antitrust again.” He makes the case for breaking up “hi-tech behemoths, or at least require they

make their proprietary technology and data publicly available and share their platforms with smaller competitors.”

Reich acknowledges that it might not be politically feasible to resurrect antitrust right now. Republicans rather like big business. Democrats get a lot of cash from big tech with progressive candidates collecting nearly \$1 billion for the recent midterms. In a society where the worth of a human being is measured in dollar terms, both parties are scared of big tech. More importantly, the vast majority of people are addicted to products of big tech and do not realize the extent of their serfdom.

Yet Bannon and Reich, iconic figures of the right and the left, are the vanguard of a popular backlash about to happen. A number of people are starting to resent their serfdom bitterly. They intuitively realize that markets collapse when masters own all assets and indebted serfs can merely sell labor for a pittance, that too if they are lucky. Politics collapses too because the gulf between the haves and have-nots becomes too deep and too wide.

It would be foolish to argue that big tech is in danger today. It holds the commanding heights of the world economy. Yet the sentiment against it is growing. Countries are worrying about their sovereignty. Citizens are worrying about privacy. Journalists are worrying about survival. And small businesses are worrying about staying solvent. Not only Americans, but also others are aching for new Teddy Roosevelts who

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will take on big tech and break its back on a barrel.

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**Atul Singh** is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer. He has taught political economy at the University of California, Berkeley and been a visiting professor of humanities and social sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. He studied philosophy, politics and economics at the University of Oxford on the Radhakrishnan Scholarship and did an MBA with a triple major in finance, strategy and entrepreneurship at the Wharton School. Singh worked as a corporate lawyer in London and led special operations as an elite officer in India's volatile border areas where he had many near-death experiences.

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## **Making India Relevant at the G-20 Summit**

Ravi Tripathi  
November 30, 2018

*The G-20 summit offers India a strategic opportunity to emerge as one of the stabilizing poles in a world with growing geopolitical uncertainty.*

Foreign policy has been a key highlight of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first term. In the last four years, India's global standing and diplomatic footprint have substantially expanded. The latest G-20 summit in Argentina is the first to be hosted in South America. It marks a milestone for this evolving

global forum of the world's 20 largest economies.

The G-20 is the child of the 2008 global financial crisis. It is an embodiment of the changing world order where China has emerged as a leading power. The forum has moved beyond its core agenda of stabilizing the world economy. It has emerged as the premier forum for international economic cooperation, a sort of a mini-UN, toward building an open world economy. But the G-20 is regularly criticized as a "talk-shop" peddling a neoliberal agenda with little regard for the developing economies and African continent — South Africa is the sole African representative. The forum has also played an inadequate role in addressing challenges like climate change and reforming global financial institutions.

In Buenos Aires, Modi will be representing the poorest member of the group, with the lowest Human Development Index. But India also happens to be the fastest growing major economy in world. Amid the ongoing US-China trade war, an expanding migration crisis in South America, Brexit and rising tensions between Ukraine and Russia, India has an opportunity to use the G-20 forum to push ahead its underlying theme of building consensus for fair and sustainable development.

The host, Argentina, is itself the showpiece of the perils of neoliberal capitalism. Many Latin American countries continue to struggle when it comes to providing basic human



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necessities like security and food. The recent currency crisis in emerging markets has impacted Argentina, Turkey, and to a lesser extent, India as well. The future of employment and a sustainable food future are two of the priorities for the G-20 agenda, both have a direct impact on India. India's position should also be to argue for bringing down stringent migration barriers that target African and Asian workers coming to the West. Barriers on trade in services present another major challenge. Any debate on a sustainable food future is not possible without reaching an agreement on the Doha Round negotiations that have remained stalled since 2008.

Modi might also consider setting up a permanent G-20 secretariat and work with the EU and China to that effect. India should learn from its mistakes during the Non-Aligned Movement and must not hesitate to use the forum to target the state-sponsored terrorism coming out of Pakistan. India's foreign policy goal at the summit should include highlighting its candidacy for permanent member of the UN Security Council and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

Bilateral and trilateral discussions led by US President Donald Trump tend to dominate the G-20. Such an approach undermines the forum and its relevance. India shall do well to represent the voice of the postcolonial developing world and bring back the focus on fair working conditions, agriculture and funding

health and energy-related projects in developing economies.

The G-20 summit offers India a strategic opportunity to emerge as one of the poles in a world with growing geopolitical uncertainty. In his statement prior to attending the G-20 summit, Modi focused on "reformed multilateralism" to "strengthen collective action for global good." It is essential for Indian interests that the G-20 is not reduced to a transatlantic affair and a talkfest of trade lobbies.

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