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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

It has officially been a full year in COVID-19 induced quarantine. The start of the new millennia saw the rise of a world-dominating pandemic that has claimed 2.65 million lives globally as of writing this letter. In the United States, we saw the Black Lives Matter movement gain greater attention after the tragic death of George Floyd, forcing Americans to take a good look at ourselves and the history of systemic racial oppression that continues to pervade institutions like the police. Wildfires have raged across the globe, unseating wildlife and families while extreme cold and flooding virtually shut down the state of Texas just this year.

During this time, President Trump became the first president to be impeached twice. His supporters were then responsible for inciting an insurgency at the U.S. capitol following the 2020 Election. Despite this horrifying event, Kamala Harris became the first woman of color to accept the role of Vice President while President Biden has begun the process of building the most diverse administration in U.S. history.

So after the events of the past year, what have we learned as a country, as a world?

In this issue you will see Cooper Price analyze the effects of depoliticization on party politics in Japan. Ethan Stern-Ellis discusses the lack of comprehensive U.S. climate policy, while Anneke Taylor looks at the dangerous consequences of incorporating low-yield nuclear weapons into military arsenals. For my own paper (Lily Hoak) I present interviews with women at many levels of U.S. foreign policy and national security to better understand the experiences and significance of gender in their fields.

As we enter an unprecedented era of U.S. governance, both at home and abroad, we hope these papers offer greater insight to the world around you and encourage broader edification for students and scholars alike. Under new leadership, and in a time where we are moving towards a post-pandemic life, there is much to be thankful for and many reasons to hope. Following so many months of trauma, we have learned and been reminded of the resiliency of the human race and the human spirit.

Sincerely,

Lily Hoak & Morgan MacFarlane
One hundred years after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, women in the United States continue to face societal and institutionalized biases that can undermine the success of women everywhere. This is especially true when it comes to leadership in the U.S. government. While the number of women serving in state and federal legislatures has increased, the number of women leaders in the foreign policy and national security enterprise continues to be lacking. As I progressed in my International Relations degree, I realized that I was most frequently learning about men, from men. I then asked: where are the women in U.S. foreign policy and national security (FP/NS)? Over the last three months, I have interviewed fifteen women from various FP/NS backgrounds and degrees of experience to understand their time in the field and how their identities as women have impacted their work. The decades-old networks of aging, white men who have held, and continue to hold, the majority of positions across the foreign policy establishment have created a culture where women must work harder than their male counterparts work in order to advance. In addition, almost all of these women reported casual sexism and discrimination in the workplace. While increasing support from male and female career service members and mentors has helped increase the number of women in FP/NS, the fraternal cultures of the FP/NS institutions have engendered and enabled underrepresentation of women in the field. Such representation is necessary so that decision-makers in FP/NS are more informed and are better representative of the country that they serve.

METHOD

In order to better understand the field of and the fraternal cultures within FP/NS in the United States, I interviewed fifteen women from across various agencies and institutions. In these interviews, I asked a set of questions that focused on their backgrounds, careers, and personal thoughts and experiences as women in FP/NS. I also asked for their thoughts on the future of women in FP/NS and advice for young women entering the field. In analyzing their answers, I identified several themes that were consistent across all of the interviews. The results will be explained below. The women were selected in no particular order, as I was put in contact with some of the interviewees through the others with whom I had spoken. Their names have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Interviews have been edited for clarity.
Agencies that are made up of entirely or almost all male staff members are not representative of the populations that they serve and protect. This is often the case all around the world where governments are making policy choices. One of the most shining examples of this is in peace negotiations. One study that examined “eighty-two peace agreements in forty-two armed conflicts between 1989 and 2011 concluded that peace agreements with women are associated with ‘durable peace’” and that agreements “signed by women show a higher number of provisions aimed at political reform and implementation.”¹ Yet, women are still being left out when negotiations are conferred. Many women also believe that they bring their own unique skills to diplomacy and foreign policy. Denmark’s Ambassador to the United States Lone Dencker Wisborg has said that “men are focused on winning and women are focused on getting things done.”² Former Hungarian Ambassador to the U.S. Reka Szermerkenyi has stated that “women have a more natural talent for approaching conflict compared to men, but a combination of men and women is hugely important, because in many cases, what is missing is an ability to smooth things together.”³ Including people of diverse backgrounds means including diverse perspectives on issues and widening the window of possibility for progress in any given field.

**EXPERIENCES: THEN**

The experiences of women in the field of FP/NS since the early 1970’s paint an illuminating picture for women’s place in the establishment. One woman, Laura, is a former Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission and has worked in the field for over thirty years. Her career highlights the changes over time. When she started, women could not get the language training that they needed and were essentially excluded from posts in the Middle East and most of Asia. She says that what women were told repeatedly that “[they] couldn’t, [they] couldn’t, [they] couldn’t.”⁴ One of her early bosses, who she referred to as the “jerk of all jerks”, was unhappy that he had been assigned a woman. When she arrived at the post, he escorted her to her new office, which turned out to include a fridge, coffee pot, and a hot plate. He had literally put her in the kitchen. He then proceeded to exclude her from all meetings and assign her no work. Luckily, the other men in the office tried to include her, and she sought out work on her own. Eventually, the Ambassador heard her story after she requested a transfer and the ‘jerk’ was asked to retire.

Later on in her career and at a new post, Laura continued to face workplace discrimination and harassment. She detailed one experience in which she was sexually harassed while wearing a Diane von Furstenberg wrap dress (she made a note of telling me this detail). A senior official stopped to chat with her and then, as an apparent joke, pulled on the tie of her dress to undo it. Laura told herself to just let it go but informed her boss of the incident. Her boss asked her if she wanted him to say anything and she said that she would think of an appropriate response later. She said that, some time after the incident had occurred, the offender was in her section and that she had some Pop Rocks. She asked if he had ever had them and when he said no, she offered him some. She explained that you were supposed to eat the entire pack at once, in an apparent effort to embarrass him. Soon, Pop Rocks were fizzing out of his nose. While this was certainly an unconventional response, it was one way that this woman found to handle an offensive and ridiculous act from her work colleague. Another story she relayed to me was not specifically about her, but rather about former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Laura detailed an encounter between Albright and former Ambassador Richard Holbrooke at a panel. Holbrooke reportedly “mansplained” to Albright the entire time, despite the fact that she was more senior than he was and had held a cabinet position.

Another woman I spoke with, Katherine, has a background in national security. She was raised by female professors and, after completing her undergraduate degree, worked for a national security scholar, which sparked her interest in defense policy. After graduate school, she worked under a top military advisor for six years. During that time, like most of the people I interviewed, she was one of the only women at her place of employment. She was also the only civilian staff member. This meant that she was not in “competition” with the military officers for possible promotions. She said that “what we were doing mattered too much” to have her gender impact their work. While she did not identify specific incidents of discrimination, she did cite an experience in which sexist assumptions were made of her. She stated that, while she was an official representative, one man assumed that she was a secretary at a meeting. This is something that multiple women have attested to have happened to them. With this, she stated there was “general creepy, predatory behavior.” This sort of behavior, in comparison to something like the Pop Rocks incident, indicates the broader, cultural problems that breed in male-dominated institutions. However, Katherine said the institution itself was looking out for her more broadly and that she “joined at the crest of diversifying the field.”⁵ She said that she had help from her male colleagues, who mitigated the impact of gender-based discrimination from select individuals. With this, she said that her “experience is markedly different because, for [her], being a woman has been a marginal advantage” due to the various mentors and programs she was able to have and access.

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¹ Sloan Susan. *A Seat at the Table: Women, Diplomacy, and Lessons for the World* (New Degree Press, 2020), 63
² Ibid., 99
³ Zoom Interview with the Author, 17 June 2020
⁴ Ibid., 276
⁵ Phone Interview with the Author, 28 June 2020
because of her gender.⁶ As she rose in the ranks and took on supervisory positions, she knew that people would not make assumptions or asperse her based on or because of her gender. She said her experience in these leadership positions, especially one that involved her working under a top military advisor, taught her how to unflinchingly deal with incidents of bias and to develop a thick skin. Despite her comparatively positive experience, she acknowledged that most of her young female friends have had poorer experiences in FP/NS.

One more woman that I interviewed, Juliet, began her career before 2000. Juliet said that “things she had to contend with are no longer acceptable today.” Throughout her education in FP/NS, there were hardly any female role models or professors. Her field of expertise, Russia/USSR, was largely dominated by men, despite the fact that the USSR had a larger contingent of women. The nuclear weapons and arms control sectors were predominantly male, filled with “generations of men who think that any hard power or military or armed services/Weapons are always male.” Juliet said that, because of this assumption, “many people felt that women would feel uncomfortable negotiating with force rather than diplomacy.”⁷

EXPERIENCES: NOW

Many of the women that I spoke with who entered the field more recently have seen a lot of growth and increased diversity. While there have been more women at the forefront of US foreign policy—like Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Clinton—there has been a less visible but no less important increase in the lower ranks. Still, many also face similar discrimination as the women did before them.

Jane has worked in several sub-sects of government, including the Marine Corps. When she joined the military, there were mostly male senior officers and no female mentors in the Marines. With this, there were structural barriers in place, like women being barred from combat (until 2015). These barriers prevented advancement for many female service members. In response to this, women found loopholes, like the Lioness and Female Engagement Teams (FETs) which allowed them to go into combat zones for a maximum of forty-four days. She also described, like other military members I spoke with, the sexual harassment issues and inappropriate actions of senior officers. When she was given a rare opportunity to head into a combat zone, the men stationed there assumed that she was going to be male. A senior officer, apparently shocked, “said no straight out” to her being assigned to this position (he was eventually promoted). She said that, at first, the military is an equalizer because everyone enters at the same level, but that the balance of power soon becomes increasingly unequal because advancement to higher-rank positions is predicated on past lengthy, usually lifelong military experience. These positions often self-select for men not only because of sheer military experience that is expected, but also because these positions allow for little time outside of work to attend to domestic duties or childcare obligations. Women who achieve these positions are often either childless, married to other officers of similar ranks, or are in relationships in which there is more shared responsibility. When Jane transitioned to work as a civilian in the Pentagon, her “male coworkers assumed that I didn’t know anything about the military.” Working in this environment became “emotionally exhausting” and that the hyper-masculine culture has made her regret “not sticking up for women all of the time.”⁸

Claire also served in the U.S. Armed Forces. She has dealt with sexism and harassment in the military since she joined ROTC in high school. During her initial training in the military, a superior officer sexually harassed her. To avoid being harassed again, she attempted to complete part of her training early. She said that she did “the right thing by not reporting.”⁹ Claire also has had to deal with microaggressions at work, especially in her current position at an agency in which she is one of only a few Black employees. She states that there is a sense of people wondering, “why does this Black girl have this job?” She stated that there are also male subordinates who regularly contradict female superiors, “even when [they] would be dead wrong, like completely wrong.” Claire cited an incident of this behavior that occurred during a joint-department meeting with a senior military officer. A woman tried to tell a colonel that her office needed something different than what was in the plan and that he “essentially told her to ‘stay in her lane.’” When the man called on another male officer, who had the same suggestion as the woman did, the colonel took his point. Claire remarked that “basically, what she said wasn’t valid until a white man said it.” Claire pointed out that there is no formal mechanism or process in place to report these micro-aggressions. Claire also shared that a male co-worker had told her that he had noticed that women would bond in the hallways “even if they didn’t know each other” and would give one another “looks” in response to behavior by “some straight up assholes.” She said that he thought that there was a “unwritten rule of friendship between the women.” Like Jane, she was thankful for her time in the service, but “was sick of it” towards the end. When she worked with female engagement teams, her boss asked, “What about home life?” during a briefing. Claire responded by saying, “Well, I’m single . . . and I don’t have a husband” and that this officer basically sounded like an Afghan man. When she was leaving, he “knew he had put his foot in it” and requested that she not tell anyone about their conversation.

⁴ Phone Interview with the Author, 28 June 2020 ⁷ Zoom Interview with the Author, 25 June 2020 ⁸ Zoom Interview with the Author, 29 June 2020 ⁹ Zoom Interview with the Author, 10 July 2020
Another Army officer, Morgan, described similar situations that happened in the late 90s and early 2000s. She said when she was in the lower ranks, she always had to be “on the lookout” for sexual predators. Although this was less necessary when she was older, she would still occasionally find herself in potentially dangerous situations with male colleagues.¹⁰ Prior to her active duty, she attended West Point several years after women were first allowed entry into the Academy. She said that a friend, who was in West Point’s first class, had to deal with far more blatant aggression and threats to her physical safety than she had to. Morgan said that this demonstrated how having women there before you can make a difference in how accommodating a male-dominated environment can be for women. In her chosen specialty, there were institutional biases and barriers that perpetuated women’s exclusion from combat. Women were not allowed to be certified in certain modes of transport, purely because these modes of transport had a weapon attached to them. While senior personnel were well aware of the issue, they were more inclined to see why “certain races were drawn towards certain sections that had less room for advancement, which made it feel like the race issue overshadowed the gender one” when, really, both issues were of great concern. While working for one senior office, she said that the officials “had a chip on their shoulder about gender questions.” In meetings, she described how, as a woman, “[she] sat back and listened” in order to have her voice heard. She also had to be more active than [her] male colleagues” because she was never going to be called on or asked a question.¹¹

Elle also worked in the defense sector, but was not a member of the military. After receiving a fellowship, she chose to start work in an especially male-dominated part of the Department of Defense, despite being female and significantly younger than a majority of the military staff employed there. Elle said that being younger in this position “had a bigger impact” on her job than being a woman. However, Elle admitted that she still had to face “additional discrimination.”¹² She stated that her appearance as a blonde woman who did not wear the unofficial black or navy suit that most women wore made her stand out even more. However, Elle said that, when she spoke, her colleagues understood her and that this deterred greater bias against her.

There was also “low-grade sexual harassment and plenty of inappropriate comments,” including men making advances at her at work. She picked her battles, like Laura did, because if she “got upset all the time, it would wear [her] down.” Around this time, Elle was also working with international networks. She said that she faced more gender concerns when abroad. Once, while traveling in Eastern Europe with a young Black Army officer, she said that they drew a lot of stares, which was somewhat off-putting. After a military site tour, her coworker said he was scared that others were going to try to grab her hair and “drag [her] out behind the building.”¹³ While Elle was traveling in the Middle East, she said that her blonde hair garnered a lot of attention and attracted a large crowd of young men, who surrounded her and took pictures. These stories show the heightened significance of physical safety for women in the field. Later in her career, after transitioning back to public service, she noticed that many of her friends who had been with her during her initial fellowship had left government service. She said that her female colleagues’ withdrawal from government service can likely be attributed to an issue that I had not considered at the outset of this project: the struggle to balance work and home life as a woman. Several mothers who I spoke with discussed how difficult it was to start and raise a family with the demands and constraints of their time-consuming, taxing careers. Elle explained that “maternity leave” (she requested that air quotes be used here) is practically non-existent. Elle said that, when she was pregnant with her twins, she had to save enough sick and vacation time to take care of her newborns: she, therefore, could not take any time off during her pregnancy. This is the way most women get enough time off to stay home after having children. When her twins were born several weeks early, she realized that she needed more time off than she had initially anticipated. Elle described being in a panic, both over her babies’ welfare and over her job security, while on the phone with a human resources representative while still in her hospital room. The unwillingness of this field to create more flexible approaches for maternity and paternity leave places unnecessary restraints on women’s careers.

Leslie, like Morgan and Katherine, has worked in the field since the 1990s, but has yet to work directly for a female boss. The majority-male, mostly male-run networks meant that advancement within the workplace was predicated on one’s ability to engage with one’s male superiors. Leslie said that she developed habits to make herself more comfortable in and compatible with that environment. She said that a graduate school professor once told her to read the sports section every day so she would have something to discuss with her male colleagues at work. She also described having to verbally “elbow her way in” by interrupting, physically taking up space, and being more aggressive and assertive. When she received a new job as a political appointee, her boss “had to gently counsel” her to not interrupt people, which Leslie found “ironic.” She said that one department in her office had a more blatantly hostile culture due to its military components. Leslie said that more people had a chip on their shoulder (an oft-used phrase by most of the women I interviewed) about women working there. One anecdote that she shared was about how a group of

¹⁰ Phone Interview with the Author, 10 August 2020
¹¹ Phone Interview with the Author, 10 August 2020
¹² Phone Interview with the Author, 10 August 2020
¹³ Phone Interview with the Author, 10 August 2020
women working there were called the “click clack girls” because of the sound that their heels made on the marble floor.\(^{14}\) She stated that men would make lewd comments at work, which could be construed as being done intentionally to make the women uncomfortable and what Leslie said was a demonstration of the “general bro-iness” of the workplace. Similar to the situation that Claire described, women’s contributions during meetings would often go ignored until a male coworker would repeat them later.

Unlike the other women interviewed, Bridget completed her undergraduate and law degrees after she had had children. So, by the time she began her public service career, her children were much older. She said that, throughout her career, that she has worked with a lot of women leaders. While her current sector is unequal in terms of gender representation, she said that “it’s not horrifying.” She said that this may be true of the whole department, stating that an office that she wouldn’t name has “a lady problem with no women in management.”\(^ {15}\) Her limited engagement with another agency that sends male-dominated delegations to her office has resulted in a running joke—they “forgot to bring their women.”\(^ {16}\) Her focus on foreign assistance and aid has resulted in her not having to deal with “old boys club” issues, but has seen other women in different sub-sects having to navigate problematic work environments.

While Nancy has largely worked in academia, she has some work experience in Congress and the White House. When I asked if she felt that there was gender-based discrimination, she responded “Yes, certainly.” She said that there is a more subtle, structural form of bias, which women like Katherine and Morgan, who described bias as being more individual-based, did not observe. Nancy said that gender prejudice is especially pervasive in her field, a field which has been focusing on typically masculine topics for the last seventy years. She said that, for women who “don’t want to engage in the cultural repartee,” work can be a “struggle.” Nancy’s subfield is steeped in language and actions surrounding power and domination, with “lots of military in the mix.”\(^ {16}\) Nancy argued that the way policy is made and viewed in her field prioritizes the concept of “a single person making a decision, which is a masculine notion.”

When asked if conditions have improved over the last thirty years, she said “there has been no change at all.” When I asked if conditions have improved over the last thirty years, she said “there has been no change at all.” When she stood her ground, they would speak with her, but would also start to hit on her. When they failed to overpower her intellectually, they felt a need to sexualize her instead. More broadly, the administration she worked in would try to cover up this behavior. She recalled senior women discussing how “creepy” a male coworker who groped women was, but not taking action to punish him or prevent his behavior. When incidents did get reported, higher-ups would try to sweep them under the rug. Nancy’s experience highlights the lack of cultural progress within the field and how far there is to go.

After working an unpaid internship for a government think-tank, Julia worked for a defense sector as an executive assistant for a director. Julia described her boss, a retired Marine, as a “dysfunctional and toxic manager” and that the other military personnel there were also difficult to work with.\(^ {18}\) This office was toxic due in part to active gender discrimination. There were at most three women on the roster, and she was typically the only woman and often the youngest. She said that her department had a “good old boys” culture and that her manager made demeaning remarks to her. She filed official complaints that went unaddressed. When she eventually left this department, he had six ongoing investigations. He has since been demoted, but still holds the same amount of power. The degree of gender-based discrimination varies across institutions. She said that her new sector promotes diversity and inclusion. Like other women working in defense, she attributes bad experiences to individuals and not the military.

The last few women that I spoke with have started working in the field in the last six years. Their experiences combine the issues of both age and gender that the other women described above. While working at a defense-centered post, which was full of “military bros”, Hadley, “a tiny Asian girl,” had a boss who would not close the door to his office “because [he] didn’t want people getting inappropriate ideas.” When a college tour came to visit her office, an undergraduate boy responded to her answer saying, “We’re really here to hear from the senior people” after her supervisor had directed a question to Hadley. Another undergraduate boy, who was interviewing with her for an internship, interrupted her and said, “I don’t think you have the policy expertise to be judging me.” A male intern would similarly disrespect her authority and ask others if he actually had to do the tasks that she would assign him. At her current job, she said that she is often demoted in emails from senior staff. Once, in a meeting with several women from the Executive Branch, a senior woman asked the room how many kids they all had. When Hadley replied that she was twenty-three, the women said, “Oh, you better get on it or your eggs will dry up!”\(^ {19}\) Each of these incidents were derived from some form

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\(^{14}\) Phone Interview with the Author, 15 July 2020

\(^{15}\) Phone Interview with the Author, 29 July 2020

\(^{16}\) Phone Interview with the Author, 16 July 2020

\(^{17}\) Phone Interview with the Author, 16 July 2020

\(^{18}\) Phone Interview with the Author, 2 July 2020

\(^{19}\) Zoom Interview with the Author, 25 June 2020
of gender and age bias that is not seen nearly as often with men early in their careers in FP/NS.

Sylvia, who works in the same office as Hadley does, has had very similar experiences. While in school studying business, she and her female classmates were instructed in what they should wear for work and how to present themselves within a “very narrow box of femininity.” Later at an unpaid internship, she said that four out of the six interns were women, but that the men were given every substantive task while the administrative tasks were “evenly” divided among the female interns. More recently, at an event that she helped organize, a male senior official said to her and her female coworkers that he had “a fiery wife just like them.” Another co-worker, Maddie, experienced much of the same things. She said that, at meetings, men are able to drag on while women tend to speak much more concisely. She said that this is because they do not want to speak too much or be cut off, and that the men are generally the people who interrupt. This is similar to Morgan’s efforts to be included in meetings and Leslie’s learned ability to elbow into conversations.

The experiences of women throughout the last thirty years demonstrate what has and has not changed over the generations. While some women described individual bias and casual discrimination or harassment, other women described a broader, institutional bias. The existence of this duality in women’s experiences indicates that being a woman in FP/NS in the United States comes with its own forms of discrimination and impediments.

MENTORSHIP

For most of the women I interviewed, there were not a lot of women present in their early education and careers who were senior enough to be female mentors for them. This is especially true of women in graduate school before the 1990’s. The lack of female mentors exacerbated the old boys’ networks by leaving women with only male mentors to help and teach them. Leslie described how the “network... explains a lot of disparity”, making it “imperative on men to expand their networks outside of other men.” When she was coming up in the field, there were only men. But, in the last five or ten years, she has been able “to not ignore female voices.” Katherine described how, during the 1980’s, FP/NS had few “prominent women.” But, a self-described outlier, she was raised by female professors and became interested in the subject after working for a female national security scholar after college. Her story shows that women being in leadership positions opens up opportunities for other women, “provid[ing] a cascade effect.” This is true outside of the United States as well. Laura shared that, while serving abroad, she approached ministry officials complaining about the amount of press coverage she received compared to that given to other US officials. In response, an official said, “You don’t get it, do you? We don’t have women role models in high positions in our country.” Laura heard this as, “tag, you’re it.” While she was stationed in the country, the country ended up appointing several women to high-level positions.

However, in the face of a male-dominated mentor pool, almost everyone who I interviewed cited the importance of male mentors and allies in supporting their work and career advancement. Maddie stated that progress cannot be achieved alone, saying that “we need white male allies to help. . .it’s not enough to just say that there’s inequality.” When “men join the chorus of voices advocating for the importance of women’s issues”, other men are more likely to pay attention and take these issues seriously. For all of the men who were discriminatory and toxic, there were men who worked to support and advance these women’s careers. Laura said that, “for every jerk I had to deal with, there were five guys who were on our side” and that, when she was placed at a controversial post for a woman at the time, her male superiors wanted her to succeed.” Her time working “in the kitchen” as a result of one man’s petty anger was mitigated by the rest of the men in the office who made sure to bring her with them to meetings. Additionally, after the head of the mission heard her story, the aforementioned “jerk” was sent back to Washington where he was forced to retire. For the women who served in the military, most described how their male bosses were “on the lookout for increased diversity” both for gender and race. One of Jane’s commanding officers appreciated her research and candor, and was very helpful in supporting her advancement. On the civilian side, Katherine’s career was furthered early on when Colin Powell brought her on as staff, which ensured that she was treated with respect. She also felt that the institution was looking out for her more broadly. Due to the assistance and support from male peers and mentors, women have been able to gradually expand their networks and reach new heights in their careers.

An increase in networking between women has also played an important role in promoting women’s entry into and empowerment within the FP/NS establishment. This became more notable under Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright and Hillary Clinton. When Albright first started working for the State Department, she began intentionally creating networks of women to expand the opportunities and connections that were so prominent in the male-sphere. Prior to her nomination, she described the male networks as being traceable to 23. Zoom Interview with Author, 17 June 2020
24. Zoom Interview with the Author, 25 June 2020

26. Zoom Interview with the Author, 17 June 2020
27. Zoom Interview with the Author, 8 July 2020
democracy, like many concepts in political science, escapes easy definition. but it's safe to say that most models of democracy include some notion of political competition, and of the peaceful transfer of power from one group to another. as adam przeworski puts it, "democracy is a system in which partiesthrow elections."¹ but by this metric, japan hardly qualifies as a democracy. for the vast majority of its postwar history, the country has been ruled by a single political party—the liberal democratic party of japan (ldp). after a landmark electoral reform introduced proportional representation in 1994, many observers declared an end to the "1955 system" of ldp dominance.² for a brief moment in the early 2010s, it seemed that regular two-party competition between the ldp and democratic party of japan (dpj) had finally become a reality.³ but the past eight years have seen a return to the "old days" of ldp control. after a crushing electoral defeat in 2012, the dpj was forced back into the political wilderness. in the years since, the ldp has decisively reestablished its control over the diet and premiership, while the opposition has returned to its previous state of fragmentation and electoral weakness.

the causes of ldp resurgence are varied, and scholars have explored many potential explanations for the party's post-2012 recovery. but one area that has been relatively overlooked is the relationship between ldp success and the phenomenon known as "depoliticization." as we will discuss at greater length in the literature review, depoliticization theorists like matthew flinders and matt wood recognize three main forms of depoliticization: governmental, societal and discursive. in this paper, we will focus on the first two categories. governmental depoliticization is generally characterized as the "denial of political contingency and the transfer of [state] functions away from elected politicians."⁴ in the japanese context, this kind of depoliticization is manifested through the de facto assumption of control over policymaking ties forged as early as prep school or college, later in entry-level positions in law firms, or on capitol hill. washington women also have networks, but until recently these networks were primarily social or philanthropic. men focused on power. women focused on everything but power.

after her appointment, albright noted that "diplomatic leadership was so long the domain of men that henry kissinger told an audience in 1997 that he wanted to welcome her to the 'fraternity' of secretaries of state and she responded, 'henry, i hate to tell you, but it's not a fraternity anymore.'"²⁸ after albright's tenure, condoleezza rice and then hillary clinton were appointed to the position. during her time as secretary of state, clinton brought women's and girls' security, long a relatively minor aspect of us foreign policy, to the forefront of u.s. national security. this shift was a monumental achievement for the rights of women and girls all over the world and placed a reinvigorated emphasis on women's empowerment on the domestic front, especially in the institutions creating and producing foreign policy and security. her appointment has had many effects on the gender disparity in the field. while clinton was in office, twenty five women were appointed as ambassadors, a historic first. a woman at the top, especially a lifelong women's advocate like hillary clinton, made it "easier for a president to pick a woman ambassador for washington."²⁹ in the u.s., "more than half of new recruits for the us foreign service and 20 percent of the chiefs of mission [were] women."³⁰ with both male allies helping to pave the way for women and with women occupying positions at the highest levels of power, women have been able to better achieve their full potential and become prominent voices in the field.

¹ adam przeworski, democracy and the market: political and economic reforms in eastern europe and latin america (cambridge university press, 1991), 10.

24 bashevkin sylvia, women as foreign policy leaders: national security and gender politics in superpower america (new york: oxford university press, 2018), 14
26 hudson valerie and patricia leidl, the hillary doctrine: sex and american foreign policy, 57
28 ibid.
29 ibid.
30 ibid.
authority by bureaucratic agencies like the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), which emerged as the primary originators of economic policy in the postwar era.\(^5\) Over the course of this period, the LDP developed a symbiotic relationship with Japan’s administrative state, and with the country’s leading corporations. At the height of the 1955 system, scholars like Chalmers Johnson characterized the LDP regime as a technocracy controlled by an axis of bureaucrats, professional politicians and business interests.\(^6\) Societal depoliticization refers to a “sense of diminished interest in public affairs on the part of the public”.\(^7\) Such attitudes can be cultivated by a variety of actors in civil society.

The current literature on LDP electoral strength would benefit from an analysis of the unique role that depoliticization plays in creating a favorable political climate for LDP dominance. Scholars like Thomas Feldhoff have noted that “depoliticisation [sic], which extends across all governing levels in Japan and across multiple policy spheres, is in the interest of those parties in power.” Feldhoff says that this “is a key message that has rarely been touched upon in the literature so far”.\(^8\)

This paper seeks to fill that gap by applying the general model of depoliticization to the specific case of Japan. We will explore the ways in which historical, social and political factors have contributed to widespread societal and governmental depoliticization, and how these processes laid the groundwork for the LDP’s post-2012 resurgence. We will examine how the two aforementioned forms of depoliticization reinforce each other in contemporary Japan, exemplifying the “interplay” between governmental and societal depoliticization that Wood and Flinders describe in their 2014 article “Rethinking Depoliticisation: Beyond the Governmental.”\(^9\) In the Japanese case, linkages between governmental and societal depoliticization are particularly clear with regard to the 2009-12 DPJ government and its failure to forge a strong two-party system. The DPJ’s failure, which was caused in large part by governmental depoliticization, contributed to societal depoliticization in the long run (as expressed by low voter turnout and generally limited political participation).

First, we discuss the scholarly literature on LDP dominance, analyzing some of the most important factors behind the party’s half-century of electoral success. Then we examine the ways in which governmental depoliticization prevented the DPJ from fulfilling its electoral mandate during the party’s brief stint in government from 2009-12, and how this failure may have contributed to internal splits within the opposition (which increased the LDP’s electoral strength) and fueled societal depoliticization. Next, we discuss the depoliticizing role played by the Japanese educational system and the media, and the broader relationship between societal depoliticization and LDP success. Finally, we consider the implications of depoliticization for Japan’s political future.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the second half of the twentieth century, the “dominant-party” model of democracy (as exemplified by cases like South Korea, Taiwan, Mexico and Italy) seemed to present a strong alternative to competitive, multiparty democracy. But the last few decades have generally seen a decline in the prevalence of dominant party systems. This trend can be observed in countries as diverse as Italy, Mexico, South Korea and Taiwan. But the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party is a notable outlier in its avoidance of dominant party decline. While the LDP can no longer claim to be electorally undefeated, the party has still governed (whether as a majority or in coalition) for roughly 22 out of the 26 years since the end of the one and a half-party system. This record is especially unusual in light of the fact that Japan has possessed ostensibly democratic political institutions since 1947. Furthermore, it sets Japan apart from neighboring countries like South Korea and Taiwan, which both overcame a legacy of single-party dominance. While there are some major historical and political differences between these three countries, they are a compelling set of cases to compare. All three followed a general policy of state-led capitalist development for most of the 20th century. They also share similar long-term economic challenges (e.g. aging demographics and diminished GDP growth prospects), broadly comparable electoral systems, and the common institutional legacy of Imperial Japan.\(^11\) South Korea, in particular, seems an apt counter model as the various iterations of Korea’s conservative dominant party were “deliberately modeled” after the LDP.\(^12\) In addition, the election of Korean leftist Kim Dae Jung in 1997 was an example of the opposition overthrowing a once-dominant party in the wake of a major economic disaster (the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis) that revealed the failings of the status quo. The 2008 recession provided a similar opportunity for the

\(^5\) As Wood and Flinders note in “Rethinking Depoliticisation”, there is some overlap between this process of governmental depoliticization and the general concept of state autonomy. Indeed, many scholars view depoliticization as part of a “conceptualisation [sic], relating to ‘good governance’ or ‘autonomy for technocratic authority from what are seen as distributional (political) coalitions.’” (Wood and Flinders, 158)


\(^7\) Flinders and Wood, 137.


\(^12\) Chaibong, 137.
Japanese opposition, but the DPJ government collapsed after just four years in power (and hasn’t regained control in the eight years since).

Despite the aforementioned similarities in political climate, center-left opposition parties in South Korea and Taiwan have repeatedly outperformed their Japanese counterparts in recent years.¹³ This raises an important question: how has the LDP managed to overcome the post-Cold War legitimacy crisis (that felled virtually all other dominant party democratic regimes) and survived as a viable, and arguably still monopolistic, political force? Scholars have not come to any definitive consensus with regard to the causes of continued LDP dominance, but a variety of different explanations have been proposed.

Some scholars, like Karen Cox and Leonard Schoppa, have observed that the LDP exploits certain weaknesses built into Japan’s election reform laws. One such weakness is the fact that Japanese law does not allow candidates in single-member districts to list themselves under multiple party tickets. This creates a structural disadvantage for small parties in Japan, as they must take the “adhoc approach of running candidates here and there”.¹⁴ Minor parties in Italy are spared this problem thanks to electoral reform legislation enacted in the 1990s, which allowed for multi-ticket candidates.

More significantly, the LDP enjoys several big structural advantages which reforms have been incapable of eliminating thus far. One of these advantages is the disproportionate voting power of pro-LDP rural districts. The LDP has long relied on the rural vote as a key pillar of support, and it continues to do so today. The party “systematically [wins] rural constituencies with low ratios of population to representative,” as this group is especially “dependent on redistributive benefits” to which the LDP possesses “nearly uninterrupted access”.¹⁵ As Masahisa Endo, Robert Pekkanen and Robert Reed point out in “The LDP’s Path Back to Power,” the agricultural lobby’s continued alignment with the LDP helped the party mobilize voters to unseat the DPJ’s legislative majority in 2012.¹⁶

This brand of pork-barrel politics speaks to a larger underlying factor that Japanese reformers have not sufficiently addressed: pervasive clientelism. This clientelism largely benefits the LDP, as noted by scholars like Ethan Scheiner and Filippo Tronconi. This is because the country’s “clientelistic and centralized governmental system” ensures that the ruling party/coalition in the Diet has great control over dispersal of funds at all levels of government.¹⁷

This creates incentives for local politicians to align themselves with the party most likely to win national elections (and therefore best able to dispense patronage/pork barrel spending to their district). The LDP has had decades to build up a network of fiercely loyal politicians, who enjoy firm support from koenkai.¹⁸ Thus, even after substantial electoral reform, the LDP still enjoys the advantage of a “deep pool of local politicians who could mobilize voters for the party”.¹⁹ Organizational speaking, it has proven difficult for the opposition to catch up. Ellis Krauss and Robert Pekkanen also emphasize the continued role of koenkai in the LDP party machine, arguing that koenkai are useful in gathering the votes of “ticket-splitters” who vote for opposition parties in PR contests but are persuaded to vote LDP in SMD races due to the influence of “personal” politics.²⁰ This kind of particularism has gone “hand in hand” with outright corruption and “money-power politics”.²¹ As the largest, most well-organized and well-funded party in Japan, it stands to reason that the LDP would thrive in such a political climate.

Finally, the LDP’s success is undoubtedly aided by high levels of factionalism and fracturing among Japan’s numerous opposition parties. Like many of the aforementioned factors, this is a long standing issue. In the 2000 election, for example, a failure to coordinate among the various opposition parties granted the LDP around 68 more district seats than it would have otherwise gained - enough to tip the balance of power in the Lower House.²² This kind of result was typical until the 2000s, when the opposition began to consolidate in earnest around the DPJ. But the DPJ proved vulnerable to fragmentation, and collapsed entirely in the mid-2010s.²³

While each of the aforementioned explanations may hold some explanatory power, the literature on LDP dominance would benefit from an application of depoliticization theory to the Japanese case. There is already some scholarly support for a “depoliticization hypothesis” to (at least partially) explain the LDP’s resilience. Eric C. Browne and Kim Sunwoong claim that the failure of dominant parties like Italy’s Christian Democracy (CD) and Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was primarily caused by an erosion of voter confidence (due to decades of corruption), which grew so intense that it triggered party fragmentation as breakaway factions saw an opportunity to capitalize on anti-establishment fervor. In Japan, however, erosion of voter confidence hasn’t led to widespread support for opposition parties. Instead, it has generated “apathy toward the political system itself”.²⁴ This has led to

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¹² Sung, 1.
¹⁴ Feldhoff, 133.
¹⁶ Scheiner and Tronconi, 18.
¹⁹ Feldhoff, 132
²⁰ Cox and Schoppa, 1037.
²¹ Scheiner and Tronconi, 18.
²² Purnendra Jain, “Japan’s 2019 upper house election: Solidifying Abe, the LDP, and return to a one-party dominant political system,” Asian Journal of Comparative Politics 5, no. 1 (2020): 58.
²⁴ Scheiner and Tronconi, 18.
decline in turnout and participation. While Browne and Kim frame these trends as a weakness for the LDP, it could be interpreted as a strength because apathy prevents the emergence of a bottom-up political movement that could generate grassroots opposition outside of the LDP-dominated system of formal electoral politics. Furthermore, the LDP’s superior ability to mobilize the “organized vote” (through well-developed koenkai networks) gives the party a general advantage in low-turnout elections. This view is reinforced by Hirotaka Kasai, who claims that Japan’s business and political elite have intentionally fostered a climate of cynicism and indifference towards Japan’s constitutional principles, in order to facilitate the acceptance of undemocratic policies that protect those in power from public scrutiny. Examples of such policies include the anti-transparency State Secrets Law enacted in 2013. While Browne, Kim, Kasai and others have identified a general culture of apathy and “depoliticization,” there does not yet appear to be a firm scholarly consensus regarding the root causes of Japanese depoliticization, nor has there been sufficient analysis of the relationship between depoliticization and LDP dominance.

This paper will analyze the Japanese case by applying a theory of depoliticization advanced by Matthew Flinders and Matt Wood, who have emerged as leading scholars on the subject in recent years. In “Rethinking Depoliticization: Beyond the Governmental”, Wood and Flinders distinguish between three separate but mutually reinforcing categories of depoliticization.

The first is “governmental” depoliticization, which is characterized as a mode of statecraft that transfers decision making responsibility away from actors who can be held directly accountable to the public (e.g. elected officials) and places it in the hands of “apolitical” institutions like regulatory agencies, central banks, and the judiciary.

The second is “societal” depoliticization, which encompasses any process by which the “social deliberation surrounding [political issues] gradually erodes,” often resulting in low levels of political participation among the citizenry. This kind of depoliticization can be carried out by a wide range of actors in civil society, including media outlets, social movements and business associations.

The final category of depoliticization is “discursive.” Discursive depoliticization refers to the use of ideas and language as a tool to “naturalize” political issues by making certain options seem inevitable, and opposition to those options irrational. This concept draws on the work of Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who emphasized “the role of language and culture in relation to political debates.” There is a great deal of overlap between discursive and societal depoliticization, as “these two forms or modes of depoliticisation are both distinctive, interrelated, and to some extent even parasitical”. For the purposes of this paper, we will limit ourselves to a discussion of societal and governmental depoliticization, for two main reasons. First, discursive depoliticization is often produced by the same actors (in the state and civil society) as societal depoliticization. Second, a proper understanding of discursive depoliticization requires an extensive engagement with theoretical literature that is beyond the limited scope of this paper. Discursive techniques are employed by many of the same institutions that promote societal depoliticization, such as the media and education system.

Having established a basic understanding of depoliticization and its two main forms (governmental and societal), we can now discuss the role that each type of depoliticization plays in the LDP’s return to power. We will begin with governmental depoliticization.

GOVERNMENTAL DEPOLITICIZATION AND THE DPJ’S FAILURE

Governmental depoliticization has a complex and important relationship to the Japanese case. The LDP has traditionally maintained a tacit arrangement with Japan’s powerful, highly autonomous bureaucracy. For much of the postwar era, bureaucratic agencies were allowed to take the lead in the policymaking process, and the role of the LDP-controlled Diet was to approve (or occasionally reject) bureaucratic proposals. This technocratic system is a clear example of governmental depoliticization, as the legislature and prime minister (the democratically accountable branches of government) generally take their cue from unelected policy experts and the private business interests that the bureaucracy tends to represent due to Japan’s amakudari system (an implicit quid pro quo exchange which involves state officials being rewarded with lucrative positions on the boards of companies they were charged with overseeing, in return for lax regulation).

In 2009, it seemed like things might finally change. Taking advantage of 1990s-era electoral reforms and a succession of short-lived, scandal-ridden LDP premierships, the DPJ won a landmark electoral victory “by promising to turn politicians into the true decision-makers and end the practice of bureaucrats calling the shots on behalf of ministries instead of the people”.

References:

26 Kasai, 24.
27 Wood and Flinders, 157-8.
28 ibid., 159-60.
29 ibid., 158.
30 ibid., 161.
31 ibid., 162.
32 ibid., 152.
Prime Minister Hatoyama pledged to act on this electoral mandate, and implement a “shift in ‘sovereignty’ [...] to end the bureaucracy-controlled government and establish a true people-centered government”.35 Hatoyama planned to achieve this grand promise through a set of institutional reforms. The new administration quickly moved to abolish vice-ministerial meetings (which were traditionally a vehicle for the bureaucracy to decide on policy that the politicians would subsequently enact). Hatoyama’s government also created an administrative firewall between politicians and bureaucrats, constraining the latter to the role of “providing basic data and information” rather than determining what policies are actually implemented.36 The overall goal was the transfer of policymaking authority away from unelected, LDP-era bureaucrats and its centralization in the hands of elected DPJ cabinet ministers.37

Unfortunately for the DPJ’s would-be reformers, decades of governmental depoliticization had swollen the bureaucracy’s role in governance to such an extent that bureaucratic compliance was necessary to accomplish virtually any policy objectives. Political appointees lacked the policy experience to effectively manage their ministries without direction from career officials, and the sudden exclusion of career officials damaged bureaucratic morale.38 The abolition of vice-ministerial meetings also backfired in many respects. Under the old system, the prime minister would influence policy making by informally participating in vice-ministerial meetings to communicate the government’s agenda to bureaucrats (using the deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary as an intermediary). The loss of this communication channel created a disconnect between the policymakers who made the decisions and the officials responsible for implementing them.39 The deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary (CCS) could no longer function as the prime minister’s liaison to the bureaucracy, and as a result the cabinet’s policy making power actually weakened.40 Over the next few years, the DPJ’s poor relationship with the bureaucracy would result in a series of policy failures, DOOING THE REFORMERS’ DREAM OF REPOLITICIZING JAPAN’S GOVERNING PROCESS. Ironically, the long-term effect of DPJ rule was increased societal depoliticization, as indicated by steadily decreasing voter turnout rates in recent elections.41

The costs of breaking with the bureaucracy had already begun to materialize by 2010. Hatoyama resigned his premiership on June 2, after abandoning a campaign pledge to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, base relocation in a negative light.42 The Japanese media, for reasons we will later explain, is typically willing to report official leaks with little corroboration or context, and this case was no exception. The press “utterly [failed] to explain to the people the true nature of the power struggle that was going on or to treat the leakers with a due degree of skepticism.”43 As a result, Hatoyama “completely surrendered” and abandoned the relocation effort.44

Under Hatoyama’s successor Kan Naoto, it became even clearer that the DPJ could not effectively govern without bureaucratic support. During his time as Hatoyama’s finance minister, Kan’s lack of economic expertise had forced him to rely on memos prepared by bureaucratic advisors. This experience changed his prior anti-bureaucratic outlook, and when Kan became prime minister he took several measures to break down Hatoyama’s “firewall” between politicians and career officials.45 Still, Kan refused to reinstate the vice-ministerial meetings, despite “basically admitt[ing] that the old vice-ministerial meeting was necessary for policy coordination”.46

In 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear meltdown would test the limits of the DPJ’s ability to govern without bureaucratic direction. This disaster revealed the pitfalls of Hatoyama’s hardline reform effort, as “inter-agency coordination was needed at various working levels” to address the myriad of problems caused by the earthquake and meltdown.47 Since the DPJ had “identified inter-agency policy coordination as the jurisdiction of political leaders” and had limited bureaucrats’ ability to contact officials or politicians from other ministries, the “network for inter-agency coordination within the government [...] had basically been destroyed.” Poor coordination greatly delayed the government’s response in regard to certain forms of complicated relief assistance which required involvement by multiple ministries.48 This “crisis of crisis management” was politically devastating for Kan, and a vote of no confidence forced his resignation in August of 2011.49

The failures of Hatoyama and Kan would haunt the next DPJ prime minister, Noda Yoshihiko. Understanding that path dependency had limited the DPJ’s ability to govern without heavy bureaucratic input, Noda quickly reintroduced the vice-ministerial meeting (in all but name), and generally allowed the bureaucracy to re-acquire its hold on the reins of power.50 Not only did Noda demolish what was left of the Hatoyama-era “firewall”, he also proved willing to reverse long standing DPJ political stances upon urging from

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36 Shinoda, 800-01.
37 Shinoda, 800.
38 Ibid., 808.
39 Ibid., 808-09.
40 Ibid., 810.
41 Feldhoff, 140.
43 Ibid., 60.
44 Ibid., 61.
45 Shinoda, 814.
46 Ibid., 815.
47 Ibid., 819.
48 Ibid., 819.
49 Ibid., 820.
50 Ibid., 821.
his technocratic advisors. Specifically, Noda acquiesced to an increase in the consumption tax that was proposed by Ministry of Finance officials.\(^51\) This move was particularly controversial because the DPJ’s 2009 manifesto had promised that the party “would not try to raise the levy during the four-year terms of its Lower House ranks”.\(^52\) The consumption tax hike was in keeping with previous increases that the MOF and Treasury had pressured Japanese governments to propose in the past, despite the typical effect of a “significant reduction in popularity immediately after [...] raising the possibility of tax legislation”.\(^53\) Thus, Noda’s decision to raise the tax, despite the political risks, demonstrated the enduring strength of bureaucrats’ agenda-setting power.

As a result, Noda’s administration alienated followers of Ozawa Ichiro, a powerful factional leader within the DPJ. This anti-Noda contingent felt betrayed by the Prime Minister’s consumption tax increase and moderate position on nuclear power. As a result, the party underwent a major split between Ozawa’s allies and Noda loyalists. Opposition fracturing was a major factor in smoothing the LDP’s path back to dominant-party status, and at the present moment the opposition is weaker and more disunited than it has been at any point since the end of the 1955 system.\(^54\) This process of fracturing was accelerated by the 2012 election,\(^55\) and the LDP has managed to win six consecutive elections over the course of the decade in the face of opposition weakness and division.\(^56\)

After years of policy failure, the DPJ under Noda had more or less capitulated to the Japanese bureaucracy. Generations of governmental depoliticization had fostered a system in which autonomous inter-agency coordination (and institutions like the vice-ministerial meeting) were essential for the effective implementation of policy, especially in a crisis like the Fukushima meltdown. The DPJ’s inability to repoliticize the governing process contributed to its electoral downfall in 2012, and to the resurgence of the LDP as a dominant party in the mid to late 2010s. After successive DPJ governments either abandoned, reversed or failed to implement their campaign promises, voters were left “completely confused about what the DPJ stood for.”\(^57\) This brings us to the second type of depoliticization described by Flinders and Wood: societal depoliticization.

The DPJ’s failure to fulfill its electoral mandate had a depoliticizing effect on voters who had hoped in 2009 that the LDP-bureaucratic establishment would be overcome by a DPJ government. Accordingly, the 2012 election saw “irresistible apathy on the part of the electorate,”\(^58\) and the LDP won in a landslide. Voter disillusionment appears to have persisted, as the LDP won repeatedly throughout the mid-late 2010s in low-turnout contests. As we will soon discuss, there is evidence that these low-turnout elections accentuated the LDP’s organizational advantages and strengthened the party’s position. The conclusion is clear – “would-be challengers [to the LDP] must find a way to turn [voters] out and keep them active for more than just a single election.”\(^59\) By reneging on its 2009 commitment to end the bureaucracy’s stranglehold on policy making, the DPJ lost the credibility necessary to mobilize disaffected voters.

By preventing the DPJ from fulfilling its 2009 electoral mandate, governmental depoliticization foreclosed the possibility of systemic change that might repoliticize the populace and spur future opposition victories. Policy reversals and electoral failure contributed to DPJ (later renamed the Democratic Party) fracturing and the collapse of Japan’s nascent two-party system. Thus, we can see that the relationship between governmental and societal depoliticization is crucial to understanding how Japan “missed its chance” (for the time being) to fully institutionalize two-party competition. The impact of societal depoliticization on LDP success is twofold. First, citizens’ sense of disinterest/disinvestment in politics leads to a decreased interest in electoral participation. Considering the fact that low voter turnout has likely benefited the LDP in recent elections,\(^60\) this is a boon for the ruling party. A strong case can be made that the “disappointed deactivation” of “casual voters” helped cause the DPJ’s loss in 2012.\(^61\) Additionally, societal depoliticization may be at least partially to blame for the lack of an electorally viable populist movement in Japan. While Japan’s employment rate is significantly above the OECD average,\(^62\) Japan faces rising economic inequality\(^63\) and slow wage growth;\(^64\) problems which have triggered the rise of populism elsewhere. But new populist parties like Reiwa Shinsengumi have thus far failed to gain much traction in the Japanese political landscape. And

\(^{51}\) ibid., 821.

\(^{52}\) Ito, “DPJ’s Promise to Change the System Failed.”


\(^{54}\) Jain, 33.

\(^{55}\) Inoguchi, 197.

\(^{56}\) Jain, 24–5.

\(^{57}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{58}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{59}\) Feldhoff, 136.

\(^{60}\) Jain, 33.

\(^{61}\) Scheiner et. al, 50–51.

\(^{62}\) J. Feldhoff, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{63}\) Jain, 33.

\(^{64}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{65}\) Jain, 24–5.

\(^{66}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{67}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{68}\) Feldhoff, 136.

\(^{69}\) Jain, 33.

\(^{70}\) Scheiner et. al, 50–51.

\(^{71}\) Jain, 33.

\(^{72}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.

\(^{73}\) Jain, 24–5.

\(^{74}\) Schoppa, Leonard, “A Vote Against the DPJ, Not in Favor of the LDP:” Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2012), 2.
while the post-Fukushima era has seen a number of mass demonstrations, these events have largely failed to coalesce into a politically effective grassroots pressure campaign. To be sure, societal depoliticization is far from the only factor that stymies populism and grassroots protest in Japan. But it seems likely that this type of depoliticization plays some role, for as the next section will go on to show, societal depoliticization is associated with a decreased interest in informal political participation.

Our discussion of societal depoliticization will be divided into two parts. First, we will introduce the concept of “political citizenship,” and explain how it relates to depoliticization (specifically, in the context of the Japanese educational system). Then, we will discuss the role of the Japanese media in undermining active political citizenship and thereby increasing societal depoliticization.

### PART I – POLITICAL CITIZENSHIP

Like depoliticization, political citizenship is a broad and fluid concept. Here, we will use the definition provided by Bernard Crick: political citizenship constitutes an “involvement in public affairs by those who [have] the rights of citizens: to take part in public debate and, directly or indirectly, in shaping the laws and decisions of a state.” In other words, political citizenship requires more than legal obligation or national identification; it requires that the citizen actually engage with the institutions that govern their country. The link between political citizenship and societal depoliticization is clear. If a nation’s citizens do not actively engage with the institutions that govern their country, then it seems to follow that the citizenry in question has been depoliticized. Thus, when determining whether or not a Japanese institution contributes to societal depoliticization, we will use the promotion (or discouragement) of political citizenship as our primary metric.

The first institution that we will consider is the Japanese education system. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the American Occupation government made a brief effort to “democratize” Japan’s school system. Aiming to create a “thick” democracy in Japan, the United States tried to inculcate democratic values by introducing a “citizenship education curriculum” that might “nurture a cohort of youth who could then later on function as active political citizens in Japanese democracy”. However, this focus on democratization was short-lived and the civic education program was “never [...] firmly institutionalised [sic.] in post war Japan.” Civic education efforts fell victim to a broader policy shift in the early years of the Cold War, as the U.S. decided that its geopolitical interests were best served by propping up the LDP and “prioritizing ‘economic rehabilitation’” over democratization.

In ensuing decades, the “political socialisation [sic.] process which is seen as essential for establishing and nurturing political citizenship[…], especially so for a society that had never operated under popular sovereignty, [was] seen to have been poorly institutionalized.” As a result, contemporary Japanese civic education is not particularly robust. While Japanese law mandates that schools promote a “public mindset,” students are not generally taught more than the “basic facts about democracy and social rules,” and they are not often “required to take part in rule/policy making” exercises or given lessons concerning the “broader meaning of political skills.” Essentially, Japanese students are “taught to ‘obey rules’ but are not taught how to make them”. Overall, political citizenship is ignored (if not actively discouraged) by the Japanese education system.

The de-emphasis of political citizenship has a close relationship with overall societal depoliticization. The Japanese people are certainly legal citizens of their democracy, and national identity is strong in Japan. But neither legal nor national citizenship demands the kind of deep civic engagement that political citizenship does. A study commissioned by Tohoku University in 2015 indicated that Japanese students are “highly accustomed to the role as a ‘recipient’ of politics and political services”, rather than the role of active participant. This “recipient” model of political engagement implies a hard separation between the political class and ordinary people, wherein the “decision makers” are not part of the same body politic as their constituents. This worldview is profoundly incompatible with a strong concept of political citizenship, and seems to reveal a high level of societal depoliticization among Japanese youth. The survey subjects tended to see politics as a temporary action, centered around periodic votes or circumscribed moments of engagement. Furthermore, the students were often cynical towards voting/formal participation, but simultaneously uninterested in or critical of demonstrations/informal politics. While many students expressed a desire to make positive change in society, they felt as though the avenues of political action available to them (both formal and informal) were ineffective.

Generally speaking, there “appears to be a missing ‘pipe’ that sufficiently connects the interest and concerns that youth have toward society, with politics and action”. As previously discussed, one reason for the absence of such a “pipe” is the lack of substantive civics education in Japanese schools. Alongside the education system, the Japanese media has also failed to “equip

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66 Tsukada, 4.  
67 Ibid., 4.

68 Ibid., 4-5.  
69 Ibid., 5.  
70 Ibid., 5.  
71 Ibid., 9.  
72 Ibid., 17.  
73 Ibid., 17.  
74 Ibid., 20.
the youth with the concepts, values, and skills to function as political citizens in a democracy”.⁷⁵ As we will discuss at length in the following section, the Japanese press has systematically colluded with the LDP-dominated state bureaucracy, decisively failing to promote the “sense of inclusion” […] in the political arena” that is necessary for the development of strong political citizenship.⁷⁶

PART II – THE MEDIA

The media is one of the most important agents in the process of societal depoliticization, as news outlets are deeply involved with shaping our interpretation of information. As Laurie Ann Freeman explains in Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan’s Mass Media, “the power of the media resides […] in their ability to channel information and ideas (both to and from elites, to and from society), to influence the setting and framing of political and social agendas, and to legitimize certain political economic or social groups and ideas as they delegitimize others”.⁷⁷ This power functions as a depoliticizing force in Japanese society (largely to the benefit of the LDP).

Large, mainstream media outlets in Japan tend to frame themselves as “impartial” and “nonpolitical,” so as to appeal to as wide a reader/viewership as possible. But the “neutrality” of Japanese media is “that of the closely linked insider who rarely challenges the status quo”.⁷⁸ Reporters are so closely tied to the LDP-dominated state ministries that they routinely present pro-government narratives as the only legitimate viewpoint, often basing their articles very closely on pre-approved press releases.⁷⁹ Certainly, journalists in other democracies also enjoy close working relationships with government officials. But Japanese reporters tend to rely on official sources to a far greater degree than their foreign counterparts. At the turn of the millennium, it was estimated that up to 90 percent of reporting is based on information provided by government and therefore, generally LDP-aligned) sources.⁸⁰ Despite reform efforts under the 2009-12 DPJ government, media-state relations in Japan have remained significantly closer than in most other developed democracies.

This symbiotic relationship between state and media is explained by a number of institutional arrangements. The Japanese press has often been characterized as an “information cartel.” This means that newsgathering is organized according to a set of rules and relationships that “limit the types of news that get reported and the number and makeup of those who do the reporting”.⁸¹ The Japanese media landscape is dominated by collegial organizations called kisha clubs, which are composed of journalists from various media outlets. Their purpose is to streamline newsgathering in one particular area of government – for example, one kisha club might cover the Ministry of Finance, while another might focus on the Prime Minister and his cabinet. The members of these clubs are allowed exclusive access to official sources in their assigned area of government, but in exchange they are expected to practice self-censorship at the risk of expulsion from the club.⁸² Kisha reporting is governed by a set of implicit norms, such as the infrequency of exclusive interviews with sources,⁸³ vague attribution (or outright non-attribution) of quotes from government officials,⁸⁴ and “secret briefings” for club members that lack the transparency of public press conferences.⁸⁵

These arrangements are mutually beneficial for both the kisha members and their sources. The journalists are “entitled” to a certain degree of information-sharing by their sources, and they can generally expect equitable distribution of this information among all members of the club, with limitations on favoritism for certain reporters over others.⁸⁶ In exchange, government officials are able to control the dissemination of information and avoid being blindsided by unfavorable news stories. Scandals are rarely broken by kisha club reporters,⁸⁷ and limitations on information exchange between members of different clubs prevents coordination between journalists specializing in different areas. This prevents the kind of collaboration necessary to break big, investigative stories that expose government corruption.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the compensation structure of large Japanese media firms creates a strong incentive for reporters to follow the rules. Many of these companies adhere to a system of more-or-less lifelong employment, wherein “employees with permanent positions know that if they lose their job and re-enter the job market at middle age, they may never work again.”⁸⁹ Therefore, “[anyone] transgressing the kisha system runs the risk of losing access and having their career derailed[…] in clinging to this privileged access, the media[…] becomes beholden to the officials and institutions they are supposed to cover”.⁹⁰

While the kisha club cartels may be beneficial for journalists and bureaucrats alike, those benefits come at the expense of the news-consuming public. Not only is the public less aware of scandals but everyday reporting is

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⁷⁵ Freeman, 31.
⁷⁶ Ibid., 21.
⁷⁸ Ibid., 165.
⁷⁹ Ibid., 86.
⁸⁰ Ibid., 130.
⁸¹ Ibid., 15.
⁸² Freeman, 104-5.
⁸³ Freeman, 100.
⁸⁴ Ibid., 128-31.
⁸⁵ Ibid., 88.
⁸⁶ Ibid., 88.
⁸⁷ Major scandals are more often reported in news magazines or the foreign press before they make their way into the rest of the Japanese media ecosystem (Freeman, 100).
⁸⁸ Freeman, 98.
done in the style of “press release journalism.” This term derisively refers to the practice of uncritically repeating official talking points (originating in government press releases) without doing any outside investigation to corroborate official claims or find dissenting perspectives. Cloaked in a veneer of “impartiality,” press release journalism is nonetheless a “denial of the existence of choice” that serves to dim public awareness of any political opposition to the government’s agenda. Considering that the LDP has maintained a monopoly on political power for the vast majority of Japan’s postwar history, media-state collusion has generally benefited the LDP and marginalized its opposition. This dynamic has led Freeman to conclude that Japan’s cozy media-state relationship is “certainly one of [the factors]” keeping the LDP in power.

The rise of non-print media has proven little obstacle to the kisha system. Televised news broadcasters are owned by the same major companies that control newspaper circulation in Japan, and corporate policy typically limits the independent reporting abilities of television journalists, such that their primary function is to report on stories that have already been broken by kisha newspaper reporters. This produces a homogenized media landscape across multiple platforms, and enables the continued primacy of “press release journalism” in Japan’s modern media landscape. The proliferation of digital media does not appear to have upset this dynamic, as television and print media continue to play a commanding role in the landscape of Japanese political news. If online, alternative media does in fact possess the potential to open up Japan’s media shop, then that potential remains untapped for the time being. Regardless, online media outlets are not immune to the pressures of kisha-style reporting, as they can still be denied access to official sources unless they submit to self-censorship.

During the DPJ’s stint in government from 2009-12, the kisha clubs saw the first real challenge to their stranglehold on political reporting. Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio pledged to open up the “closed shop” that controlled Japanese media, a move that was clearly in the party’s “self-interest since the DPJ felt Japan’s closed media system favored its Liberal Democratic Party rivals”. Hatoyama tried to move away from exclusive, kisha-only briefings in favor of more transparent press conferences that allowed in foreign journalists and non-kisha “freelancers” (two groups that the Japanese media establishment distrusts due to their nonadherence to kisha club rules). Many of his cabinet ministers soon followed suit. Hatoyama also formally disclosed the existence of an LDP-era “slush fund” that prime ministers had used to “curry political favor” among journalists. However, these actions did not fundamentally change the kisha system, and the return of the LDP in 2012 foreclosed the possibility of more substantive reforms.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the LDP has systematically worked to re-entrench the country’s media cartel. At government press conferences, Abe rarely takes questions from non-kisha journalists. On the rare occasion that the Prime Minister or one of his Cabinet members faces real scrutiny (usually from foreign or freelance reporters), the resulting stories fail to gain traction in the broader media landscape. For example, in 2015 Abe was questioned on his government’s refugee policy by a Reuters reporter. His answer, which suggested that “he had not seriously considered the refugee issue”, was widely circulated through the global media ecosystem while remaining “mostly ignored by the big media in Japan”.

But Abe has done far more than simply reinforce pre-existing norms regarding media behavior. His administration has taken aggressive steps to incentivize self-censorship in the Japanese press, enacting security legislation that restricts the public’s access to information. The Abe government has also used informal techniques of coercion to intimidate media organizations like the newspaper Asahi Shimbun, a liberal paper that has been openly critical of the Prime Minister.

Since its return to power in the early 2010s, the LDP has enacted controversial laws that restrict speech and press freedoms. Most significant for the Japanese media is the 2013 State Secrets Law. This deeply unpopular law gave the government great discretion regarding what information can be classified as a “state secret” and concealed from the press and public. The law also increased the penalties for leaking classified information. Critics warn that this law allows the LDP government to exercise even stricter control over the public dissemination of information. The government has officially stated that nuclear power could be considered a national security issue under this law, which raised concerns in 2014 that the State Secrets Law would be used to conceal government incompetence or malfeasance surrounding the Fukushima meltdown response.

For the time being, these concerns remain largely hypothetical. But when

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91 Freeman, 167.
92 Freeman, 157-9.
96 Ibid., 6.
it comes to the informal suppression of dissenting media, the Abe government has taken much more concrete action. The administration and its right-wing supporters have repeatedly attacked the Asahi over its coverage of controversial historical issues (like the so-called “comfort women” of World War II), and television broadcasters like NHK have been pressured to self-censor under the implicit threat of funding loss (as the company’s license fee revenue depends on government approval). This pressure is suspected to have caused the firing of three anti-Abe television anchors in March of 2016. That same year, Abe’s communications minister publicly asserted that the government has the authority to censor “politically biased” broadcasters. Although this sweeping claim has not yet been acted upon, it illustrates the administration’s attitude of intolerance towards dissent. NGOs have recognized this turn towards press restriction. The media watchdog organization Reporters Without Borders lowered Japan’s “press freedom” ranking in 2016 from 61st to 72nd (out of 180 states). Today, Japan still stands diminished at 66th place in the organization’s press freedom index.

As previously mentioned, this overrepresentation of government viewpoints contributes to societal depoliticization. Since the quality of discourse in a democratic polity is shaped by “the way in which [...] information is generated and disseminated”, the kisha clubs’ press release journalism is actively damaging to the opposition’s ability to mobilize voters and rally them against the LDP-dominated political establishment. This is an example of the “denial of the existence of choice” that Wood and Flinders argue is central to societal depoliticization. When the official narrative becomes the only legitimate one, room for political contestation is removed. We can see the depoliticizing effects of this process in the 2014 general election campaign, when opposition viewpoints were systematically undercovered by the mainstream media, likely encouraging low voter turnout. Low turnout was particularly beneficial for conservative incumbents in rural areas, as the “organized vote” of LDP-aligned agricultural cooperatives “gains more weight when the overall voter turnout declines.” In the same electoral cycle, some observers also criticized “non-transparency and the biased reporting by the mainstream media” surrounding the then-ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade negotiations. Trade liberalization is a particularly sensitive issue for the LDP, because it is unpopular with the party’s all-important rural constituency and is often opposed by the powerful “agricultural policy community”. Thus, the LDP benefits from reporting that “continues to downplay or even ignore critical issues” like the proposed trade pact.

Through the promotion of official views at the expense of dissenting ones, Japanese media outlets serve as de facto “social managers,” undercovering opposition forces, ignoring controversial issues, and often undermining protest movements by “showing institutionalized means of conflict resolution (court cases, meeting with bureaucrats, etc.) in a neutral light while casting opprobrium over more confrontational, grass-roots activities (human barricades, etc.)”. An example of this can be seen in the media coverage of mass protests that broke out in the wake of the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear disaster. These demonstrations were given relatively little attention in the mainstream press, particularly the major conservative paper Yomiuri Shimbun.

Under the kisha club-dominated mode of journalism, “[controversial] stories are not pursued, wayward politicians are not held accountable, and the public is [often] left ignorant of fundamental incongruencies in its own political and economic system.” The kisha clubs discourage serious “watchdog” reporting on the part of mainstream journalists, and their exclusive nature cuts off information access for the alternative media outlets that actually are engaging in independent journalism (e.g. freelance journalists, foreign reporters and news magazines). Multimedia keiretsu groups ensure that uncritical “press release journalism” is dominant across all major media platforms. Finally, the “impartial” public stance of many of these media outlets discourages critical examination of LDP talking points by framing them as objective truth. Each of these dynamics contributes to societal depoliticization and weakens the average person’s sense of political citizenship, as previously mentioned. If problems are ignored and solutions are not presented, it is little wonder that an increasing number of Japanese citizens feel apathetic towards (and are disengaged with) politics.

CONCLUSION: CONNECTING THE THREADS OF DEPOLITICIZATION

To be sure, depoliticization is far from a “silver bullet” explanation that fully accounts for the LDP’s return to dominant-party status in recent years. Since the LDP’s loss in 2009 occurred under a set of fairly special and unique circumstances (which were no longer present by 2012), perhaps some level of “pendulum swing” back to the LDP was inevitable, regardless of the outcome of the DPJ’s struggle against the bureaucracy. There were numerous other factors at play in the 2009 general election, such as the political reverberations

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103 McNeill, 10-11.
111 Freeman, 169.
102 Feldhoff, 136.
110 Ibid., 137.
112 Freeman, 169.
113 Ibid., 137.
109 Ibid., 139.
108 Ibid., 140.
107 Ibid., 137.
106 Freeman, 166.
105 Ibid., 137.
of the Great Recession, which saw governing parties thrown out of office in other parts of the world as well. Also, the LDP faced a number of inconvenient problems/political setbacks around that time, such as a scandal involving the mass disappearance of employee pension records.¹¹⁴ It is entirely possible that without this “perfect storm” the LDP would not have lost in 2009, or at least not by such an immense margin. But all things considered, it is clear that societal and governmental depoliticization have played at least some role in smoothing the LDP’s path back to power. Societal depoliticization has long served to benefit the ruling party, as the postwar education system discouraged the development of meaningful political citizenship and the media collaborated with LDP politicians and bureaucrats to restrict the public’s access to information regarding the “fundamental incongruencies in its political system” (and regarding the opposition’s response to these incongruencies).¹¹⁵ Neither of these institutions has been substantively reformed - Tsukada’s 2015 study indicates that the education system is still depoliticizing students, and the LDP-press relationship has gotten even more controlling than the days of Closing the Shop.

All things considered, the LDP’s resurgence confirms Wood and Flinders’ argument that the different forms of depoliticization are mutually reinforcing. Decades of governmental depoliticization left the opposition party unprepared to manage the affairs of state without direction from bureaucrats, leading to a string of policy failures and subsequent capitulations to the bureaucracy. These failures created intra-party splits in the DPJ, weakening the opposition’s unity. Furthermore, they fatally undermined voters’ confidence in the DPJ’s ability to govern, worsening the problem of societal depoliticization (which was already an issue due to the depoliticizing influence of media and schools). In other words, the long-term ramifications of governmental depoliticization serve to increase societal depoliticization in Japan. In turn, increased societal depoliticization is preventing opposition parties from regaining power and enacting the kinds of administrative reform that might repoliticize the Japanese state. If the opposition hopes to break Japan’s dominant party system once and for all, this “vicious cycle” of depoliticization must somehow be redressed.

According to David Wallace-Wells, author of The Uninhabitable Earth, “already, more than 10,000 people die each day from the small particles emitted from fossil-fuel burning; each year, 339,000 people die from wildfire smoke, in part because climate change has extended forest-fire season (in the U.S., it has increased by seventy-eight days since 1970).”¹¹ Several states in the international community have implemented policies to combat climate change. The United States, however, has failed to put together a comprehensive policy tackling the issues of climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The purpose of this paper is to explore what the United States has achieved with regards to climate policy, present the limitations it has encountered that have precluded comprehensive policy creation, and to explain why the future of climate change policy is highly uncertain. While there have been significant gains, four key limitations — a rise in conservative ideology, international noncooperation from the United States, poor use of adversarial legalism, and poor timing — have been sufficient in preventing the United States from creating comprehensive climate change policy. This paper concludes with a look to the future in climate policymaking, assessing whether or not a breakthrough will be feasible.

IMPORTANT GAINS THAT SET THE STAGE

While the federal government has failed to develop a comprehensive policy addressing the challenge of climate change, significant strides have been made at the state and federal levels. This paper will mention four

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¹¹⁴ Freeman, 161.
¹¹⁵ Freeman, 161.
significant achievements that have been made in policy, legislative, and administrative areas. First, the twenty-two legislative victories from 1964-1980 were the building blocks for current climate policymaking. For example, the Clean Air Act established national air quality standards to regulate motor vehicle and stationary emission sources. The Clean Air Act also became a central part of the 2007 opinion in Massachusetts vs. Environmental Protection Agency, where it was held that, “...the Clean Air Act’s sweeping definition of air pollutant unambiguously covers greenhouse gases...The act requires EPA to regulate whenever it forms a judgment that an air pollutant causes or contributes to air pollution which may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health and/or welfare”. As a result of this ruling, though eventually regressed, the Bush administration issued an executive order demanding the EPA to regulate greenhouse gasses. This ruling is just one example of how the “golden era” legislative victories impact modern law.

A second achievement is how states have implemented successful programs for regulating greenhouse gases. This is particularly true in California, a state that passed the, “...first important public policy in the United States to explicitly address the risks of climate change...” and made other gains combating climate change in more elusive ways. As the first important public policy to address the risks of climate change, what is known as the Pavley Bill gave the California Air Resources Board (CARB) the power to regulate greenhouse gasses. Given CARB’s extensive scientific and technical expertise, this was a big win for environmentalists. California made further progress when the state implemented a Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) in 2002 to address the 2000-2001 Electricity Crisis. This RPS, which became a model for other states, forced investor-owned utilities and retail sellers to increase the renewable energy usage from 12% to 20% by 2017. This effort was a particularly savvy move by environmental organizations, who managed not to bring up climate change when supporting the legislation and argued successfully that this RPS would benefit the state financially. California’s efforts “encouraged national environmental groups to pressure the federal government for federal climate change legislation,” and while the pressure proved unsuccessful, it is still a notable feat.

A third achievement is the Obama administration’s incorporation of $80 billion into the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to foster cleaner energy, despite a partisan-blocked Congress. Lastly, a fourth achievement is the introduction of the proposed Green New Deal, which calls on the federal government to address the issue of global warming into public discourse. While not presenting any specific policy solutions, the Green New Deal has certainly created a framework and talking point for putting climate change in the national spotlight during the 2020 Democratic Primaries, and may provide some hope for future policy ventures.

**KEY LIMITATIONS**

While progress has been made in addressing climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, there have been several limitations that have prevented any sort of definitive and comprehensive policy from emerging. Four limitations will be discussed in this paper. First, there is a complicated story of conservative ideology and increasing polarization, which has emerged and risen in the United States over the past several decades and altered the national agenda that is set regarding climate change policy. There are three critical aspects of this particular limitation. The first began with what is referred to as the “Republican Reversal.” The “Republican Reversal” began when the “...Reagan administration broke with bipartisan consensus on the importance of environmental protection.” This shift occurred because conservative ideology became a major identity in American politics, which led to the rise of an organized network of conservative interests and ultimately resulted in new attitudes toward the environment and climate change.

The second aspect of this first limitation comes from the organized network of conservative interests, namely the Koch brothers’ organization. The Koch brothers began their network in 1977 by backing the creation of the Cato Institute, coinciding with the period when the Republican Reversal was taking hold. As of 2015, the Koch network has influenced at least fifteen major organizations including think-tanks, policy advocates, donor coordinators, constituency mobilizers, and political utilities. This influence has resulted in “the Koch network...urging [Congressional] Republicans to take positions against the beliefs of most of their constituents—including majorities of moderate Republicans.” This congressional pressure has contributed to limiting climate change action, in particular because the Koch

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3 Layzer, Judith A. The Environmental Case: Translating Values into Policy, CQ Press, 2012: 42
5 Layzer, 410
7 Vogel, 203
8 ibid., 203
9 ibid., 201
10 ibid., 201
11 ibid., 201
12 ibid., 204
15 Turner & Isenberg, 8-12
17 Skocpol & Hertel-Fernandez, 685
18 ibid., 693
brothers’ libertarian beliefs directly contradict any sort of centralized government climate policy.

The third aspect contributing to the rise of conservative ideology is the notion of the “Deep Story.” If, on one hand, there is the conservative ideology championed by the Reagan administration and supported by organized networks like the Koch network, then, on the other, there are the constituents who are molded by these elements of society. Attention to the lived experiences of constituents most affected by environmental misaction or lack thereof reveals that constituents are “stuck” in a paradox: these constituents live in Louisiana, one of the biggest victims of environmental problems in the United States, yet they are increasingly hostile towards federal support. Why is this the case? The answer lies within the Deep Story: “[people] want to achieve the American Dream, but for a mixture of reasons feel they are being held back, and this leads people of the right to feel frustrated, angry, and betrayed by the government.”20 These same people, who already feel betrayed by the federal government, believe that climate change is a hoax provoked by “liberal fear” and align themselves with the Republican representation that shares that sentiment.21 The deep story is part of why progressive states, like California, can achieve much at the state level, but Republican or right-oriented states are beholden to their constituents’ and representatives’ interests and, in this case, disinterested in effecting comprehensive climate policy change. The Deep Story, coupled with the first two aspects of this limitation, is emblematic of a rise in conservative ideology that is at odds with comprehensive climate change policy.

The second limitation is how the rise in conservative ideology has impacted international agreements. According to Judith Layzer, “...the way the problem of and solutions to climate are defined domestically is a primary determinant of the U.S. position on international agreements to address it.”22 In other words, U.S. decisions on international climate agreements are a reflection of domestic interests. This is currently affecting the Paris Climate Agreement (PCA), an international agreement into which President Obama entered the United States in 2016. The goal of the agreement, which has support from every state in the international community, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions enough so that there will be less than a two degree celsius rise in global temperatures this century.23 President Trump, champion of those who have experienced the Deep Story, however, can remove the United States from this agreement as of November 4th, 2020. Given Layzer’s position on international agreements, it would seem contradictory for President Trump to withdraw from the Paris agreement, especially since a October 2019 Pew Research Center poll says that 67% of Americans say that the federal government is not doing enough to reduce the effects of global climate change (Funk and Kennedy). However, public opinion has little effect on how climate is currently defined domestically. Instead, it is the members identified in the discussion of the first limitation in this paper, President Trump’s political base, that set the U.S. agenda on the international stage. This explains why the current domestic environment has not been conducive to comprehensive climate policy on an international level.

The third limitation is that one of the main policymaking pathways used to create climate policy is not conducive to comprehensive policy measures, exemplified by the Rock Creek Mine case. Congress is a legislative body that has been, “...a poster child for legislative gridlock.”24 Because of this gridlock, environmental groups have turned to what Christopher Klyza and David Sousa dub as “alternative pathways” to conduct climate policy. One popular pathway, which has been more of a limitation than a venue for successful comprehensive climate policy, is what Robert Kagan calls “adversarial legalism.” Adversarial legalism is a way in which groups and, for our purposes, environmental groups, use litigation to combat opponents of their interests.25 It is costly and time consuming. The Rock Creek Mine case shows just how this process works. The Rock Creek Mine was first proposed in 1987 and the struggle to approve construction of the mine continues to this day.26 The reason for this struggle is that environmental groups have found multiple ways to invoke laws such as the Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act, and Clean Water Act to prevent the mine from being built, yet, at the same time, there is a right to mine on public lands.27 Both sides in this case use adversarial legalism to attempt to achieve their goals. In a struggle that has lasted since 1987, neither side has won. This Rock Creek Mine case is a clear example of how environmental groups in the United States spend considerable time combating their opponents micro-issues to protect the environment, while also making little progress in achieving comprehensive climate policy.

A fourth limitation is that the issue of climate change was born in the wrong era. Anthony Downs explains a concept called the “issue attention cycle.” According to Downs, there are five stages in this cycle. The first is the pre-problem stage, where an undesirable social condition exists but has not reached comprehensive policy combating climate change.28 The second is the
stage of alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm, where the public believes that it can be solved given enough effort.²⁹ This stage is important because it is where the most policymaking can be achieved. The third stage is the realization of the costs of significant progress, where part of the cost is understood as a need to restructure the public’s way of living.³⁰ The fourth stage is a gradual decline of intense public interest, leaving the final stage, where any organizations or institutions created during the cycle are left to battle these issues on their own.³¹ The problem with climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is that it was not the salient issue we know today when environmental politics reached the second stage of the cycle in the late twentieth century. Indeed, once environmental policy reached the fifth stage of the cycle, the rise of conservative ideology began to take hold. One might point out that, if the issue attention cycle is correct, then the issue of climate change should have its own second stage where policy can be created. However, it is because of the first and third limitations discussed in this paper that the laws created during the late twentieth century are the only readily available tools environmental groups can use to combat threats to the climate. As shown throughout this paper, they are not quite the right tools for creating a comprehensive policy combating climate change.

IS BREAKTHROUGH POSSIBLE?

There are some reasons to be optimistic for the future and some not to be, but it is currently unpredictable. One reason to believe that it will be just as difficult in the future is due to the legacy of judicial appointees put forth by the Trump administration. One example of this legacy is that, “on the courts of appeal, the final word in the overwhelming majority of federal cases, more than one-quarter of active judges are Trump appointees.”³² These judges are affiliated with the Federalist Society, a group of experienced lawyers that President Trump appointed to make all of his judicial selections in order to implement a web of conservative justices throughout the nation.³³ This will already make it difficult to come up with a breakthrough, but if Trump is re-elected and the Senate continues to enjoy a Republican majority, it will be even more difficult in the future.

One reason to be optimistic is a possible revival of the Clean Power Plan. The Clean Power Plan, introduced by the Obama administration, was an attempt at a comprehensive policy solution to combat climate change. In particular, it intended to, “reduce carbon pollution from power plants, the nation’s largest source, while maintaining energy reliability and affordability.”³⁴ The Trump administration, however, revoked the CPP and replaced it with the Affordable Clean Energy rule. This new rule is much weaker compared to the CPP: it reduces power sector emissions between 0.7-1.5 percent by 2030, whereas the CPP would have reduced emissions by 32 percent by 2030.³⁵ Clearly, this is a huge blow to climate change combatants. The reason there is hope, however, is that several environmental organizations have organized to file suit against the EPA, in another attempt to invoke and engage in adversarial legalism. In fact, an opening brief was filed on April 17th, 2020, arguing, “that EPA’s decision to repeal the Clean Power Plan was based on a fundamental misreading of the Clean Air Act that would force EPA to ignore common-sense, cost-effective emission reduction measures and would ‘frustrate the Act’s capacity to reduce the enormous amount of climate pollution emitted by fossil fuel-fired power plants.’”³⁶ This is one case where adversarial legalism would support comprehensive climate policy. It remains to be seen, however, if this venture will be successful in bringing back the Clean Power Plan.

The future of climate change policy and the feasibility of a policy breakthrough are made unclear by recent developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing event that has greatly impacted the United States and the rest of the world. One mainstream argument against comprehensive climate policy is that people simply will not change their habits in order to battle climate change. The battle against COVID-19, however, has shown that the United States can largely alter its habits for an extended period of time rather quickly. The consequences of these changes on the environment are starting to show and scientists are studying their potential global impacts.³⁷ Environmentalists are hopeful that the global community will see the results of these consequences and gain a new understanding of how detrimental the world’s current habits are to combating climate change. COVID-19 is also throwing a curveball into the United States’ presidential and Senate elections. What were already difficult and tight races are now unpredictable. The next Senate and presidential administration will be crucial in determining whether or not climate policy will become center stage on the national agenda.

²⁹ Downs, 39
³⁰ Ibid., 40
³¹ Ibid, 40
²⁸ Ibid, 31
³³ Milhiser, 4
In early 2020, the Pentagon confirmed the deployment of a new low-yield nuclear weapon, the W76-2, to an unspecified number of Trident submarines in the US.¹ The military already owns air-dropped bombs of a similar size, but government officials argue that a submarine-launched weapon is strategically important and is a necessary addition.² This is a major change in direction for U.S. nuclear policy, as no significant new nuclear weapons have been added to the arsenal in decades.³ These attempts to “modernize” the nuclear arsenal by producing new weapons in the midst of increasingly problematic relations with Russia have caused concern about a new arms race or even the possibility of war. While military officials such as John Rood, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, argue that the new low-yield weapon “strengthens deterrence and provides the United States with a prompt, more survivable low-yield strategic weapon,” other military strategists, academics, and US representatives argue that low yield weapons increase the likelihood of war by lowering the threshold between conventional and nuclear warfare.⁴ I argue that while low-yield weapons might, in certain circumstances, contribute to nuclear deterrence, they introduce far too many destabilizing factors for any additional level of deterrence to be worth the risk.

This article will explore the deterrence value of low-yield nuclear weapons (LYNWs) and their role in increasing the likelihood of a war that involves the use of both low-yield and standard yield nuclear weapons. The recent tensions between the US and Russia over the inclusion of LYNWs in Russian military strategy will serve as a case study. While it is uncertain whether or not the Russian military truly has an “escalate to de-escalate” war plan involving LYNWs, as intelligence and government reports are contradictory, the fact remains that US officials have based military actions

² Kaplan
⁴ Kaplan
and strategy on the existence of this plan and on the assumption that Russia has LYNWs in its nuclear arsenal. This is perhaps an indication that the new deployments are a result of an aggressive military culture rather than of strategic thinking. The deployment of LYNWs also carries several risks, which negate any deterrence value which comes from additional nuclear weapons. Firstly, the apparent smaller impact and more practical scale of LYNWs both lower the threshold between nuclear and conventional warfare. Secondly, there is a possibility that warring states might not know which type of weapon is being deployed, due to the frequent dual-use of launch systems for both high and low yield weapons. Thirdly, according to war game simulations, a real war involving the use of LYNWs, even if a yield limit was somehow maintained, would likely still cause huge civilian casualties and destruction on a massive scale. Lastly, it is possible that the use of the standard, non-nuclear deterrence is sufficient. In this case, the deployment of any new nuclear weapons would be a pointlessly risky move. All of these factors make extremely destructive nuclear war more, not less, likely when states add low-yield warheads to their arsenals.

The W76-2 warhead is estimated to have a yield of around six kilotons, about a third of the explosive power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.\(^5\) Trident submarines are already equipped with similar warheads, the yields of which are between 90 and 450 kilotons.\(^6\) While there is no official size threshold that defines a weapon as low-yield, they are generally considered to be weapons smaller than the nuclear bombs dropped in WWIII.\(^7\) However, a six-kiloton weapon is still five hundred times more powerful than the “most powerful conventional explosive in the US arsenal.”\(^8\) LYNWs are often referred to as “tactical” or “non-strategic” weapons, which are designed for use on the battlefield during a military conflict, but they could also be used strategically.\(^9\) With recent developments in targeting technology, the line between strategic and tactical has become increasingly blurred.\(^10\) Large nuclear weapons are usually considered to be strategic, as they can be used to bomb large civilian populations, however low-yield weapons could also be used on civilians as well. In general, the terms “tactical,” “non-strategic,” and “low-yield” are used interchangeably, meaning there is no longer any real distinction between them in terms of deterrence. All are assumed to have a yield lower than approximately 20 kilotons. For clarity, this article will use only the term “low-yield,” but the sources cited may use either of the three terms.

Arguments for and against the deployment of LYNWs center around deterrence theory and mutually assured destruction. Deterrence, in its simplest form, is the attempt to add as many costs as possible to an enemy state’s cost/benefit analysis of whether the monetary, structural, and human life costs of war are worth the gain in territory, resources, idealistic motives, or any other factor a nation might hold as beneficial. Nuclear deterrence rests on the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD), which assumes that a war between any nuclear-armed states will result in a quick and devastating destruction of both countries (as well as their neighbors and allies), due to the massive impact of nuclear weapons (including radioactive fallout and other radiation effects) and the relative ease of using them.\(^11\) Theoretically, nuclear-armed states are therefore faced with two possible outcomes: peace, if weapons are not used, or complete destruction of all parties involved if weapons are used. However, LYNWs complicate the special status of nuclear weapons as potentially extinction event-inducing devices and may undermine nuclear deterrence by appearing to reduce the threat of total mutual destruction.

Government proponents of adding LYNWs to the U.S. nuclear arsenal argue that the weapons fill an essential gap in an attempt to match that of Russia’s and without them the US remains vulnerable.\(^12\) This argument is based on Russia’s reported but not confirmed “escalate to de-escalate” plan, which holds that, should a European war erupt and endanger Russian territory, Russia would launch low-yield weapons at tactical targets in Europe, forcing their opponents to surrender.\(^13\) The alternative to European surrender to Russian forces is theorized to be a counter-deployment and detonation of a U.S. low-yield weapon.\(^14\) Low-yield weapon advocates argue that having this option available would extend deterrence from large scale conflict to smaller scale conflict, as well as preclude Russia from attempting this “escalate to de-escalate” tactic.\(^15\) Some defense experts, like Elbridge Colby, argue that a smaller scale nuclear war would be preferable to a large scale war, and that we should pursue proliferation to increase deterrence.\(^16\) These arguments downplay the importance of two key dangers: the potential escalation from small-scale, low-yield nuclear warfare to larger-scale, standard or high-yield

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2. Kaplan
6. Ibid.
nuclear warfare and the enormous death toll that would likely result from even a limited nuclear warfare.

Key arguments against the deployment of LYNWs focus on the possibility of escalation to the use of high-yield nuclear weapons once the nuclear threshold has been lowered. Many argue that having a less destructive nuclear option makes the choice to shift to nuclear weapons easier, because the low-yield weapons can be used tactically or in smaller strategic areas. Additionally, LYNWs may not appear as likely to lead to an outcome of mutual destruction. These weapons are more “survivable,” meaning that the effects and externalities of LYNW deployment and detonation are perceived to be less severe than those assumed of a traditional, twenty kiloton to megaton size, nuclear bomb.¹⁷ The use of LYNWs could potentially lead to higher-yield nuclear war, as the nuclear threshold would have already been lowered with the use of lower-yield weapons.

General Andre Beaufre, a “renowned military thinker and strategist,” writes that when low-yield weapons are introduced and the nuclear threshold is lowered, “the risk of an accidental or inadvertent nuclear war increases.”¹⁸ Although Beaufre argues for the deterrence value of LYNWs, Beaufre still acknowledges the danger of LYNW use potentially lowering the nuclear threshold. Once a nation detects that a nuclear weapon has been launched at them, they probably do not have time to assess the yield of the weapon and resulting damage, and as a result, will retaliate using whatever nuclear weapons they have in their arsenal. This makes communication between warring states impossible in the short run because the country being attacked does not know what is happening. If a submarine were to launch a warhead, the enemy would be unable to differentiate between a small weapon, supposedly meant to prevent escalation, and a large weapon. The enemy would then be forced to choose between retaliating at full strength or possibly under-reacting to a serious threat, giving up their crucial window for a second strike.¹⁹ This has been an issue with other low-yield nuclear weapons, including Pakistan’s launching systems that work for both conventional and nuclear weapons, and the existing US warheads with adjustable yields.²⁰ This difficulty of differentiation is a significant issue when considering the deterrent effects of low-yield weapons, as, in certain cases, it negates any additional deterrence a low-yield weapon would produce since there is no way to tell which weapon is being used. This potential for escalation from a relatively contained nuclear conflict to a full nuclear war makes low-yield weapons, at least as they are currently deployed, dangerously unpredictable. Additionally, any “special” deterrence value ascribed to LYNWs is nulled by the fact that, in reality, warring states do not set kiloton yield limits before engaging in battle and in most cases would not have time to assess damage before retaliating. As Michael Krepon argues: “if two states have screwed up so badly that they have used nuclear weapons on a battlefield, how are they supposed to agree on the number of detonations and yields?”²¹

While proponents of low-yield nuclear weapons argue that these weapons strengthen deterrence, proponents also maintain that a war involving their use could remain small in scale and not necessarily progress to an all-out nuclear war.²² This assumption is key to such an argument, but can easily be dissolved, as was discussed previously. While I would argue that nuclear war of any scope should be avoided, some see a limited nuclear war as a reasonable possibility. Experts like Elbridge Colby argue that a nuclear war conducted using only low-yield weapons would be an acceptable risk to take for the supposed increase in deterrence.²³ If the argument that LYNWs increase deterrence is sound, why is Colby’s argument necessary? The limited actual usefulness of low yield warheads off of the battlefield and the probability of extensive civilian casualties are too significant to ignore in discussions of the supposed deterrent properties of low-yield weapons.²⁴

Firstly, low-yield weapons may not be practical for battlefield use, as their sheer size and possible unpredictability could possibly endanger weapon-deploying combatants and could interfere with attempts to advance into irradiated territory.²⁵ This could drive the deployment and detonation away from the main arena of combat to an alternative site, possibly one near civilians, where “ease” of use is more assured. Aside from causing civilian casualties by way of civilian-targeted retaliation, expanding beyond military targets could encourage the use of more, possibly higher-yield weapons and escalate the conflict to a traditional nuclear war.

Secondly, “low-yield” weapons are still incredibly deadly. According to expert Daniel Hooey, “initial wargames and exercises in the 1950s [with low-yield nuclear weapons] revealed that ‘in only 9 days of simulated nuclear combat, West Germany was judged to have suffered three times the civilian casualties of [World War II].... LYNWs introduce additional factors that must be carefully considered, such as increased potential for miscalculation, nuclear accidents, and unauthorized use.”²⁶ The outcomes of this simulation demonstrate how destructive even an exclusively low-yield war could be. When the difficulty of limiting weapons in a nuclear war to a smaller yield is

¹⁷ Burns
¹⁹ Facini
²¹ Krepon
²² Hussain, 24.
²³ Colby, 4.
²⁴ Krepon
²⁵ Thomas-Noone
²⁶ Hooey, 40.
considered, the scale of this supposedly preferable war begins to look very similar to the scale that would assure mutual destruction.

The recent U.S. deployment of new LYNWs as a response to the Russian “escalate to de-escalate” plan discussed previously brings up another issue behind arguments advocating for LYNWs: these weapons and their deployment may not be truly motivated by strategy at all. Supporters of the anti-low-yield position, including Michael Krepon, argue that the Russian “escalate to de-escalate” plan that is considered the most compelling justification for LYNW deployment is essentially non-existent. They argue that the deployment of LYNWs is due to the U.S. military’s desire to build up the nuclear arsenal based on groundless rumor.²⁷ In her 2016 analysis of Russian nuclear doctrine, Olga Oliker argues that there is no evidence that the “escalate to de-escalate” tactic is part of any legitimate Russian war plan.²⁸ As the tactic involves shifting from conventional to nuclear weaponry, this tactic would require Russia to lower their nuclear threshold, and increase their willingness to shift from conventional to nuclear weapons, which would be a bold and dangerous choice.²⁹ She argues that if the US were to incorporate low-yield weapons into their arsenal and lower their nuclear threshold to match Russian actions, particularly if accompanied by the development of more “usable” nuclear weapons, both states would significantly increase the risk of nuclear war.³¹ Oliker adds that, even if Russia is considering the deployment of LYNWs as a part of their “escalate to de-escalate” plan, Russia might see increased American investment in LYNWs as an indication of the weakness of the U.S. conventional war machine, further encouraging aggressive action from Russia.³²

In addition, while the US government would perhaps argue that deploying their own low-yield warheads would be intended purely for defense and deterrence, increased investment in and improvement of U.S. offensive capabilities could be interpreted by Russia as a response to their own earlier development and deployment of low-yield nuclear weaponry. This is a classic example of the security dilemma and means that the deployment of new US low-yield weapons would probably only increase tensions between the US and Russia. The fact that the U.S. government’s primary justification for the recent and continued development of low-yield weapons is a hypothetical, unconfirmed Russian war plan demonstrates that arguments for adding more LYNWs to the arsenal may be more motivated by a nuclear-focused and aggressive military culture than by actual benefits to nuclear deterrence.

Lastly, this discussion of nuclear deterrence in the context of LYNWs begets a larger question about the actual efficacy of nuclear deterrence as a means of dissuading conflict: is deterrence as a whole — that is, the total cost/benefit analysis of all aspects of warfare — as opposed to nuclear deterrence the operative mechanism in obstructing potential world war? Perhaps the U.S. and Russia never felt that a full-on war, be it nuclear or conventional, would be worth the costs, given what little gain would come from war based on idealistic differences with no extant threat to either homeland.³⁴ Perhaps ordinary deterrence, not mutually assured destruction, was what prevented the Cold War from ever becoming hot; without the long range, immensely destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons, war perhaps never would have happened.³⁵ If this is the case, then there is no need for any further nuclear proliferation, which has the potential to escalate quickly, and even accidentally, from the use of low-yield weapons, because then deterrence would not be based on nuclear capabilities at all.³⁶ Even if MAD has indeed been the only means of preventing war, filling the small theoretical gap in deterrence with low-yield weapons is not worth the risk of a lowered threshold to nuclear escalation. Since we can never know exactly the reason why large scale nuclear war has never become a reality, it is never advisable to introduce new nuclear weapons into an already massively destructive stockpile.

Rather than contributing to deterrence, LYNWs weaken deterrence by making nuclear weapons appear as a more realistic option for use on the battlefield. LYNWs do not carry the stigma of traditional nuclear weapons, and therefore may be considered for practical use in military plans, weakening the all-or-nothing deterrence of MAD and encouraging nuclear war. Additionally, since MAD or nuclear deterrence may not be the main factor in preventing war in all cases, stockpiling additional LYNWs would only increase international tensions. Warring states would not be able to assess damage or yield before retaliating without missing a crucial second-strike window and would be compelled to escalate conflict. In addition, most LYNWs are housed in multipurpose launch systems, meaning that a targeted nation would have no way of knowing what kind of weapon had been launched. In the case of recent events, many arguments for the deployment of LYNWs center around the Russian “escalate to de-escalate” tactic and hold that additional U.S. LYNWs are necessary to maintain a deterrent balance between the US’s and Russia’s

²⁹ Oliker, 11.
³⁰ Ibid., 10.
³¹ Ibid., 11.
³² Ibid., 12.
³³ The security dilemma holds that actions taken by a state intended to increase its own security, such as military build-up or weapons deployment, will likely be taken by other states as a threat to their own security. The other state(s) will then build up their own military, and the first will build up more, and so on, leading to a tense situation in which both states are less secure and at a higher risk of war than when they started.
³⁵ Rofer
³⁶ Ibid.
nuclear capabilities. However, the legitimacy of the pro-LYNWs argument is undercut by the possible fictitiousness of the Russian war plan itself. The fact that real US deployments have been justified by questionable intelligence from Russia indicates that perhaps these deployments are not strategic, but rather a product of a nuclear-focused defense apparatus and an administration inclined towards intimidation through stockpiling. The lowering of the threshold for nuclear war that the adoption of low-yield nuclear weapons would likely assure demonstrates that LYNWs do not contribute to the protection of peace through nuclear deterrence and that further deployment would be dangerous and unnecessary.