
West Coast Publishing

NewsViews Sample Select Articles Jan. – May 2018

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The Winter Olympics in South Korea will improve relations between the two Koreas

The modern Olympics have been long known for attempting to foster peace and unity through the common pursuit of sports. Even then, the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea stands out in a uniquely troubling time. Despite increasingly bellicose rhetoric from its leader, Kim Jong-Un, and refusal to stop development of its nuclear weapon program, North Korea will send athletes to compete in the Winter Olympics.¹ Even more remarkably, athletes from both nations will march together in the opening ceremony under a united Korean banner for the first time since the 2000 Summer Olympics.² Optimists have reason to be hopeful that this is a positive sign: **the 2018 Winter Olympics will improve relations between the two Koreas because it is a public step towards reconciliation, it demonstrates that negotiations are still possible, and bolsters South Korea's ties to the United States.**

First, although a unified Korean Olympic team will be competing in the Winter games, it represents a public thawing of hostilities between the two nations. There was a distinct possibility that Pyeongchang, situated only 40 miles from the Demilitarized Zone, was going to become a security risk if North Korea had chosen to stay away from the Olympics and continued its threats against the South.³ Although cooperation during a sporting event is relatively minor in the face of potential nuclear conflict, it does forestall the possibility of things getting worse during such a pivotal time when the world's attention will be collectively on the Korean peninsula.⁴ In this light, the Winter Olympics have to be viewed as a win for improving Korean relations simply by dint that it has not made things worse.

Second, the united Korean team highlights that direct negotiations between the two Korean governments can be successful. Even though it is only involving low-stakes efforts involving athletic competition, it is a remarkable about-face from the ratcheting hostilities from the previous year.⁵ The bright focus of the global political community is directed at the very real problem—and prospect—of a nuclear incident or conflict. As such, any reasonable measure, such as a joint Olympic Korean team, should be treated as a viable opportunity toward a meaningful resolution.⁶ The sign that negotiations are still a viable option is an immense breakthrough for the two nations and affords a venue in which the two sides can continue talking even long after the Winter Olympics. It may not lead to a cessation of North Korea's nuclear program overnight, but it has created the space for negotiations to evolve and grow over time.

Finally, the Olympics signal the growing bonds between the United States and South Korea – which forces North Korea to the negotiating table. It is no secret that North Korea has long sought to drive a wedge between the United States and South Korea; the thinking goes that without their biggest military ally, South Korea would be significantly weakened and the North would begin to impose its will without making any concessions. This is especially true now because the Special Measures Agreement – South Korea and the United States' recurring negotiations over military and financial burdens in maintaining the Demilitarized Zone – is set to expire in 2018 and would possibly put Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy and Moon Jae-in's Korean nationalism on a collision course.⁷ The Winter Olympics, however, have demonstrated that the tough stance and sanctions taken by the United States has forced North Korea to back down from its most recalcitrant stances.⁸ This visible sign of progress will ensure smooth negotiations for the upcoming Special Measures Agreement negotiations. In so doing, it will keep North Korea hemmed in – which will keep relations from worsening.

The Winter Olympics in South Korea will worsen relations between the two Koreas

Women's ice hockey is not typically the most prominent sport at the Winter Olympics, but all eyes will be on one team this year in Pyeongchang. North and South Korea have agreed to field a unified women's ice hockey team; overnight, the players have found themselves in the middle of the world's most fraught international tensions.⁹ Despite the splashy public relations from this move, many analysts and foreign leaders have pointed out that North Korea is only ever driven by self-interest and that Kim is likely trying to either buy his ballistic missile program more time, ease sanctions from the West, drive a wedge between South Korea and the United States, or some combination thereof.¹⁰ As such, **the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics will strain relations between the two Koreas because it will inflame tensions in South Korea, further reunification propaganda in North Korea, and fail to address longstanding structural issues between the countries.**

First, the Winter Olympics are already inflaming tensions a South Korean public. Although South Korean leadership may have hoped that a unified Olympic squad would create more buy-in from South Koreans for the dovish administration to continue peace negotiations, the opposite seems to have happened. For example, a North Korean delegation arriving in South Korea ahead of the Winter Olympics was met with dozens of protesters burning a banner image of leader Kim Jong Un.¹¹ These are not just some loud voices either: a poll commissioned by the Korean news channel SBS found that 70 percent of South Koreans oppose forming a joint team with the North.¹² The move to a unified Korean Olympic team seems to have been done with a poor understanding of public attitudes. Due to this, it will only make public pressure on South Korean leadership to take a less conciliatory approach to the North in future negotiations, thereby driving a wedge.

Second, the Winter Olympics will be a messaging win for North Korea at the expense of the South. For example, a two-minute clip titled "Reunification is by Korean nation itself," uploaded by the North Korean propaganda site DPRK Today, paints the Olympics as part of the rogue state's reunification campaign. The clip shows emotional images of North and South Koreans, including footage of times they've cooperated during past athletic competitions.¹³ It's not just reunification either. Kim Jong-Un is also using the Olympics as an opportunity to portray himself as the peacekeeper while the United States, South Korea's closest ally, as the instigator and agitator.¹⁴ This not only bolsters Kim's standing back in the North – allowing him to continue his nuclear program – but puts South Korea in a messaging bind with the United States. This calculated move by North Korea only gives more breathing room for Kim, while putting additional pressure on Korean reunification.

Finally, the sad reality is that this is not the first time the two Koreas have marched together in a sporting opening ceremony to much fanfare, only to see hopes for a durable peace agreement fall apart. The 2000 Sydney Olympics and the 2007 Asian Winter Games also brought similar hopes, but both failed to bring lasting peace because sports cannot resolve intractable issues between the Koreas. Scott Snyder, director of the Program on U.S.-Korea Policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, explained that the Olympics, "are a commercial break from the drama and tensions that have continued to build between the United States and North Korea."¹⁵ Indeed, notably absent from the Olympic negotiations was the topic of how South Korea will host the 400-person North Korean delegation without violating United Nations Security Council sanctions against the North.¹⁶ This highlights how, if anything, the Olympics are only more likely to reopen sore issues between the two countries that no sporting event could ever possibly fix.

The Rohingya should be repatriated to Myanmar.

The Rohingya, a Muslim-majority ethnic minority in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, have been at the center of an ongoing, international human rights catastrophe. United Nations officials have summarized the situation, saying that the Myanmar state has committed crimes against humanity and possible genocide against the Rohingya.¹⁷ With such a fraught situation in Myanmar, over half a million Rohingya have fled over the border from their homeland of Rakhine State into neighboring Bangladesh in order to escape the violence.¹⁸ Now, Myanmar and Bangladesh have both agreed on a tentative decision, to begin repatriation, or the process of returning the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.¹⁹ **Because the situation in Myanmar is steadily improving and the situation in Bangladesh is rapidly deteriorating, the Rohingya should be repatriated to Myanmar.**

A major push factor for the Rohingya relocating is that the situation in Bangladesh is deteriorating severely. Bangladesh, where most of the Rohingya have fled following the outbreak of military violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar, is struggling to sustain the large refugee population. Rampant overcrowding in particular is an issue, which has led to the government of Bangladesh to propose relocating one hundred thousand of the refugees to the island of Thengar Char, located in the Bay of Bengal and currently deemed uninhabitable due to consistent seasonal floods.²⁰ This is emblematic of the overall conditions for Rohingya refugees, which Bangladesh is struggling to accommodate. The situation is so bad currently in the refugee camps that many of the Rohingya, especially the youth and infants, are suffering from malnutrition and other health crises.²¹ This, in and of itself, is a human rights violation, adding to the cumulative and ongoing suffering of the Rohingya. Indeed, the Rohingya are acutely aware of the squalor conditions of the Bangladeshi refugee camps, and there is the legitimate possibility that they will transform from serving as a breeding ground for resentment to a recruitment center for the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, a militant insurgent group based in Myanmar in opposition to the military and government.²² The potential for radicalization means that the longer the Rohingya remain in Bangladesh, the more likely they are to support taking up arms against the Myanmar military and state in order to resist and avenge their oppression. Ultimately, this only serves to potentially escalate the conflict, especially if the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army conducts military exercises across the border, attacking Myanmar from Bangladesh. The potential ticking time bomb of escalating military conflict makes a compelling push factor to repatriate the Rohingya, rather than forcing them to stay in dismal and overcrowded refugee camps where they are likely to be radicalized by the militant insurgency. The dismal conditions of the refugee camps, the potential relocation into flood prone islands that are officially uninhabitable, and the threat of escalating conflict from radicalization combine to create a significant push to repatriate the Rohingya to Myanmar from Bangladesh.

Even if the push factor of dangerous conditions in Bangladesh was insufficient, there is a notable pull factor that supports the Rohingya returning to Myanmar due to improving conditions. Notably, safety is ensured through the actions of China, which has taken the role of an international mediator between Myanmar and Bangladesh.²³ The Chinese proposal is one aimed at making Rakhine State, and Myanmar more generally, a safe place to return to for the Rohingya refugees currently in Bangladesh. For instance, a major piece of the proposal is international support, funded in large part by the deep pockets of Beijing, to rebuild and develop Rakhine State.²⁴ This is crucial, as it guarantees that the Rohingya actually have a home to return to, when the time comes. Due in large part to the Chinese offer of aid, conditions in Myanmar are set to improve, making a welcoming place for the Rohingya to return. This makes Myanmar an attractive place for the Rohingya, creating a powerful incentive to pull the Rohingya back to Myanmar and begin the repatriation process.

The Rohingya should not be repatriated to Myanmar.

In southeastern Asia, one of the largest human migrations in the region's recent history is occurring due to an ongoing human rights disaster. The Rohingya, a majority-Muslim ethnic group, are fleeing military persecution in Rakhine State in Myanmar, a majority-Buddhist country, to escape to neighboring Bangladesh. Now, that migration is set to be reversed, as Bangladesh and Myanmar have made a bilateral agreement to repatriate the Rohingya, emptying the refugee camps and returning them to Myanmar.²⁵ **Due to the ongoing violence in Myanmar and the unfair standards being set on the Rohingya in order to return, the deal should be denounced, and the Rohingya should not repatriate to Myanmar.**

One major issue with the repatriation deal that needs to be accounted for before the Rohingya are forced to return to Myanmar is that the situation in Myanmar has not ameliorated; the Rohingya would be forced to return to a dangerous and genocidal situation. Representatives of the Rohingya were not consulted on their fate; instead, diplomats from Myanmar and Bangladesh joined together to legislate what happens to the refugee population.²⁶ This is, on principle, a violation of the fundamental right of the Rohingya people to self-determination; foreign legislators do not have the interests of the Rohingya at heart. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that it is not in the best interest of the Rohingya to return to Myanmar; international human rights watchdogs have decried the ongoing violence in Myanmar, such as Amnesty International, which described the situation as "a systematic, organized, and ruthless campaign of violence against the Rohingya population as a whole in northern Rakhine State."²⁷ International governmental organizations have validated this assessment. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, has condemned the actions of the Myanmar military against the Rohingya as "the very likely commission of crimes against humanity" and a "textbook case of ethnic cleansing."²⁸ The growing international consensus about the dangerous situation in Myanmar suggests that it would be foolhardy to send the Rohingya back to their war-torn and pillaged former home. Indeed, likely as a result of the devastating violence in Myanmar, just eleven percent of Rohingya refugees in Myanmar said they wanted to return to Bangladesh, when polled.²⁹ Because of the dangerous situation for the Rohingya in Myanmar, and the express lack of self-determination in the repatriation process, the Rohingya should not be repatriated to Myanmar.

Even if all of the Rohingya were completely willing to return to Myanmar, the government of Myanmar is dangerously ambiguous about the repatriation process. For one thing, the government of Myanmar is guilty of gatekeeping in order to selectively accept which Rohingya may return to the country, allowing only those with official documentation to return; the problem is that the government of Myanmar has systematically stripped the Rohingya of such documentation since the late 1980s.³⁰ Ultimately, then, this repatriation deal is a façade to give the appearance that serious work is being done to improve the situation of the Rohingya, but precious little can actually be accomplished under these terms. The Myanmar government has set the additional unfair standard of only accepting three hundred Rohingya per day, a limitation which means that the repatriation process would stretch out over multiple years in order to process the over 600,000 refugees who fled to Bangladesh.³¹ These limitations combine to make the repatriation process all but impossible to achieve, a false hope for any Rohingya who wish to return. This false hope is a dangerous ambiguity, which is only enhanced by Myanmar cracking down on the free press and media, arresting international reporters trying to report on the Rohingya crisis.³² Conclusively, then, Myanmar has made the actual repatriation process ambiguous and impractical, and compliance with the deal only supports the cruel and ambiguous standards Myanmar has set. As a result, the Rohingya should not be repatriated to Myanmar.

Republicans Will Lose Control of Congress in the 2018 Midterm Elections

The off-year elections after a new President is inaugurated oftentimes portends how his party will fare in their first Congressional midterms and in his reelection. Only a year after suffering a shocking and demoralizing loss to Republicans and Donald J. Trump, the tide seems to have turned. Democrats swept statewide elections in Virginia and New Jersey by comfortable margins as well as won a number of special state legislative and mayoral races – the first time the party did so since 1989.³³ Incidentally, this preceded the last time a sitting President, Republican George H.W. Bush, lost his reelection. With Democrats holding a 10 point lead in generic Congressional polling,³⁴ will history repeat itself? Unfortunately for them, **Republicans will lose control of Congress in the 2018 midterm elections because they will experience an anti-Trump backlash, they have lost support in the suburbs, and Democrats will have a strong economic argument.**

First, the 2017 elections showed that the backlash to Trump is real, durable, and a motivating issue for voters to come to the polls. The problem facing Democrats has been that the so-called “Obama coalition” – millennials, nonwhites, women, and educated affluent whites – didn’t consistently come out to vote, leading to losses in 2010, 2014, and 2016.³⁵ So far, it appears that this coalition is roaring back, explaining why Democrats have consistently beat polling expectations across the board in 2017.³⁶ Importantly, this seems to overcome concerns of gerrymandering. In the Virginia House of Delegates, Republicans enjoyed a 2-1 advantage due to gerrymandered seats; as of this writing it’s now at 49-48, with several recounts that could lead to the unthinkable and flip the chamber altogether. Trump’s historically low approval ratings and embarrassing antics will continue to be an albatross around Congressional Republicans that drives up turnout among energized Democrats and independents.

Second, the midterms will confirm what first occurred in the 2016 elections and was confirmed by the 2017 off-year races: Republicans are continuously losing educated suburbanites. What was once the backbone to their coalition has proved to be a vexing problem for them in the age of Trump, in that appealing to Trump’s white working class base continues to alienate more educated and affluent voters.³⁷ Democrats in 2017 not only won by wide margins in the suburbs of Philadelphia, D.C., and Atlanta, they did so against candidates who attempted to model themselves after Trump’s rhetoric. As such, longtime Republican Congressional seats in places outside of Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Kansas City, New York, and Seattle have attracted strong, well-funded candidates who are eager to take advantage of a potential opening.³⁸ When several districts become suddenly vulnerable and longtime incumbents have to either run a competitive race or retire and leave the seat open, it typically leads to a wave elections.

Finally, Republicans have effectively handed Democrats an economic platform. One of Hillary Clinton’s and Democrats’ biggest weaknesses in 2016 was that they lacked a strong economic message to blunt Trump’s populism and constant railing against trade and regulations. That has now effectively changed, given the historically unpopular legislation surrounding health care and tax reform.³⁹ Republicans are now in an untenable position: either vote against these bills and suffer the wrath of Trump and face angry primary voters, or support the legislation and risk losing in the general. Moreover, these legislative battles have demonstrated the political popularity of programs such as Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and student loan tax deductions – longtime Republican targets.⁴⁰ As the old saying in Washington goes, “if you’re explaining, you’re losing.”

Republicans Will Not Lose Control of Congress in the 2018 Midterm Elections

In 2009, Democrats were ebullient. Fresh off two consecutive wave elections that afforded them control of both chambers of Congress and the White House, there was widespread belief that a political shift was afoot. Only two years later, Democrats lost 63 seats in the House, 6 in the Senate, and 6 Governor's races – setting the stage for the rise of the Tea Party and Trump. Democrats are cautiously enthusiastic again for 2018, because in a typical midterm year the “out” party gains an average of 30 House seats and 4 Senate seats – enough to retake Congress altogether.⁴¹ Yet, the same forces that led to their repeated defeats this past decade are still present.⁴² As such, **Republicans will not lose control of Congress in 2018 because the electoral map is still in their favor, they have not lost their white working class base, and they can still rally against unpopular Democrats.**

First, the electoral map still works for Republicans. This is not to say that Democrats won't be making any gains, but it simply will not be enough to retake both chambers. After 2010 Republicans effectively controlled Congressional redistricting the majority of states, allowing them to gerrymander districts in their favor. The results have already worked as intended: in 2012, House Democratic candidates gained 1.4 million more votes than their Republican counterparts, but Republicans still enjoyed a 33 seat majority.⁴³ Moreover, this does not even account for the Senate elections, where Democrats will have to defend 23 seats compared to only 8 for Republicans – most of which are in deeply conservative states such as Wyoming, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Utah.⁴⁴ As such, the electoral math is deeply in favor of the Republican Party come 2018. It would take a meltdown of historic proportions to lose both chambers before the 2020 Presidential election.

Second, 2017's results need to be looked in a fuller context to see that Democrats have not made inroads with Trump's base. The areas where Democrats did the best were in states that Trump had already lost. It's hardly any surprise that the same suburbanite voters in Northern Virginia or New Jersey who rejected Trump, for example, would vote the same way again a year later. More importantly, Republicans have still done well in white, rural, and working class areas.⁴⁵ This places Democrats in a precarious position when trying to flip the sorts of Congressional seats that are needed to regain the majority and ancestrally supported Democrats but have since lurched hard to the right.⁴⁶ This will prove to be especially important for the Senate elections, where several Democratic incumbents are up in states that Trump won by wide margins and still enjoys support, such as North Dakota, West Virginia, Missouri, and Montana. The same geographic and cultural divides that have left our polity so polarized are still in effect and will continue to benefit Republicans, no matter how much voters on the coasts rage against the President.

Third, Republicans can still rally against unpopular Democrats. This is not the same as in 2008 or 2012 when Barack Obama's popularity was able to carry the party. Instead, longtime conservative targets Nancy Pelosi and Charles Schumer will be the party's bearers, which does not bode well. Indeed, Pelosi was an effective attack to turn back spirited Democratic challenges in several House special elections in 2017.⁴⁷ The party's lack of direction, leadership, and platform has left it at its lowest public approval rating in 25 years.⁴⁸ You can't beat something with nothing – or, in this case, something with something even more disliked by voters.

U.S. Can Protect Electoral System from Hackers

The 2016 United States presidential election will go down in history as one of the most unusual and controversial elections. For the first time in United States electoral history, foreign actors allegedly influenced the election. In 2016, the CIA, FBI, and NSA all “concluded in a report declassified in January that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a campaign not just to undermine confidence in the US electoral system but to affect the outcome.”⁴⁹ The shocking revelation of international interference in the United States electoral system has the country’s leaders scrambling for a solution. Jeh Johnson, former Homeland Security Secretary, argued that “cyberattacks of all manner and from multiple sources are going to get worse before they get better,”⁵⁰ and that the United States must take cybersecurity seriously. But can the United States ensure improvements in cybersecurity before it gets worse? **This essay will argue that the United States can protect its electoral system from cyberattacks by the next national election.**

First, the United States must take the issue of cybersecurity in relation to the electoral system seriously. In response to the findings that Russia hacked the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and influenced the election, the Obama administration in early January of 2017 designated the system as critical infrastructure. Jeh Johnson, former Secretary of Homeland Security, argued that the classification change will “allow the DHS to prioritize cybersecurity assistance to officials who request it and serve as deterrent to foreign interference.”⁵¹ Few state officials oppose the reclassification, claiming it is a federal government overreach, but the action comes as a necessity to protect democracy. Reclassifying the electoral system as critical provides momentum for greater security in the future as it may encourage Congress to approve and appropriate more funding to the issue.⁵² Ultimately, the United States experienced a wake-up call during the 2016 election cycle and has begun to take the issue of cybersecurity as it relates to elections seriously.

Second, providing cybersecurity training to election officials will prevent future attacks. For example, Special Agent Hawkins of the FBI called the DNC warning them that a known hacker had access to one of their computers. Yared Tamene, tech support contractor at the DNC, “was no expert in cyberattacks”⁵³ and he responded to the FBI warning by merely looking through logs, but came up with no evidence of a hack. The DNC even concluded that the call from Special Agent Hawkins could have been a prank and should be disregarded. Further, the Clinton campaign was also a victim of hacking due to inadequate training in cyber security. John Podesta, chair of the Clinton campaign, received a phishing email that appeared to be from Gmail informing him that “someone has your password.” He passed the email along to Charles Delevan, help desk associate for the campaign, who confirmed the legitimacy of the email.⁵⁴ The phishing email led to the collection and release of hundreds of emails from the Clinton campaign, which severely damaged her chance in the election. In each instance, inadequate training led to the success of each hack. Therefore, the United States can secure their election system by the next national election if they put more effort towards preventative training.

Finally, the United States must take efforts to restore citizen’s confidence in the election system for it to be fully protected. In an article from June 2017, the Atlantic proposed that the US create a nonpartisan group comprised of “career government-intelligence professionals and analysts”⁵⁵ to analyze threats and propose responses. The attacks in 2016, while they did not affect tallies or vote counts,⁵⁶ played on the partisan mistrust plaguing America today. In fact, a recent study conducted by Carbon Black, found that “27 percent of eligible U.S. voters will ‘consider not voting’ in future elections because of their concerns regarding cybersecurity.”⁵⁷ The hackers have won if U.S. citizens feel this way. Thus, the United States should take the Atlantic’s advice and create a non-partisan response team to reestablish the country’s trust in the election system and protect against cyberattacks in preparation for the next national election.

U.S. Cannot Protect Electoral System from Hackers

As the world settles into the technology era, it must take certain measures to protect key assets. Technology increases efficiency and connectedness throughout our lives, but if not done so securely, can also connect us to nefarious actors. Such was true during the United States' 2016 election where "at least 21 state election systems were targeted by Russian hackers."⁵⁸ The intrusion has marked a turning point in history where voter fraud is no longer the only danger to democracy. International meddling in elections has perked the interest of law makers and government officials alike to find a solution to this serious problem. With many minds on the issue, can the United States protect its precious electoral system from either domestic or international hackers? **This essay will argue that the United States cannot protect the electoral system from hackers.**

First, election officials will have a nearly impossible time securing existing election on a widespread scale. At the local level there are over "10,000 election administration jurisdictions in the U.S.,"⁵⁹ each varying in size and method of balloting, vote collection, and tallying. The sheer diversity in voting jurisdictions makes a 'one-size-fits-all' policy inconceivable. Jeh Johnson, former Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary, determined that election cybersecurity will amount to a "vastly complex effort"⁶⁰ given that so many jurisdictions have their hands in national elections. Currently, some states use direct-recording electronic voting machines, which many experts deem as "complexity of DRE machines makes them very hard to secure."⁶¹ Developing technology to secure these machines will be functionally impossible to do on a wide-spread scale. However, the complexity of the election system may make it more difficult for hackers to prevail in intervening in national elections, but it does not guarantee perfect security for the next national election.

Second, it will take the federal government many years to secure election systems because of the range of election technology from county to county. According to J. Alex Halderman of the University of Michigan's Center for Computer Security and Society, "safeguards against [election hacking] in the future are far from adequate. Meanwhile, the fact that voting is a local and state responsibility makes it hard for the federal government to solve the problem."⁶² Because voting responsibility ranges throughout the nation, the federal government will not have enough time to discover and implement a cybersecurity solution across all local prior to the next national election. Further, even if the federal government could create a security solution, some state would stand opposed to the assistance. For example, Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, characterized former DHS Secretary Johnson's classification of election equipment as critical infrastructure as "a federal overreach into a sphere constitutionally reserved for the states."⁶³ The federal government will need to win the trust of these states if it wishes to secure the election system by the next national election; a feat which seems impossible.

Finally, states do not have the resources necessary to implement any security changes to existing infrastructure. Many states currently have "paperless machines with optical-scan machines that count paper ballots" which some cybersecurity experts claim to be "obsolete."⁶⁴ Yet, many of the jurisdictions handling election results do not have the finances to replace obsolete technologies. In fact, many "state officials complained to the Senate Intelligence Committee that they're waiting to see any benefit from the designation by DHS of elections systems as "critical infrastructure." Further, some election jurisdictions do not have the labor resources available to adequately secure their election system. As Joseph Lorenzo Hall, the chief technology officer at the Center for Democracy and Technology in Washington states, many jurisdictions have dramatically different election staff "from L.A., which has a small army of folks, to many jurisdictions that don't even have a full-time person for their election work."⁶⁵ Overall, the complexity of the election system and the disparity of resources makes it nearly impossible for the United States to secure itself before the next national election.

SCOTUS will curb extreme gerrymandering

Money in politics and voter identification laws have grabbed the most attention concerning the health of our democracy but gerrymandering may be the biggest threat. The Supreme Court recently heard a case where a lower court had ruled against an extreme example of the practice by Wisconsin Republicans.

This article will argue that the Supreme Court will curb extreme gerrymandering in Gill v. Whitford.

Its failures have paved the way for so-called extreme partisan gerrymanders, electoral maps drawn by politicians and paid consultants that lock in a statewide majority for their party, through good and bad election cycles. But there is reason to believe that the Wisconsin case, which the court will take up Oct. 3, may turn out differently. Several crucial factors have aligned to make judicial action both relatively easy and absolutely necessary.⁶⁶ If any case could convince them that it's time to step in and find a solution fast, it's the one they're hearing on Tuesday: Gill v. Whitford, a lawsuit out of Wisconsin that offers a stark lesson in just how distorted the map-drawing process has become in an era of sophisticated mapping technology and intense political polarization. In 2010, Republicans won unified control of Wisconsin's government for the first time in years.⁶⁷ They were determined not to lose it anytime soon, so they turned the decennial redistricting process, which began in 2011, into a clandestine partisan operation. They set up a "map room" at a Republican-allied law firm, used refined data analyses to draw new, Republican-friendly district lines, and invited only Republican lawmakers to come in and see their new districts — after they signed nondisclosure agreements. It worked. In 2012, the first election using the new maps, Republican candidates won 48 percent of the vote, but 60 of the state's 99 legislative seats. The Democrats' 51 percent that year translated into only 39 seats, yet two years later, when the Republicans won the same share of the vote, they ended up with 63 seats — a 24-seat differential. In other words, Republicans had figured out how to draw maps to lock in their legislative majority no matter how many, or few, votes they received.⁶⁸ Political science experts point to two predictors of a successful partisan gerrymander: state legislatures under one-party control and a recent history of close elections. Wisconsin has both. So do several other battleground states, where extremely biased legislative maps could be at risk if the court rules against Wisconsin, according to an analysis by the Brennan Center for Justice. The analysis also found that 16 or 17 Republican seats in the House of Representatives — two-thirds of the 24 seats that Democrats would need to retake control of that chamber — are a result of extreme partisan bias in the drawing of district lines.⁶⁹

The 2–1 district court decision favoring the challengers to Wisconsin in this case heavily revolved around a new standard devised by two political scientists, called an "efficiency gap," which essentially compares the voting performance of districts to what it might have been without such standard gerrymandering practices as "cracking" (spreading the minority party's voters across districts) and "packing" (concentrating the minority party's voters in a minimal number of districts).⁷⁰ Extreme partisanship is only inevitable in redistricting if we allow it to be. Certainly, as long as the courts refuse to rein in political gerrymandering by state legislators, those legislators will continue to draw districts to maximize partisan advantage. Many states have chosen to create independent redistricting commissions, and courts have drawn districts for other states after successful legal challenges. Studies have found that both independent commissions and courts draw districts that are more compact and more competitive than those drawn by legislatures.⁷¹ Self-sorting does have some effect on the districts that states can draw. However, it cannot explain the extreme partisan lean of many states' district maps. Pennsylvania voted for Barack Obama by ten points in 2008 and by over five points in 2012. Democrats won 12 of the state's 19 congressional districts in 2008 (63%), which is to be expected in a state that voted Democratic on the presidential level. In 2012, Democrats won only five of 18 districts (28%). Such a large shift in such a short amount of time could not have resulted from self-sorting — and it didn't. Instead, it was the result of one of the worst partisan gerrymanders of the 2010 redistricting cycle.⁷²

SCOTUS will not curb extreme gerrymandering

The Supreme Court case *Gill v. Whitford* was recently adjudicated and the decision will be announced in Spring. Many hope that the Court will curb an obvious example of politically motivated gerrymandering by ruling the behavior of Wisconsin Republicans unconstitutional. However, the makeup of the Court and past rulings on similar cases paint a more pessimistic picture. **This article will argue that the Supreme Court will not curb extreme gerrymandering in *Gill v. Whitford*.**

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court will consider whether state legislatures violate the Constitution by deliberately drawing legislative districts for partisan advantage. The ghosts of Justices Felix Frankfurter and William Brennan will be hovering behind the bench. Those two judicial antagonists fought their last duel on March 26, 1962. Frankfurter was incensed that day, because his colleagues had voted, 6-2, to ignore a warning he had written 16 years earlier. The new case was *Baker v. Carr*, a challenge by Tennessee voters to the grossly inequitable districts from which their legislators were elected. Tennessee lawmakers had not redrawn districts in more than half a century. In that time, the state's population had nearly doubled, with most of the growth taking place in urban areas.⁷³ Standing in their way was Frankfurter's 1946 opinion *Colegrove v. Green*, which rejected the identical claim from a group of Illinois voters. The vote in *Colegrove* was 4-3 (the court was short two justices); Frankfurter's opinion, for only three of the four-justice majority, argued that inequality of representation was an issue "of a peculiarly political nature and therefore not meet for judicial determination." He added, "Courts ought not to enter this political thicket."⁷⁴ After hearing argument twice in *Baker v. Carr*, however, the justices voted 7-2 for a different result. No more would malapportionment be a "political question": courts could hear and decide challenges like that of the Tennessee voters. That decision didn't resolve the Tennessee challenge; it simply told the lower court that it could hear evidence and make a decision. Even so, no one at the time regarded this as an easy question. In fact, Justice Charles Evans Whittaker, agonized by the deliberations in *Baker*, suffered a nervous breakdown, recused himself from the case, and eventually resigned his seat.⁷⁵

Like the challengers in *Baker v. Carr*, the challengers in *Gill*—voters in Wisconsin—are confronted with an apparently adverse precedent a decade and a half old: *Vieth v. Jubelirer*, a 2004 challenge to U.S. House districts in Pennsylvania carefully drawn to shift congressional seats from Democratic to Republican control. The challenge failed: four of the nine justices voted for a per se rule that partisan-districting challenges were always "political questions." Justice Antonin Scalia wrote for these four that "no judicially discernible and manageable standards for adjudicating political gerrymandering claims have emerged."⁷⁶ Determining the result, as so often, was Justice Anthony Kennedy. He said, "I would not foreclose all possibility of judicial relief if some limited and precise rationale were found to correct an established violation of the Constitution in some redistricting cases." This is very similar to the result in *Colegrove v. Green*, in which Frankfurter wrote for three justices. Three justices joined a dissent written by Justice Hugo Black, who would have moved forward with the plaintiffs' challenge. The deciding vote came from Justice Wiley Rutledge, who said that apportionment cases were "justiciable," but that the short time remaining before the election meant that in that particular case "the cure sought may be worse than the disease."⁷⁷ One additional roadblock has stood in the way of judicial intervention: even if the Court elected to curb gerrymandering, just how would it go about it? The lack of a workable standard to determine what would constitute a constitutionally viable gerrymandered legislative map versus one that violates the Constitution has made the justices reluctant to step into the breach.⁷⁸ The notion that so many of our political ills stem from gerrymandering is, in fact, a bad idea that simply will not die—what we call a Zombie Myth. And when it comes to Zombie Myths in American politics, gerrymandering remains one of the most persistent. Actual evidence from political science research shows only weak correlations between gerrymandering and both polarization and electoral competitiveness.⁷⁹

Xi Jinping is effectively exerting leadership

Xi Jinping has been criticized for his handling of international situations like the conflict over the South China Sea and North Korea's nuclear program. However, Xi's influence and positive perception among the people don't seem to be ebbing. The restructuring of the CCP at the recent party congress will only make this power go further and encourage a larger presence on the international stage.⁸⁰ **This article will argue that Xi Jinping is not effectively exerting his leadership.**

To kick off this year's congress, Xi delivered a whopping 3.5-hour-long opening speech outlining his accomplishments over the past five years and vision for the country's future. He heralded a "new era" in Chinese political life and repeatedly boasted of China's status as a "great power." Xi spoke a great deal about making the economy more nimble and prosperous by doing things like improving state-owned enterprises — but he was clear it wouldn't be moving toward a conventional market economy. "He is emphasizing that he is strongly committed to the distinctive Chinese hybrid system in economics and party-led system in politics," said Julian Gewirtz, a fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School.⁸¹ Xi also championed China's growing influence on the world stage, celebrating the country's increasing control of the disputed South China Sea under his first term and calling for efforts to make the Chinese military more powerful. Xi signaled that he would continue to ramp up one of the biggest themes of his first term: domestic repression. Under his rule, Chinese authorities have cracked down hard on free expression and civil society. During his speech, he suggested there was more to come — pledging enhanced internet censorship to "clearly oppose and resist the whole range of erroneous viewpoints." The government has blocked the international messaging service WhatsApp during the congress so far. The expression "new era" is the party's way of saying this is the third chapter of modern China. If the first was Chairman Mao uniting a country devastated by civil war, and the second was getting rich under Deng Xiaoping, this new era is about even more unity and wealth at the same time as making China disciplined at home and strong abroad. Enshrining all of this under Xi Jinping's name in the party constitution means rivals cannot now challenge China's strongman without threatening Communist Party rule.⁸² Xi may not even need a boost in the first place. As Jeffrey Wasserstrom, a historian of China at the University of California Irvine notes, Xi doesn't have to do anything exceptional to increase China's standing in a global order led by Trump. "It has been a godsend to [Xi] to have a US administration in place in recent months that has been erratic in its diplomacy, has sent mixed signals to allies, and has pulled back on various forms of engagement with the world," Wasserstrom told me.⁸³

The idea of the "coming collapse of China" has been around for decades. Each time a warning is sounded, it has proven to be premature. China has demonstrated time and again that it does not fit the mould Western scholars have tried to put it into. China has not gone the way of the Soviet Union or developed into a democracy. Its economic growth has continued and its global influence has only grown. The Chinese Communist Party has shown resilience and a unique ability to adapt to changing domestic and global situations.⁸⁴ In this time of change, Xi's anti-corruption campaign endeavours to restore trust in the Communist Party while his own leadership strives to serve as a unifying force pushing the country forward. Xi himself is seen as a man of integrity with a strong vision for China's future. Xi's "Chinese Dream" envisions a strong, rejuvenated nation that has regained its central role in the world. Xi places the Communist Party, and himself, as promoters of that dream. The "Belt and Road Initiative", for example, serves the dual purpose of creating more global markets to stimulate the slowing Chinese economy while at the same time expanding China's political influence and global reach.⁸⁵ In our globalised and social-media-saturated world, more eyes than ever are watching and commenting on the world's leaders. This places an intense spotlight on Xi — an experience that his predecessors did not have to deal with. Xi has cracked down on dissent and directed China's media and propaganda networks to control the narrative about himself and the party. He has also carefully cultivated his public image. His own personal integrity is seen as a strong contrast to those caught up in his anti-corruption campaign.⁸⁶

Xi Jinping is not effectively exerting leadership

Xi Jinping has been declared the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong largely because of his ruthless consolidation of power within the CCP and increased repression of free speech and the press. While he may have inordinate power, Xi's term has largely seen China's position decline because of miscalculations on his part. **This article will argue that Xi Jinping is not effectively exerting his leadership.**

He is arguably the most powerful man on Earth. Presiding over the second-biggest economy, the second-best-funded military and the world's largest population. Unlike his American counterpart, Xi Jinping does not have to fend off opposition political parties, a free media and internet, or a community of critical civil society groups. And factional rivals? If they're not in jail yet, they're worried. His decision to oversee a military parade this week reinforced his authority over the world's largest army. It was unprecedented for a Chinese leader to have a second parade in his first five-year term, but Mr Xi got it.⁸⁷ His Government has shut down popular entertainment websites (to purify the online space) and cracked down on services that allow people to circumvent internet censorship. What is left is a politically sanitised social media space and a nationalistic news environment that is increasingly gushing in its praise of the country's leader. His signature anti-corruption campaign has felled thousands of officials (including a suspiciously high number of political rivals), but hasn't inched the country one step closer to a rule of law system that people can trust.⁸⁸

Since 2012, Xi's foreign policy has unraveled years of careful efforts on China's part to persuade its Asian neighbors of the "win-win" benefits of China's peaceful rise. Under Xi, Beijing has suffered a series of diplomatic setbacks so counterproductive that they raise serious questions about his foreign-policy competence. A brief review of the past three years shows a remarkable string of failures and foreign-policy defeats. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on July 12th nullified China's "Nine-Dash Line," which is the basis for Beijing's claim to disputed islets and reefs, and 85 percent of the South China Sea, as sovereign Chinese territory. This was a body blow, undoing a major pillar of Chinese foreign policy toward the rest of Asia. The ruling was a troubling metaphor, undermining the smiley-face image China has sought to project.⁸⁹ It was preceded by South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD, a U.S. missile defense system, in the face of China's strong objections and heavy-handed threats against Seoul. China's overbearing posture, and call for South Korea to prioritize Beijing's security concerns over Seoul's, aimed to drive a wedge into the U.S.-South Korea alliance, but did just the opposite. The THAAD decision moved South Korea closer to the United States and opens the door to trilateral U.S.-South Korea-Japan strategic cooperation, long anathema to Beijing.⁹⁰ The THAAD decision, of course, was related to the failure of Chinese diplomacy to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile test programs. Indeed, Pyongyang thumbing its nose at Beijing's admonitions not to conduct nuclear and missile tests was a stunning rebuke. Xi had sent a special envoy to Pyongyang to persuade North Korea against a ballistic missile test. Yet, North Korea announced it would conduct the missile test. And for spite, Pyongyang launched it on the eve of Chinese New Year.⁹¹ Defeat on the Korean peninsula was preceded by defeat in the Senkakus, the disputed rocks which Beijing had attempted to use to drive a wedge into the U.S.-Japan alliance by raising the question of whether the United States would support Japan in a conflict with China. But in April 2014, during a visit to Japan, Obama made clear that Article V of the alliance extends to the Senkakus. Meanwhile, China's continuing air and naval incursions into the Senkakus and East China Sea have had a major impact on Japan's security policy, leading to the decision in 2014 to reinterpret the constitution to allow for the exercise of collective self-defense and the 2015 U.S.-Japan defense guidelines, which recognize a wider Japanese regional security role.⁹² This spring, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force ships made port calls in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Australia — to Beijing's horror. And Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's recent Upper House election victory raises the possibility of Japan amending its Peace Constitution, another long-dreaded nightmare for China.⁹³

DOJ suit against the AT&T Time Warner deal good

Currently AT&T is trying to purchase Time Warner for 85.4 billion dollars. AT&T is one of the nation's biggest cellular and fixed line providers. Time Warner is one of world's biggest multimedia companies owning CNN, HBO and Warner Brothers among other multimedia business.⁹⁴ That would mean AT&T would own both much of content as well as the cables and cell towers that many American watch. On November 20th the United States Department of Justice sued to block the merger on antitrust grounds fearing it would harm competition.⁹⁵ **The Department of Justice is correct to challenge the AT&T Time Warner merger because we need to have tougher anti-trust regulations, abuse is probable from the new firm and changing policies on net neutrality make the merger even more dangerous.**

The first reason the Department of Justice lawsuit is justified is that for too long the Department of Justice has been too lax on enforcing anti-trust law. Over the last two decades 75% of United States industries have become more concentrated, and that concentration has been more important to the value and strategy of firms.⁹⁶ "Firms in industries with the largest increases in product market concentration have enjoyed higher profit margins, positive abnormal stock returns, and more profitable M&A deals, suggesting that market power is becoming an important source of value."⁹⁷ The rise in market concentration corresponds over the last 20 years with laxer enforcement of antitrust enforcement. Monopolies are bad for the economy since they tend to invest in creating barriers to entry instead of innovation.⁹⁸ Also firms not facing competition are able to collect higher profits based on their market power at the expense of other actors in the economy. Competition forces firms to either cut prices or increase quality or both. The need to compete means that firms cannot extract more value from the economy than they produce because any attempt to do so will fail because competitors will undercut them. When firms can exploit market power they can raise prices and decrease quality, increasing profits at the expense of consumers. The Department of Justice's objection to AT&T Time Warner merger will help create precedent to engage in stricter antitrust law.

The AT&T Time Warner merger poses a high risk of abuse. Traditional antitrust law tends to focus on horizontal purchases (where a company purchases a competitor) rather than vertical acquisitions (when a firm buys a supplier or a customer). The AT&T Time Warner deal is vertical, but still poses unique risks. Cable firms in the United States do not compete at the local level meaning that consumers usually only have one option on who to get cable from.⁹⁹ That means that AT&T could include Time Warner content in more packages helping move its consumer base towards watching more content that Time Warner owns. In fact, the deal does not make sense from a business perspective for AT&T without abusing its power over the distribution of content. Right now with planned cost cutting the deal is looking to return AT&T a measly return on capital of 6% very low for major company like AT&T.¹⁰⁰ "AT&T could boost returns by using its muscle in the pipes business to force clients to buy Time Warner's content rather than that of rivals. If Time Warner's market share rose from 20% to 35%, the deal's return would rise to a decent 11%."¹⁰¹

Furthermore, future changes to telecommunication regulations make the AT&T Time Warner deal even more dangerous. Right now, providers of internet including AT&T are bound by Net Neutrality a rule banning Internet Service Provider (ISP) from discriminating in its service. "That means the consumer can load every website, app, video, gif, etc., equally, regardless of where the content is hosted. For example, an ISP cannot charge more for sites that stream movies or promote a specific agenda."¹⁰² However the Federal Communication Commission announced plans to remove all regulations requiring Net Neutrality.¹⁰³ Without Net Neutrality AT&T would have a strong incentive to press its wireless and internet customers towards Time Warner products and away from competitors. For instance, AT&T could slow down Netflix while speeding up HBO Go making that service more desirable for AT&T customers. That would give Time Warner products a huge competitive advantage against any competitor and limit consumer choice.

DOJ suit against the AT&T Time Warner deal bad

Currently AT&T is trying to purchase Time Warner for 85.4 billion dollars. AT&T is one of the nations biggest cellular and fixed line providers. Time Warner is one of world's biggest multimedia companies owning CNN, HBO and Warner Brothers among other multimedia business.¹⁰⁴ That would mean AT&T would own both much of content as well as the cables and cell towers that many American watch. On November 20th the United States Department of Justice sued to block the merger on antitrust grounds fearing it would harm competition.¹⁰⁵ **The Department of Justice lawsuit is misguided because it violates free speech, the merger does not violate the antitrust law, and the merger is in fact necessary to maintain competition in the long run.**

The Department of Justice lawsuit seems to be a response to negative press coverage by CNN of the Trump administration. President Donald Trump has long criticized CNN calling it fake news, raising questions when the Department of Justice asked for Turner Broadcasting which owns CNN to be sold before the merger.¹⁰⁶ The issue was made even worse when President Donald Trump made statements about the AT&T Time Warner merger he specifically mentioned CNN, during the same speech he also made many comments about how corrupt the media was.¹⁰⁷ The motivation is even more questionable when you consider Makan Delrahim the Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust formally did not see a problem with the AT&T and Time Warner merger when making answering questions about the merger. "The sheer size of the deal and the fact that it involved major media would certainly attract a lot of attention, he (Makan Delrahim) told Canada's BNN, but 'I don't see this as a major antitrust problem.'"¹⁰⁸ Antitrust law was not created for the president to pursue vendettas against media companies. Using antitrust laws would allow the executive branch to circumvent the First Amendment. If the executive branch can threaten media companies with antitrust legal action no company would risk allowing their news networks to run critical arguments about the President. Undermining the media's ability to criticize the President would destroy a key pillar of Democracy, without a critical media a president would have far less to fear from voters.

The merger between AT&T and Time Warner merger does not violate antitrust law. In general, the Justice Department had focused on horizontal expansion when a company buys a direct competitor instead of vertical integration where a company buys another company on a different point on the supply chain. An example of the willingness to allow vertical integration was when Comcast and NBC Universal merged. "I don't see the government winning this lawsuit based on precedent and facts, including Comcast/NBCu, approved with conditions while I chaired the FCC."¹⁰⁹ Suddenly changing precedent makes business unpredictable since firms will not know which actions are and are not legal. Furthermore, the fears that the Department of Justice raises that AT&T and Time Warner will not work with each other competitors (AT&T only carrying Time Warner content or Time Warner only distributing on AT&T) if either of these happened they would face huge losses. No cable company could only carry that few networks nor could a network survive if they ignore most of the countries cable carriers.¹¹⁰

Finally, the AT&T Time Warner merger is actually good for competition in the long run. The Department of Justice law suit fails to recognize the changing media business landscape. Right now, the rise of companies like Google (through YouTube), Amazon and Netflix are disrupting the media landscape. Traditional media companies are facing long term problems. Young people are abandoning free TV for streaming services "For a while the losses were modest, at just over half a million households in total in 2013 and 2014, out of 101m subscribers. Last year, however, traditional pay TV suddenly lost 1.1m subscribers."¹¹¹ The leakage of pay T.V viewers put pressure on and media companies like Time Warner and cable providers like AT&T. The weakness of traditional media companies pose a huge risk to competition when the new online streaming economy is dominated by far bigger companies. "Netflix has more than 100 million subscribers and Amazon has an estimated 60 million Prime members."¹¹² These firms have far more than the 25 million subscribers AT&T says that the Department of Justice says makes the merger

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dangerous.¹¹³ By allowing AT&T to buy Time Warner it will be stronger to compete with the likes of Netflix and Amazon both of which pose a far larger risk to competition than the proposed merger.

The United States will win the trade war with China.

What does it mean to “win” a trade war? In the realm of economic negotiation and international commerce, trade wars feature heavy costs to all participants. The winning move, then, is to deter retaliatory tariffs, which are taxes placed on goods from foreign countries, and guarantee a favorable vision of international trade. As the subject matter of escalating and retaliatory tariffs between the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China move from probing discussions to distinct policies that reshape the norms of international commerce. What started with the United States issuing a series of tariffs on aluminum and steel has shaped into a significant international affair that will test the diplomatic and economic strength of both America and China.¹¹⁴ **The United States is likely to win the current trade war with China, as China is conciliatory, the Trump Administration is willing to be merciful, and the United States economy is better able to weather economic harms.**

Most promisingly, it seems that the People’s Republic of China is willing to outright concede to trade demands from the United States rather than engage in a trade war. President Xi Jinping of China gave a promise to lower tariffs on automobiles and improve protections for intellectual property rights.¹¹⁵ While this is not identical to the steel and aluminum demands that the Trump administration has singled out. The promise from President Xi is in line with a parallel move, filing a formal complaint against the United States via the World Trade Organization.¹¹⁶ Filing through the World Trade Organization indicates a Chinese desire to maintain normal economic relations and prevent a trade war from erupting. This is more than just policy forecasting, as China has a very strong economic incentive to avoid a trade war. The International Monetary Fund has already predicted that a trade war between China and the United States would lead to a Chinese economic recession, with their gross domestic product shrinking half a percentage point.¹¹⁷ Such economic harm would be devastating to the government of the People’s Republic of China, which broadly legitimizes its reign on its ability to provide economic prosperity rather than democratic accountability. China cannot win a trade war against the United States.

It isn’t just the Chinese that are interested in avoiding a trade war; paradoxically, the United States is also seeking to avoid an outright trade war in favor of negotiations with China. Perhaps ineffectively, the Trump administration is seeking to use the steel and aluminum tariffs as a bargaining chip to get China to revise their trade policies altogether to be more favorable to American business.¹¹⁸ This is the obvious motive behind the aluminum and steel tariffs, as even if the Trump administration is correct that a trade war with China can be easily won, it is more advantageous to meet American interests without a costly economic conflict. Political insiders in the Republican party, such as Michael Bloomberg, are also interested in averting a trade war.¹¹⁹ The assembled American interests give assurance that the United States will win a trade war by not escalating.

Even if the United States favors outright trade war over commercial negotiations mediated by the World Trade Organization, the United States will still end in a more favorable position than China. First, the analysis of the new tariffs implemented on aluminum and steel trade both indicate that the American consumers will not be overly hurt by the increase in prices. Automobile prices, one of the biggest consumers of raw steel and aluminum, is only expected to go up a paltry \$175 per vehicle.¹²⁰ The economy of the United States is resilient and able to withstand economic harm. Moreover, the United States has created strategic exemptions from its tariff project, such as the entire European Union, Canada, and Mexico, to prevent global escalation and maintain an global opposition to the Chinese commerce practices.¹²¹ As a result, the United States can withstand any trade war until China gives up.

The United States will not win the trade war with China.

In March of 2018, President Donald Trump issued an executive order increasing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, citing a national security concern.¹²² This triggered fears of retaliatory increases in tariffs, which are taxes on imported goods, that might generate a further tariff increases from the United States. In short, a trade war. Assuming a full-blown trade war erupts between the United States and the People's Republic of China, who would be the victor? The question is loaded with assumptions such as the fact that there can meaningfully be a winner in a trade war, and that the trade war will escalate from the status quo. Already, top business executives have lobbied with the Trump administration to dissuade any retaliatory tariffs and promote trade normalcy.¹²³ **Here, the business leaders have a very important insight: the United States cannot win a trade war with China, because trade wars are unwinnable, the Trump administration is unwilling to conceded, and China is in a far more advantageous commercial position than America.**

Ultimately, the most problematic assumption with the Trump administration's new trade policy is that trade wars are a conflict that can be won. The record proves decisively that trade wars hurt all parties involved, meaning there is no "winner." Broadly speaking, even if the steel and aluminum industries benefit from the initial rounds of tariffs, other industries are disproportionately hurt. Automobile manufacturers, technological development, and a whole host of other industries which use steel and aluminum in their business will suffer from increased costs in production, which will be passed along to the price that the consumer pays.¹²⁴ The result is that the overall economic activity, both in the United States and the world, will diminish. This is proven through history, as well; the last time the United States implemented a trade war with the Smoot-Hawley Trade Act, it had the effect of significantly worsening the Great Depression.¹²⁵

With this knowledge of how impossible it is to win a trade war in any meaningful sense, the United States may yet attempt to avoid a trade war by yielding to the negotiation process rather than continuing to escalate. This is, however, highly unlikely. The Trump administration's justification for invoking the increased steel and aluminum tariff is that they will protect the United States national security interests, as steel and aluminum are necessary for a wide range of defense applications.¹²⁶ This is an iron-clad, or perhaps steel-clad, rationale that it is unlikely that the Trump administration can be dissuaded from. As such, there is little reason to believe that the United States will turn to negotiation rather than continue to escalating a trade war.

If, then, a full-out trade war breaks out, there is substantial reason to believe that the United States will suffer significant economic costs that leave the United States in a worse position. The People's Republic of China has already targeted key sectors in the United States economy for retaliatory tariffs. Farmers in such diverse agricultural markets as almonds, tofu, pork, and wine will struggle to bring their goods to the international market, where many surplus American crops rely on international demand to be purchased.¹²⁷ Even without the damages to America's agricultural sector, China has significant economic leverage. Chinese investors hold over \$1 trillion dollars of American debt that gives influence over the United States.¹²⁸ China buying up American debt is crucial to support federal government deficit spending, which gives China the ability to threaten to withhold the purse strings to coerce American policymaking. In addition, China is resilient to economic losses from a trade war, as it is diminishing its overall portion of economic activity that is reliant on trade; already, trade as part of gross domestic product has decreased by fifty percent compared to ten years ago.¹²⁹ As such, even if America is able to significantly damage China's international trade, the effects will be limited as China is becoming more economically resilient due to its growing domestic consumer base. China is better able to economically outmaneuver the United States should a trade war commence in earnest.

The teacher strikes of 2018 will lead to long-term educational reforms

Teacher appreciation week is a national holiday celebrated in the first week of May every year when most school districts begin to wind down their academic calendars. This year, however, teachers, students, and parents alike are realizing that home-baked goods and heartfelt cards simply won't cut it anymore. In the first few months of 2018, long-simmering teacher anger has already resulted in a series of strikes, walkouts and protests in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Oklahoma and West Virginia.¹³⁰ They're not the last either, as North Carolina teachers plan to walk out on May 16, 2018 when the state legislature reconvenes.¹³¹ Among the demands, besides better pay, are to return funding levels to before the Great Recession and raise taxes to better fund public education. The speed at which these strikes have occurred, and that almost all of them took place in states where they are technically illegally, demonstrate their potency. **The teacher strikes will lead to long-term educational reforms because they will directly impact the 2018 elections, they have public support on their side, and they are demanding institutional changes.**

First, these strikes will inevitably have an impact on the 2018 elections, when the majority of governorships and state legislatures are up for grabs. Fresh off a wave of teacher strikes and grassroots demonstrations, education activists are aiming to turn that momentum into structured and well-oiled campaigns in this fall's midterm elections, especially in fiscally conservative states. Importantly, these are not just politicians, as a plethora school funding measures are also on the ballot and can be voted in by a simple majority.¹³² We're already seeing the effects: in West Virginia a longtime State Senator and foe of teacher unions, Robert Karnes, infamously predicted the strikes wouldn't have "any significant effect." Despite being an incumbent, lost his Republican primary by a 2-1 vote.¹³³

Second, public opinion is firmly on teachers' sides. Despite all of these strikes occurring in traditionally Republican and anti-union states and the disruption to family lives, they have enjoyed broad support. This is not surprising, as Americans generally support the aims of the teachers. A poll commissioned by the Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that Americans overwhelmingly believe teachers don't make enough money, and half say they'd support paying higher taxes to give educators a raise.¹³⁴ Most remarkably, this is an issue that has eluded the sort of polarization that has typically marked our modern discourse: of those who support higher taxes, an equal proportion both do and not have children. Likewise, almost 40% of Republicans would support higher taxes.¹³⁵ A sympathetic public is going to make it increasingly untenable for politicians to say no, portending future changes.

Finally, the teachers are fighting for institutional reforms and not just a pay raise for themselves. Yes, teachers are underpaid – in 26 states, average teacher salaries, adjusted for inflation, were less in 2016 than they were at the end of the 20th century, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.¹³⁶ In 2015, an average teacher made 17 percent less than comparable workers in salary. Back in 1994, the salary gap was 1.8 percent. Yet, teachers have turned down generous pay raise offers to secure longer-term commitments from lawmakers for public education and to end programs they see as harmful to education funding, such as school vouchers.¹³⁷ It appears that politicians' plans to pay off public educators have backfired: with political capital on their side, teachers are willing to forgo better salaries in order create the sort of necessary changes in funding and public attitudes that will change primary and secondary education for the better.

The teacher strikes of 2018 will not lead to long-term educational reforms

At 7 a.m. on August 3, 1981, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization declared a strike, seeking better working conditions, better pay, and a 32-hour workweek. In response, President Ronald Reagan fired 11,345 controllers and rallied the public against the union, emphasizing that every controller had taken a no-strike pledge upon being hired. Many cite this as a major turning point in American labor history, particularly for government employees.¹³⁸ As thousands of teachers have walked off the job in 2018 demanding better pay and public funding, many political commentators are wondering if history is repeating itself.¹³⁹ **The teacher strikes of 2018 will not lead to long-term reforms because they do not address structural issues in teacher compensation, politicians were able to offer only temporary concessions, and funding has simply fallen too far behind.**

First, the strikes have not addressed the core reason behind teacher discontent: teachers are getting compensated more, but they are not seeing it in their pay. Traditionally, fringe benefits helped compensate for lower teacher salaries, and teacher benefits are still far richer than in the private sector. But reforms have dramatically eaten into the pension benefits for newer workers at the same time that both employee and employer contributions have risen. In fact, when taking pensions into account, teachers lagged in total compensation by 11 percent.¹⁴⁰ This reveals a fundamental disconnect in the teacher ranks, one that will assure future discord in the future. Teachers' pay, on average, has risen 1.4 percent a year nationwide over the past 10 years. Meanwhile, teacher health insurance costs have risen 4 percent a year, and retirement costs have increased 7.8 percent a year. Yet, those increased costs don't translate into better benefits for today's teachers. They're merely being used to pay for past underfunding of beleaguered pension systems. Also, thanks to the lower salaries many teachers won't be in their jobs long enough to take advantage of retirement benefits anyway.¹⁴¹ None of the strikes, however, have gotten at this issue – it's only been about salaries and overall statewide funding. As such, these strikes overlook the biggest fiscal bomb set to hit American public education.

Second, in most of the aforementioned states, politicians were able to end the strikes with only temporary and short-term concessions, falling far short of the teachers' initial demands. In Arizona for example, the state legislature only guaranteed a 9% pay raise this year while still refusing to accede to the teachers' central campaign of raising state taxes for education.¹⁴² The same has occurred in Kentucky and West Virginia as well. Want to know how politicians made off well? They've received praise from conservative media outlets for not giving in to the bigger demands.¹⁴³ Rather than give in, state officials have simply kicked the can down the road in hopes they can win a waiting game with teachers. Unless these strikes are recurring – which itself poses a political risk – it is unlikely these walkouts will result in little more than momentary pay increases.

Finally, state funding for education has fallen behind in grave fashion. This is years in the making, and it will take more than just one round of strikes to fix them. The housing collapse hit many states' property-dependent tax receipts – much of which funds public education.¹⁴⁴ As such, many states and districts, in an effort to cut costs in the wake of the Great Recession, cut back on education spending. The majority of states have still not returned to pre-recession funding levels. Arizona is the worst hit, with 36 percent less in per-pupil spending now than pre-recession levels, but another 15 states where teacher actions have not yet materialized still have spending reductions of 10 percent or more in place.¹⁴⁵ This has created a backlog in state budgets; even if every demand from the teachers were met, it won't fix long-running problems in public education that stretch back a decade.

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Lebanon is the site of a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The prime minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, shocked the world on November 4, 2017, while on a trip to Saudi Arabia, by announcing his resignation from office.¹⁴⁶ While Hariri has since said that he would postpone his resignation, on request of the Lebanese president Michel Aoun, the political situation in Lebanon seems to be rife with turmoil and uncertainty.¹⁴⁷ These events are not merely the result of internal state machinations within Lebanon, but rather have great significance for the larger balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran. **Given the larger geopolitical context of the region and the political reactions in both Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, there is every reason to believe that Lebanon is and will continue to be the site of a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.**

A principal reason to suspect that Lebanon may be the site of a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is the larger regional geopolitical context. Qatar, a state directly to the east of Saudi Arabia, has been accused of supporting Iranian-backed terrorist organizations and thereby placed under economic embargo since June of 2017 by the Gulf Cooperating Council, headed by Saudi Arabia.¹⁴⁸ This demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is fully willing to exert economic capital and coerce its allies into following a similar policy, in order to limit Iran's sphere of influence. Yemen, a state directly to the south of Saudi Arabia, has been the site of an escalating proxy war between the Houthi rebels, armed by Iran, and the government, armed and supported by Saudi Arabia and its air force.¹⁴⁹ This demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is willing to go to full scale military intervention in order to prevent states from aligning themselves with Iran. Syria, directly bordering Lebanon, is the site of a civil war with large degrees of foreign influence, features Saudi Arabia funding rebels to overthrow Assad, and Iran engaging in direct military strikes and deploying the paramilitary organization of Hezbollah to support Assad.¹⁵⁰ This suggests that Iran, likewise, is willing to deploy its military might in order to curtail Saudi Arabian hegemony. Due to the wide range of conflict, from full scale militarized proxy war to economic sanctions, the climate is staged for Lebanon to become the site of a new proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Even if there weren't other proxy conflicts raging that suggest that Lebanon might become the next battlefield between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the internal balance of power in Lebanon suggests the same. Hezbollah, a militant political organization in Lebanon that is directly tied to Iran, has been opposed to Hariri's resignation, as it would shatter the coalition government in Lebanon and destabilize the country; this has won popular support for Hezbollah as a stabilizing force.¹⁵¹ This is significant, as any possible Saudi Arabian subterfuge that led to Hariri's initial resignation would be aimed at reigning in Hezbollah's influence and installing a regime that is friendlier to Saudi Arabian interests. Hariri's government has been focused primarily at preventing a renewal of sectarian fighting within Lebanon, and so the dissolution of that government heralds a new coming conflict. The internal political imbalance between Hezbollah and the government sets the stage for the coming proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Lebanon.

Independently of the Lebanese political situation, Saudi Arabia's own response to the leadership crisis in Lebanon is indicative of a coming conflict. A top government official in Saudi Arabia declared on Saudi news channels, "The Lebanese government will be dealt with as a government declaring war on Saudi Arabia, and all Lebanese must realize these dangers and work to resolve the issues before we reach the point of no return."¹⁵² While not an official declaration of war, Saudi Arabia has not retracted the statement. Thus, it is likely that Saudi Arabia will continue to try to weaken Hezbollah and diminish Iranian influence in Lebanon. This is only further backed up by the government of Saudi Arabia ordering all of its citizens to evacuate Lebanon, a tell-tale sign that conflict may escalate there.¹⁵³ As a result of the statements and actions of the Saudi government, there is every reason to believe that Lebanon will be a site of conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Lebanon is not the site of a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In early November 2017, Prime Minister Saad Hariri of Lebanon resigned from office while on a state visit to Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁴ While this initial announcement has since been tempered and delayed, in part due to the request of President Michel Aoun of Lebanon, the announcement set the rumor mill ablaze with predictions that Lebanon was about to delve into a civil war sponsored by Saudi Arabia and Iran.¹⁵⁵ Like many alarmist statements about profound regional instability in the Middle East, these are based more in fear and security culture than anything else. **Due to the domestic and international checks on escalation of any potential conflict in Lebanon, Lebanon is not and will not become the site of a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.**

The domestic politics of Lebanon are particularly unlikely to spur conflict, as Hezbollah can prevent the government from collapsing. The Lebanese government is a highly integrated political body that includes Hezbollah figures and therefore is unlikely to launch any operations against Hezbollah, despite pressure from Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁶ The strength of Hezbollah compared to the Lebanese government gives it enough relative resources that few would dare oppose it in Lebanon. Hezbollah is not particularly eager to make conflict, either. Even since the initial resignation, Hezbollah officials have been in negotiations with the Lebanese government in order to maintain domestic stability and the current coalition government.¹⁵⁷ While Hariri may have attempted to dislodge Hezbollah's position in the government, that attempt has failed. Hezbollah cannot be disconnected from the government, and shows no signs of leaving on its own. As a result, Hezbollah can maintain its position and prevent the government from dissolving, showing that Lebanon will not be the site for a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Another domestic factor within Lebanon that is serving to moderate conflict and prevent escalation is President Aoud. Aoud specifically has already prevented conflict escalation, being personally responsible for initially convincing Hariri to postpone and potentially even withdraw his resignation.¹⁵⁸ The ability of Aoud to prevent the immediate dissolution of the acting Lebanese government and an ensuing power struggle has helped prevent conflict escalation in Lebanon. This power is indefinite, as the office of the president is responsible for accepting or declining Hariri's resignation.¹⁵⁹ Aoud, then, can continue to hold Lebanon in its current coalition government and prevent a breakdown in the rule of law or civil war from occurring. This grants Aoud an extended block of time to continue negotiations with Hariri to prevent a resignation. Taken together, the actions and powers of President Aoud all but guarantee that Lebanon will not be the site for a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

An additional key aspect that will prevent any sort of political instability from escalating to the level of proxy conflict in Lebanon is the pressure from international actors. While many in the international community suspect that Saudi Arabia pressured Hariri to resign, any Saudi efforts to install a new leader in Lebanon have been stymied by Western powers wary of more civil war in the Middle East.¹⁶⁰ Western nations such as the United States have influence in Saudi Arabia, in large part due to trade ties. Additionally, the United Nations General Secretary Antonio Guterres has urged for continued stability in response to the situation in Lebanon.¹⁶¹ The United Nations releasing a statement on this gives moral authority to Lebanese actors aiming to maintain the status quo. Taken in its wider geopolitical context, international actors such as Western states and the United Nations have a moderating influence on Lebanese politics, effectively preventing Lebanon from becoming the site of a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

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