INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER EXTREMISTS AND THEIR FAMILIES ON RADICALIZATION AND DERADICALIZATION PAGE 12

VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Advancing DECARBONIZATION

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE GIORGIA LUPI visualizes RAND data
Should the Police Conduct Traffic Stops?

Traffic stops are the most prevalent way in which police interact with the public. RAND’s Bob Harrison—a former police chief—considers the implications of limiting traffic stops and opportunities to create a better future for traffic and community safety.

MORE AT www.rand.org/b210630harrison

Sexual Assault of Sexual Minorities in the U.S. Military

Service members who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or who did not indicate that they identify as heterosexual, represented only 12 percent of the active component population in 2018. But they accounted for about 43 percent of all sexually assaulted service members that year.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/RRA1390-1

Pharmacotherapy for Substance Use Disorders

This toolkit supports the delivery of effective, evidence-based pharmacotherapy for clients with co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders, and simplifies care implementation in mental health clinics.

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Game Theory: A Tool for the Vaccine Campaign

Luke Muggy, an operations researcher at RAND and professor at the Pardee RAND Graduate School, discusses ways in which game theory could support the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, including through coordination of supply purchases and the development of tools that make the availability of vaccines transparent to the public.

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Funding and Financing Infrastructure at U.S. Airports

In June 2021, Benjamin Miller, an economist at RAND and professor at the Pardee RAND Graduate School, presented testimony before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations, and Innovation.

MORE AT www.rand.org/t/CTA1471-1
A Cixin Liu Mystery
Where Chinese science fiction and RAND history collide?

Violent Extremism
Terrorism and ideologically inspired violence are serious threats to U.S. national security

Global Implications of Costa Rica’s Decarbonization Plan
A promising approach to slashing carbon emissions

Research Briefly
Vaccines, alcohol consumption, and teachers in the age of COVID-19

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Paying college athletes

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The U.S. criminal justice system in the pandemic era

Art + Data
A data visualization designer focuses on reconnecting numbers to what they stand for: stories, people, and ideas

Giving
The Susan L. Marquis Endowed Scholarship

Senior policy analyst Sale Lilly read about renowned RAND researcher Bill Mathers in an award-winning science fiction trilogy—but somehow had never heard of him before.
The Cost of Vaccine Nationalism

The world economy will continue to lose billions of dollars every month until the lowest-income countries are able to vaccinate their people against COVID-19. By most estimates, that won’t be until well into 2022.

Researchers at RAND Europe developed an economic model of world trade to explore the potential costs of “vaccine nationalism.” That’s when wealthy nations like the United States or United Kingdom corner the market on vaccines, striking deals directly with vaccine makers, hoarding supplies, and leaving poorer countries out.

But the world economy is so hyperconnected that it will not fully recover until every country is able to bring the virus under control. The researchers looked at what a “my nation first” approach would mean to five sectors that have been hit especially hard by COVID lockdowns and other precautions: hospitality, recreation, retail and wholesale trade, transportation, and health.

The global loss to those sectors alone could exceed $150 billion a year until vaccines reach the world’s poorest countries. Wealthy countries will take a direct economic hit from the continued slowdown in economic demand and from supply-chain disruptions. The United States, for example, stands to lose between $6 billion and $30 billion a year. The United Kingdom will lose as much as $10 billion a year, and the European Union will lose up to $78 billion.

That makes a strong business case for wealthier nations to help expand the reach of the vaccines. By one estimate, it will cost around $25 billion to procure and deliver vaccines to the world’s poorest countries. At that rate, every dollar invested in the effort would save between $1.90 and $12.60 for the world economy.

More at www.rand.org/t/RRA769-1

Funding for this research was made possible by the independent research and development provisions of RAND’s contracts for the operation of its U.S. Department of Defense federally funded research and development centers.
Teachers Under Stress

Teachers left their jobs during the pandemic for many of the same reasons they left before the pandemic, a recent RAND survey found. That should give district administrators pause as they contemplate what schools will look like after the pandemic.

Fewer than half of the teachers who quit post-COVID last year cited the pandemic as a main reason. More often, they pointed to the overall stress of teaching—long hours, low pay, and what the survey described as the "disappointments of teaching." Those are problems that won’t go away as schools reopen and classes get back to normal.

Researchers asked nearly 1,000 former public school teachers what made them resign, retire early, or take an unpaid leave of absence. The teachers were roughly split between those who left before COVID shut down schools in March 2020 and those who left after.

More than 4 in 10 of the teachers who left because of the pandemic said the challenges of remote instruction or inadequate safety plans played a role in their decision. Older teachers, especially, said they worried about health risks. Younger teachers cited their own child care responsibilities at home.

But the most common reason—"The stress and disappointments of teaching weren’t worth it"—was the same for teachers who left before and during the pandemic. That undercurrent of discontent could put additional strain on the 2021–22 school year, just as schools are trying to recover from the pandemic, the researchers wrote. Districts should work with their teachers to address classroom stress as they plan for the future.

The survey, which drew from RAND’s American Educator Panels, did find one reason for optimism. Nearly two-thirds of the teachers who left because of the pandemic said they would consider coming back once students and staff members are vaccinated.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/t/RRA1121-2

Funding for this research was made possible by a grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

Alcohol Use During the Pandemic

This might not come as a surprise to anyone who spent eight hours a day working at the kitchen table while helping the kids with online math, but alcohol use in the United States soared during the pandemic.

Women, especially, reported more bouts of binge drinking during the early days of the COVID lockdowns. They also reported more problems associated with their drinking, such as work or health impacts.

Researchers were already studying alcohol consumption for the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism when the pandemic created a natural experiment. They had surveyed hundreds of American adults in Spring 2019, before anyone had heard of COVID-19. They repeated the survey in May and June 2020, when those same adults were mostly stuck at home, sheltering in place.

They found that women were drinking around 17 percent more often and men around 10 percent more often. Women also reported binge drinking—four or more drinks in a couple of hours—41 percent more often; although, for the average woman, that was still something that happened less than once a month. Nearly 1 in 10 women scored higher on a set of questions designed to test whether their alcohol use was causing problems.

The results suggest that health care providers should make a point of asking their patients about alcohol use and explaining the risks of alcohol abuse, the researchers wrote.

The study provided some of the first survey-based information on how alcohol use changed during the pandemic. It used RAND’s American Life Panel, a nationally representative sample of American adults who answer questions about their attitudes and behaviors over time. Researchers are following the same panelists to see how their drinking changes as the pandemic drags on, and whether it takes a toll on their physical and psychological health.

MORE AT
www.rand.org/ep68312

Funding for this research was made possible by a grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.
Giorgia Lupi has shown what plastic pollution would look like if you could see it in the air, a swirling mass of household flotsam and fibers. She once documented the history of Starbucks on the bronze wall of a roastery in Milan. Lately, though, she’s found her inspiration within the pages of RAND policy reports: research as work of art.

Lupi is RAND’s inaugural Art + Data artist-in-residence, part of an effort to make research on important policy issues more accessible to more people. Every month, she and the artists who follow her will release a visualization that describes some key piece of RAND research in shape and color.

“We hope this partnership with artists, whose vision and creativity can inspire people to think differently about policy, will help illustrate the relevance of policy issues to everyday life,” said Jennifer Gould, vice president and chief of staff at RAND, who helps lead the initiative.

Lupi is an information designer, a partner at the international design consultancy Pentagram, and a self-described data humanist. By that, she means she tries to reconnect numbers to
the people, stories, and ideas behind them. Data, she said at a TED conference in 2017, should be the “beginning of the conversation, and not the end.”

Her first artistic challenge at RAND was a 97-page report describing “decisive and transformative change” to America’s system of mental health care. The report offered 15 recommendations that would improve the lives of millions of Americans living with mental illness.

In Lupi’s hands, data from the report became the glowing strands of filament in an image of the human brain. Fewer than half of the people who need mental health treatment get it; they were shown as purple strands amid the bright pink of people affected by mental illness. One in four Americans experiencing homelessness also has a serious mental illness; they were the teal strands just below.

The visualization is meant to “draw our attention to all the barriers—some quite recognizable and others hidden in arcane systems and little-known statistics—that prevent us from caring for ourselves and others,” Lupi explained on Twitter.

Her second piece used video to explore the challenges and opportunities of wearable—and, in some cases, implantable—technology. It drew from a RAND report on the “Internet of Bodies,” a fast-growing category that includes fitness trackers, sensor-equipped hospital beds, digital pills, and smart pacemakers. What they share is the ability to track, record, and store information about a user’s health, movement, and bodily functions.

Lupi’s video shows a young woman gradually disappearing behind a cloud of her own data. Its purpose, she said, was to evoke “the future ‘data ecosystems’ that will surround us when these technologies are employed at huge scales.”

“As our culture has become more and more complicated, the ability to visualize information can provide people with a better way to understand it,” said Debbie Millman, host of the Design Matters podcast, who is curating the RAND Art + Data residency. “We hope the program will showcase how world-class artists can visualize nonpartisan data in a telegraphic and compelling manner for all.”

The program is part of RAND’s NextGen Initiative, a series of projects to spark interest in public policy and cultivate civic engagement among 18- to 40-year-olds. Future illustrations will build awareness around RAND research on other top policy issues.

This is not the first time RAND has brought together the worlds of art and research. In 1969, it hosted sculptor John Chamberlain, who decided to engage employees in what he described as participatory art. He sent around a memo: “I’m searching for ANSWERS. Not questions! If you have any, will you please fill in below, and send them to me in Room 1138.”

The answers he got back ranged from exasperated (“DAMNED IDIOT”) to confused (“I like the black edging on the doors...”) to cryptic (“The sign at the Holiday Inn is what is wrong with America”). But Chamberlain had the last laugh. A selection of the answers made its way into an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
For its 115-year history, even as the popularity and profitability of collegiate athletics soared, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) restricted what student athletes could receive in education-related benefits, such as tutoring, academic awards, graduate school scholarships, or paid internships. But on June 21, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously against the NCAA.

The Court did not directly address the broader issue of whether these athletes could be paid salaries. Still, this ruling may prove transformative as a step toward allowing college athletes to access the income that their labor produces.

There’s still resistance to the idea, of course. College presidents have opposed paying athletes, suggesting that students and alumni wouldn’t root for paid players. Coaches also have taken issue with paying college players salaries and have even threatened to “do something else” if their players are paid.
But the Supreme Court made it clear that the NCAA business model of restraining competition and price-fixing labor would be illegal in almost any other industry in America. The NCAA, for its part, voted in June to allow college athletes to profit from the use of their name, image, and likeness. Still, some see college-issued paychecks for athletes as inevitable. Very quickly, the question will turn from if colleges should pay their athletes to how that might work.

A likely model lies with another group of university students. Like near-pro athletes, they receive tuition waivers, health benefits, and access to world-class facilities, but they are also paid salaries: Ph.D. students. Graduate students have their own complaints these days and some have organized unions and strikes to protest their pay rates and how harassment cases are handled. But they are still far ahead of athletes. Ph.D. students get a contract before they start school agreeing to work a certain number of hours per week—grading, teaching, doing research, etc.—for their institution. In exchange, the university agrees to waive their tuition, pays them a salary or stipend, and may give them access to various benefits including health insurance. Similarly, college athletes could sign a contract that binds them to work for the university and receive a salary. Their labor hours would include game-day labor and preparation for games (i.e., practice and travel time to away games). Their contract would also include educational requirements, such as maintaining a certain GPA.

The marketplace can easily manage to value salaries for college athletes. This too already happens with Ph.D. students. Business school and STEM doctoral students, for example, receive salaries higher than English or history Ph.D. students, because those programs bring in more revenue and their graduates are in high demand.

College athletes’ salaries are likely to be influenced by the supply of and demand for players in particular sports, their skill sets, location, and bargaining power. These factors will, of course, vary across collegiate athletic programs, and also across sports within a college. Baseball, basketball, and football players are in high demand to industries (i.e., Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, and the National Football League) and generate high revenue for their universities and the NCAA. As such, it would seem like these students should earn higher salaries than rugby, softball, or bowling college athletes. That said, labor in collegiate sports is a team effort, so perhaps salaries should be the same for teammates, not dependent on the position, or higher for star players. This would lead to greater competition across universities and result in a fair market rate for college athletes.

Some may argue that a market-driven approach to paying athletes could lead to an imbalance—that schools in high-profile conferences or with winning programs will lock up all the best recruits. Among graduate programs, this is minimized because graduate students receiving degrees in the same subject have similar salaries across different universities. For example, Ph.D. salaries in economics are similar for students at University of Michigan and Louisiana State University, adjusting for cost of living. Similarly, college athletes in baseball could receive similar salaries whether working for UC Santa Barbara or Clemson University since they are performing the same labor. Allowing salaries to not vary too much between universities within the same sport could, in fact, allow for greater athletic competition because students will not be incentivized to “follow the money.”

The fairness of compensating college athletes has resonated with many Americans who have never donned a jersey. One reason is that the current NCAA business model essentially mirrors inequities in the broader U.S. economy: huge income is generated in the aggregate, but a select sliver reaps massively disproportionate gains.

Over the last 40 years, workers gained almost nothing in real dollars, while CEO pay has grown by 1,167 percent. College athletes’ pay remained suppressed, even as the NCAA grew to generate $1.18 billion in revenue by 2019. It is as if these college athletes’ incomes were taxed 100 percent and all the wealth they generated was redistributed to college athletic departments.

The recent Supreme Court ruling may upend college athletics in some ways that are overdue. But the model to pay them is simple labor economics—the same one that has been used to give salaries to Ph.D. students for decades.
The name jumped off the page at me: Bill Mathers, of the RAND Corporation. It wasn’t some research report I was reading, not a policy paper or news commentary. This was Chinese science fiction, an epic novel about distant galaxies and alien intrigues. And yet, here was Bill Mathers, of the RAND Corporation.

The author, a famed novelist named Cixin Liu, described Mathers as one of the foremost minds in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. He had, Liu claimed, written a critically important report on the dangers of interstellar contact, *The 100,000-Light-Year Iron Curtain*.

I had never heard of him. I searched RAND’s internal library for his report but found nothing. Yet a quick search of the internet turned up more than a few websites that quoted him as a real person. Who was this Bill Mathers—and was he really a RAND colleague?

I’m a policy analyst at RAND, where I mostly work on China-related defense and economic research. No small part of my interest in Chinese science fiction comes from trying to understand how contemporary Chinese authors tell a big story. And the book I
was reading, Liu’s *The Three-Body Problem*, is as big as they come.

It’s part of a trilogy that provides Liu’s answer to the famous Fermi paradox: With billions of stars in our galaxy, and countless worlds circling them, shouldn’t we have found intelligent life by now? Liu describes a universe where life is abundant—and has learned to keep quiet out of fear of mutual destruction. The trilogy was translated into English in 2014; won the biggest prize in science fiction, the Hugo Award, in 2015; and has been recommended by no less than former U.S. president Barack Obama.

In the story, Bill Mathers’ report provides a warning that the universe is not so quiet as it may seem. Our efforts to signal intelligent life are essentially equivalent to soldiers calling in artillery fire on their own position.

It certainly sounded expansive and Cold War-esque enough to be an old RAND publication. And I soon found references to Mathers on science fiction blogs and in magazines, and on news sites dedicated to space travel. *OuterPlaces*, a sci-fi webzine, even quoted him alongside renowned physicist Stephen Hawking. “Over the course of the book,” it said in a review of *The Three-Body Problem*, “Liu brings in real-world writings on the dangers of extraterrestrial contact, including [those of] Bill Mathers.”

My next stop was the Chinese message boards I often peruse to help me make sense of what China’s political and economic leaders are doing. I found plenty of references to Bill Mathers, or 比尔马修 in Chinese characters—and a lively debate about whether he existed. “There’s no such character,” one user posted. “Liu made him up.” Others countered that perhaps he was just hard to find because his reports were classified as top secret.

Resolved to know the truth, I emailed RAND archivist Cara McCormick. She looked through more than 70 years of RAND publications, trying different variations of Bill or William Mathers, even Chinese transliterations that sounded close. She found one W. Christopher Mathews, who wrote about HIV care in the 1990s and early 2000s—but no Bill Mathers, and no report on an extraterrestrial iron curtain.

But Liu’s fictional Bill Mathers was not far from reality. McCormick pointed me to several former RAND researchers who had spent years studying the search for extraterrestrial life. A few had even explored how the geopolitics of the real Iron Curtain might influence interplanetary affairs. They published reports with titles like *A Comparison of U.S. and Soviet Efforts to Explore Mars* or, more darkly, *Planetary Contamination II: Soviet and U.S. Practices and Policies*.

The Bill Mathers of Liu’s book warns that Earth must be ready, willing, and able to fend off an alien attack, even if that assures its own destruction. That, too, has echoes of RAND’s past. RAND research and analysis on “mutually assured destruction” helped maintain an uneasy balance between the United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. The ideas that Liu uses to build suspense could have been drawn from Herman Kahn, who wrote the book on nuclear deterrence, *On Thermonuclear War*. Or from John Nash, the game theorist featured in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. Both were researchers at RAND.

I don’t know whether Liu knew of them or their work. But I think he would be entertained to know that his fictional Bill Mathers came close enough to reality to send me on my quest.

The 20th century was full of science fiction authors whose futuristic imaginings have since become more fact than fiction. Isaac Asimov’s stories of autonomous robots, for example, helped inform real-world discussions about the ethics of artificial intelligence. Asimov also teamed up with RAND researchers in the 1960s to study the possibilities of interplanetary exploration.

Liu is sometimes described as China’s Isaac Asimov. What insights could we gain from a science fiction author like him, as talk of a U.S.–China race to Mars heats up?

Perhaps Liu might one day find himself on the cover of a RAND report. It would hardly be more surprising than a RAND researcher finding a fictional colleague between the pages of a Chinese science fiction story.
Even as protesters called for change in cities across America last year, a massive experiment was underway that reshaped every corner of the criminal justice system. Some police agencies scaled back traffic stops and low-level arrests. Courts tried to send more defendants into diversion programs, rather than locking them up. Prisons and jails released people who were awaiting trial or serving minor sentences. The result was a less intrusive, less punitive system of justice—one that dovetailed in some ways with demands for reform, but was brought about more by the demands of COVID-19.

**POLICE**

**Big Change**
As courts shut down and jails tried to reduce their populations, some police agencies scaled back low-level arrests and reduced or fully suspended traffic enforcement. Many workshop participants said they had not seen any subsequent increase in crime tied to those changes.

**Questions for the Future**
Does evidence support those perceptions that targeted reductions in enforcement had no significant effect on public safety?
How would continuing web-based crime reporting, which expanded during the pandemic, affect public trust in police?
Are there more effective approaches to respond to mental health crisis calls, which increased during the pandemic?

**COURTS**

**Big Change**
Some courts closed early in the pandemic and then tried to reduce caseloads when they reopened. That resulted in fewer criminal prosecutions and—in some areas—greater focus on diversion programs and other alternatives.

**Questions for the Future**
How did court systems in different states and counties respond to the pandemic, and what did those differences mean for their outcomes?
Has the significant reduction in pretrial detention and money bail affected appearance rates?
Was the significantly increased use of virtual hearings during the pandemic associated with different outcomes, such as bail amounts or criminal sentences?
COVID-19 and Criminal Justice

The pandemic forced the entire criminal justice system to adapt and innovate in ways it never had before. Researchers convened a series of workshops with experts and practitioners—police chiefs, prison officials, judges, parole officers—to explore how the lessons of COVID-19 could improve the future of criminal justice. The National Institute of Justice sponsored their work. “By showing what was possible,” they wrote, the pandemic “opens up new possibilities for the future.” Here’s a small sample of those possibilities, and the questions that must still be answered.

SUPERVISION

Big Change
Parole and probation officers made greater use of online check-ins to minimize physical contact. Those appear to have been less burdensome and provide better access to services, which could make them a better alternative to usual supervision practices.

Questions for the Future
Did virtual check-ins reduce parole or probation violations and help prevent the backflow of people back into the criminal justice system?
How can we best address technological barriers, such as lack of internet WiFi, that could hinder the expansion of virtual supervision?
Did the pandemic-related reduction of drug testing and other in-person supervision affect outcomes?

CORRECTIONS

Big Change
Some jails, and even some larger prisons, expedited the release of significant numbers of incarcerated people to prevent infection. At the time of the workshops, panelists were optimistic that this “massive natural experiment in decarceration” had not resulted in a major increase in crime.

Questions for the Future
Do crime statistics and other evidence support that view, which could reinforce broader arguments about the need to reduce incarceration in the United States?
How can jails and prisons better partner with local hospitals or other health care providers to prepare for the next outbreak of disease?
Did virtual visits provide a cheaper and more convenient way for families to stay connected?

Adapted from The U.S. Criminal Justice System in the Pandemic Era and Beyond: Taking Stock of Efforts to Maintain Safety and Justice Through the COVID-19 Pandemic and Prepare for Future Challenges by Brian A. Jackson et al. Available for free download at www.rand.org/t/RRA108-8
On the afternoon of January 6, 2021, Todd Helmus, a senior behavioral scientist at RAND, was finishing a report on violent extremism when chanting crowds began streaming past his window. He grabbed his phone and chased after them.
He caught up with a man in an American flag shirt and a Trump 2020 ballcap just outside the U.S. Capitol. “All these trees you see out here, with these big, sturdy limbs,” the man said into the camera of Helmus’ phone, “need to have bodies of senators, Republican and Democrats alike…. It’s time for us to bring our guns and leave our women at the house.” Behind him, the crowd swelled against the Capitol steps.

Helmus is an expert in what pulls people into violent extremism. He has studied efforts to quell hate in Indonesia and to prevent violence in Nigeria. His new report, the one he was writing the day an insurrectionist mob crashed through the barricades of the U.S. Capitol, turns the lens on America. He and other researchers interviewed dozens of former extremists and their friends and family members to understand what drew them in, and how they got out.

“People can escape this; they can find their way out of these extreme ideologies,” he said. “Those who are knee-deep in QAnon conspiracy theories or so radicalized by the notion that the election was stolen—they, too, can escape that. There’s hope at the end of the tunnel.”
Indicators of radicalization

Top law enforcement officials have described violent extremism—especially violent White extremism—as the greatest domestic threat facing the United States. The Biden administration has requested tens of millions of dollars to fight it. Yet the research on what an effective strategy might look like has too often failed to engage the people who might know best: those who have lived that life and left it behind.

RAND researchers partnered with two antiextremism support groups, Parents for Peace and Beyond Barriers, to change that. They interviewed 24 former extremists, as well as ten family members and two friends who had helped them escape extremism. Most of the former extremists had once sworn allegiance to groups like the Ku Klux Klan or the National Socialist Movement. But the researchers also interviewed former Islamic extremists who had left groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda.

Most of the people they interviewed had come to extremism by way of social media, books, and other propaganda; for one former White supremacist, it was “loud rock music and screaming voices.” Some had been recruited, but many others had radicalized on their own and then went looking for groups to join. One interviewee credited a book club run by the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer website.

As a group, they tended to struggle with social isolation and financial instability; they told stories of being victimized, marginalized, or stigmatized by other groups or individuals. More than half showed signs of mental health problems, such as anger or anxiety, but the line from there to extremism was not direct. Instead, those problems had often cut them off from other opportunities, such as jobs or military service, fueling their sense of isolation or marginalization. Like gang members everywhere, they were drawn by the promise of camaraderie and power. One former White supremacist recalled how people would cross the street when they saw him coming.

“No one joins these movements saying, ‘You know what? I’m going to be a bad guy.’”

Jeff Schoep, the former leader of the National Socialist Movement, the largest neo-Nazi organization in the U.S., at his home near Detroit in 2019

“These group bonds pull people in, retain them, and make it hard to leave,” said Rajeev Ramchand, a senior behavioral scientist at RAND who coauthored the report. “It’s really a process for these people. It makes sense, but that’s really been missing from the discourse around violent extremism.”

Jeff Schoep used to boast that he could recruit almost anyone into the National Socialist Movement, the largest neo-Nazi group in America. As its commander for 25 years, he proved his point hundreds of times. All he needed was a grievance, he said—a lost job, a tight bank account—and a sliver of suspicion that someone else was benefiting.

“Now the foot is in the door,” he said.

“It worked very much like a cult,” said Schoep, who renounced the movement in 2019, recast himself as a spokesman against hate, and founded Beyond Barriers to redress some of the damage he had done. “Hate is developed,” he added. “It’s fostered in these movements. You don’t even realize it’s happening to you. No one joins these movements saying, ‘You know what? I’m going to be a bad guy.’”

Successful interventions

Most of the interviewees had stories of family or friends—or, sometimes, the criminal justice system—trying to bend them away from the path they were on. Those confrontational interventions didn’t just fail; often, they drove extremists deeper into the movement, feeding their sense of anger and victimization.
What did work? For more than half of the interviewees, it was an encounter with someone they had been taught to hate, who showed them kindness they did not deserve. “I was faced with things with my perceived enemy,” one former White supremacist said, “and my perceived enemy was treating me normal.” Another spent seven years thinking about a Black cashier who noticed his White power tattoo and told him, “You’re a better person than that.” Seven years later, that one moment helped convince him to leave the movement.

Other former extremists said they just burned out, or grew disillusioned with the hypocrisy and pointless violence. For some, a turning point in their lives—an arrest, a friend’s death—made them rethink what they were doing. For others, someone intervened at just the right moment, when they were already starting to question their involvement, and guided them the rest of the way. “The sheikh said to me... ‘I’m going to give you a new pair of glasses by which to view the world,’” one former Islamic extremist said.

The interviews provide some direction as America turns to confront the extremist threat laid bare at the Capitol on January 6.

Families that sense a loved one sliding into extremism need more support and information about what warning signs to watch for, the researchers wrote. Public service announcements could help get the word out about what support groups are available, what hotlines to call. Antiterrorism groups, and communities in general, need to provide more opportunities to bring people from different backgrounds together. That one intervention played a critical role in changing the views—and the lives—of many of the people in the study.

“It was amazing how transformative just human contact and kindness could be,” said Ryan Andrew Brown, a senior behavioral and social scientist at RAND who co-led the project.

For Jeff Schoep, the former neo-Nazi leader, it was a conversation with a Black man that finally began to dent his commitment to hate and violence. The man described being hit with rocks when he was little and tried to march in a parade with his Boy Scouts troop. Something about his story broke through. “People who are trying to help can’t go in saying, ‘Hey, you racist bigot, you’re wrong,’” Schoep says now. “That’s the natural response, but it doesn’t work.”

Instead, America’s response to violent extremism should take a page from public health, researchers wrote. It should look for patterns in who is susceptible, what risk factors they share, and what help they need. It should focus money and resources on preventing extremism, long term, as if it were a virus or an addiction, rather than responding to it when it becomes a crisis.

RAND’s Todd Helmus learned those lessons early in his career, long before he was chasing after extremists to ask about their motives. He got his start as a clinical psychologist, working to free people from substance use disorders, and sees some of the same forces at work in the extremists he’s interviewed. “It’s not something they do part-time,” he said. “It’s their social circle, it’s their friends, it’s their lifestyle. It’s all-consuming. It gives them meaning.”

“When people break the law, yes, they need to face consequences,” he added. “But at the same time, we need more efforts at outreach, support, mental health care, and other initiatives that can help these folks find their way out. Because without that, it’s going to be very hard to escape that world.”
The Heat Is On

Costa Rica’s Ambitious Decarbonization Plan Has Implications for Nations Around the World

By Doug Irving, Staff Writer
This year has provided a grim preview of what climate scientists say the world is becoming. Suffocating heat in the Pacific Northwest killed 200 people. Torrential rains and flooding across Europe killed at least 200 more. In New York, smoke from western wildfires turned the sun red; in Madagascar, people ate locusts to stay alive as crop-lands turned to sand.

Almost every country on Earth has pledged to slash carbon emissions to slow the gears of global warming. The Biden administration has promised a “clean energy revolution” that would make the United States carbon-neutral by 2050. The European Union has proposed ending the sale of gas-powered vehicles by 2035.

But in the race to cut carbon emissions, Costa Rica has been leading the way. It adopted its own plan in 2019, promising to show the world what a net-zero carbon future could look like. Its plan would transform almost every facet of its economy, from car sales to cattle farming. A recent RAND analysis found that might be what it takes to break our reliance on carbon—and it might make Costa Rica tens of billions of dollars richer.

“Many people might assume that this is a big investment for a return that’s quite uncertain and based far out in the future,” said David Groves, who led the project as a senior policy researcher at RAND and is now with the World Bank’s Climate Change Group. “But our No. 1 finding is that, for a country like Costa Rica, the net benefits are very likely to be positive.”

The most important number in climate science right now is 1.5. When world leaders talk about slowing climate change, 1.5 degrees Celsius of postindustrial warming is the line they do not want to cross. After that—around 2 degrees—the best projections say tens of millions of people will face flooding or famine; almost every coral reef in the world will die.

Carbon is not the only driver of climate change, but it is the big one. Released from tailpipes and smokestacks, it can stay in the atmosphere for hundreds of years, trapping and reflecting heat. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned in August that global temperatures will very likely soar past that 2-degrees mark by the end of the century without steep cuts to carbon emissions. Its models show a world that is hotter than at any other point in the last 3 million years.

Costa Rica alone could not budge the total amount of carbon circulating in the atmosphere even if it bulldozed cities, outlawed cars, and shifted its entire economy to subsistence farming. It has one-sixtieth the population of the United States, and one-six-hundredth the carbon emissions. But its plan provides a glimpse of what a carbon-neutral future will look like.
Costa Rica would meet, or almost meet, its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 in more than three-quarters of the futures they modeled. It did even better than net-zero in nearly half of those futures, achieving net-negative emissions.

Electric cars on the road. Electric trains shuttling workers to the office towers of the capital, San José. Reclaimed forests; and, in the fields, more efficient management of crops and cattle. All of it powered not by coal or by gas, but mostly by the sun and the flow of water through dams.

“We do this,” former president Oscar Arias said, “with the hope that, eventually, we will be able to show the world that what ultimately needs to be done, can be done.”

But can it? The Inter-American Development Bank, which is investing hundreds of millions of dollars in Costa Rica’s vision, posed that question to researchers from RAND, the University of Costa Rica, and the Costa Rica Climate Change Directorate. The researchers couldn’t just look into the future to see how that plan would turn out. So they looked into 3,003 futures.

Using computers, they modeled different assumptions, different scenarios—an economy booming or growing slowly, more demand for transportation, less demand, forests shrinking or thriving. Their guiding question was not “Will this plan work?” but “Under what future conditions will this plan not work?”

They found that Costa Rica would meet, or almost meet, its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 in more than three-quarters of the futures they modeled. It did even better than net-zero in nearly half of those futures, achieving net-negative emissions. That would mean that Costa Rica’s vast forests and other carbon traps were inhaling more carbon from the atmosphere than its cities and industries exhaled.

The researchers estimated that Costa Rica’s plan would require up-front investments of around $37 billion. But it would provide $78 billion in savings and benefits, a return of 110 percent. Those ranged from increased crop yields to lower transportation costs to less congestion and fewer crashes on the streets of San José.

In fact, the costs of Costa Rica’s plan exceeded the economic benefits in only 21 of the 3,003 futures that RAND’s team analyzed. Higher-than-expected technology costs and slower-than-expected uptake could push the needle into the red. So could a super-heated economy that brought more people into the cities. Conventional cars becoming much more fuel efficient than they are now could also throw off the plan, if drivers put off buying even more efficient electric cars.

“What Costa Rica is doing is assuming the future economy will be driven
by industries that are carbon neutral,” said Edmundo Molina Pérez, who coauthored the report as a collaborator from the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey) in Mexico. “They’re basically catapulting their economy to a position that will make them more competitive and distribute the benefits of economic development more broadly, while at the same time keeping emissions low and mitigating climate change.”

Costa Rica has some unique advantages here. More than half of its map is colored green with forests, the result of one of the world’s most successful forest-conservation programs. It already has invested in an electric grid that runs almost entirely on hydropower. It has the political will; a national ethos of pura vida, or pure life; and a constitution that recognizes a healthy environment as a right of citizenship.

Nonetheless, there are some important lessons here for other countries. RAND’s analysis found significant benefits to decarbonization in the agricultural sector, for example. Across Latin America, that sector provides back-breaking wages in exchange for back-breaking work. Making it more efficient and cost-effective could improve the lives of some of the lowest-income workers in society.

More generally, the Costa Rica analysis shows how countries can take action and make investments that hold up, regardless of what future comes to pass. “This is the way we need to think about the problem,” Groves said. “You can’t just go and make a projection of how you’re going to decarbonize. You have to really think about the risks of not achieving it, and how you can manage those risks.”

RAND’s findings underpinned recent government decisions in Costa Rica on roughly $500 million in loans to get that electric train up and running in San José. Researchers are now doing a similar analysis in Chile, a country with a much larger economy, and much greater reliance on carbon-venting fossil fuels. They’re also studying the role that carbon-cutting investments might play in Costa Rica’s economic recovery from COVID-19.

That’s a theme that Costa Rica’s outspoken former environmental minister, Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, picked up on in a recent essay. “To ensure we leave this pandemic period in a better position than we started in,” he wrote, “we will need to work hard to steer ourselves toward a brighter and more resilient tomorrow…. It is 100 percent possible to balance the needs of the population with the needs of the planet.”

He made headlines around the world a few years ago with one bold prediction. His grandchildren, he said, will have the same carbon footprint in 2035 that his grandparents had in the 1940s. If Costa Rica does what it says it will, RAND’s analysis shows, they might have no carbon footprint at all within 30 years.
Susan Marquis recently stepped down as dean of the Pardee RAND Graduate School, leaving behind a legacy of change that reaches far beyond the classroom. She spent 13 years at the school pushing to redefine the field of policy analysis.

To recognize her achievements, donors—including James B. Lovelace, chair of the school’s Board of Governors, and other longtime board members—have contributed to a $1 million scholarship endowment established in her name. It’s a fitting tribute, board members said, to a leader who challenged students to “be the answer” they want to see in the world.

“She’s been a transformational leader, but it’s her focus on student needs that really set her apart,” said Susan Fuhrman, the former president of Teachers College at Columbia University. “She’s always been a dean who thinks about students as individuals—she knows them, and she thinks about their needs and interests.”

The Susan L. Marquis Endowed Scholarship will cover first-year tuition for future student recipients, and partial coverage for their second year. Members of the Board of Governors announced the scholarship, and contributed toward its endowment, following their annual meeting this spring. “It’s our way of saying thanks and helping future students remember your achievements,” Lovelace told Marquis.

As the Frank and Marcia Carlucci Dean of Pardee RAND, Marquis reoriented the study of policy analysis to meet the demands of the 21st century. She expanded the school’s traditional focus on research and analysis and added two new streams of study and action. One, centered on a physical lab developed at the school, focuses on the challenges and opportunities of cutting-edge technology. The other, centered on a handful of partner communities around the United States, focuses on making and implementing policy change at street level.

“We intend to make Pardee RAND the model for a new generation of public policy in America,” she wrote in a 2019 essay announcing the changes.

Through it all, she never lost sight of the student experience. She created a program to bring more students, from more diverse backgrounds, into the field of policy analysis by engaging with faculty leaders at schools committed to serving students of color. She recently worked with longtime donor Fred Pardee to provide subsidized housing to students, no small benefit in the Los Angeles rental market.

“She’s done so much for the school,” said Michael Dardia, former vice president for finance and assistant treasurer at the New York Public Library. He’s a longtime board member at Pardee RAND—and, also, a graduate. “Instead of just accepting the plight of the graduate students, she’s been tireless in trying to figure out how to get them more resources.”

As a finance officer, he has a rule when he donates to organizations like Pardee RAND: Don’t attach any strings, don’t target gifts to any specific project or purpose. He made an exception for the Marquis scholarship endowment.

“Thinking about the thing that was nearest and dearest to my heart, the thing I could relate to most, it was helping students,” he said. “When I heard they were naming it after Susan, that just sealed the deal.”

If you are interested in making a gift to the Susan L. Marquis Endowed Scholarship, contact Jessica Kikuchi at jkikuchi@rand.org. For more information about giving, visit campaign.rand.org.
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