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U.S. gov't-linked firm is source of exit poll claiming Venezuelan opposition won election

written by Ben Norton

August 2, 2024

Venezuela's opposition and U.S. media outlets claim there was fraud in the July 28 election based on an exit poll done by U.S. government-linked firm Edison Research, which works with CIA-linked U.S. state propaganda organs and was active in Ukraine, Georgia, and Iraq.

Venezuela's opposition has claimed that it won the July 28 election, accusing President Nicolás Maduro of "fraud".

The supposed evidence that Venezuelan opposition leaders and their allies have cited to justify this claim is an exit poll produced by a firm that is closely linked to the U.S. government and does work for U.S. state propaganda outlets that were

founded by the CIA.

A New Jersey-based company called [Edison Research published an exit poll](#) on the day of the election projecting that right-wing candidate Edmundo González Urrutia would win with 65% of the vote, compared to just 31% for Maduro.

This poll was cited by Venezuela's far-right, U.S.-backed opposition leader [Leopoldo López](#), as well as by billionaire oligarch [Elon Musk](#) and Western media outlets like the Washington Post, [Wall Street Journal](#), and [Reuters](#).

Many polling firms inside Venezuela are run by opposition figures and are notorious for their political bias. The most respectable independent firm in the country is the pollster [Hinterlaces](#), which estimated in its exit poll that Maduro got 54.6% of the vote, compared to 42.8% for González.

Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) ultimately reported that Maduro won the election with 51.2% of the vote, whereas González received 44.2%, and eight other opposition candidates got 4.6% combined. These results were close to what Hinterlaces projected, but very far off from what Edison Research claimed.

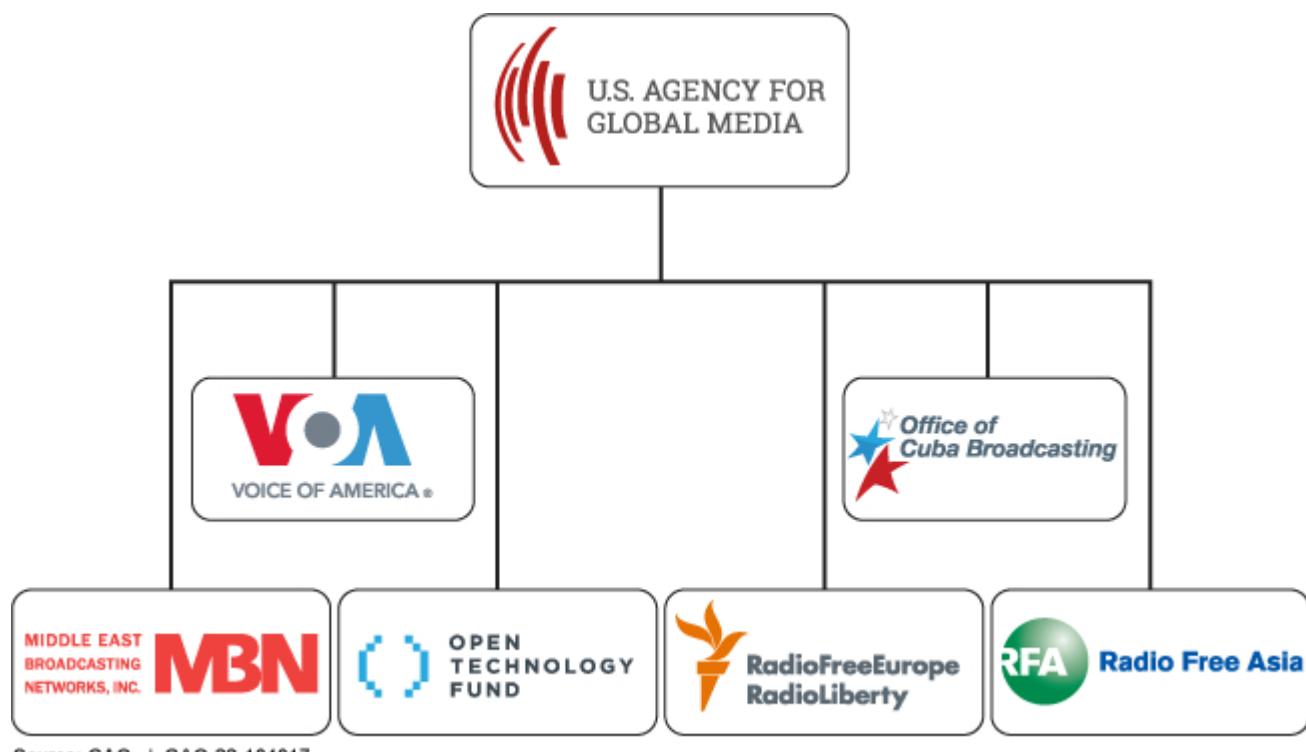
The U.S. State Department, which has backed [numerous coup attempts](#) in [Venezuela](#), refused to recognize Maduro's victory. [Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#) called the results into question.

On the other hand, independent electoral observers said the vote was free and fair. Monitors from the U.S. [National Lawyers Guild](#) wrote that their delegation in Venezuela "observed a transparent, fair voting process with scrupulous attention to legitimacy, access to the polls, and pluralism." They strongly condemned the opposition's "attacks on the electoral system as well as the role of the U.S. in undermining the democratic process."

Although Edison Research's exit poll has been widely cited by the U.S. media to cast

doubt upon Venezuela's electoral results, it is by no means an impartial observer. In fact, Edison's top clients include CIA-linked U.S. government propaganda outlets Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, all of which are operated by the U.S. Agency for Global Media, a Washington-based organ that is used to spread disinformation against U.S. adversaries.

Edison Research has likewise worked with UK state media outlet the BBC.



In addition to Venezuela, Edison has previously conducted suspicious polling in Ukraine, Georgia, and Iraq - areas of the world that have been deemed highly strategic by the U.S. State Department and targeted by Washington's relentless meddling.

Edison's international research is managed by the company's Executive Vice

President Rob Farbman. He was also cited in the press release on the [Venezuela exit poll](#) and was listed as the contact for the study.

The U.S. firm's website notes that "Farbman manages Edison's international research with a specialization in the Middle East and Africa for clients including BBC, the Voice of America, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty".



Election Research

Audio Research

Market Research

About

Rob Farbman

Executive Vice President

Rob Farbman is Edison Research's Executive Vice President. He is responsible for the management of all research operations at Edison. Directing Edison's work for the National Election Pool (ABC News, CBS News, CNN, and NBC News) has been a major focus for Farbman since 2004. Edison provides the National Election Pool with pre-election polling, early voter exit polling, Election Day exit polling, and tabulation of the national vote across every county in the United States. Farbman also oversees Edison's election polling for international clients, most recently in Venezuela, Iraq, Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia. Farbman manages Edison's international research with a specialization in the Middle East and Africa for clients including BBC, the Voice of America, the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.



These U.S. state media outlets are a key part of what the New York Times described in 1977 as a "[Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A.](#)"

The Times identified Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (as well as Radio Free Asia and Free Cuba Radio) as "C.I.A. broadcasting ventures".

One of the C.I.A.'s first major ventures was broadcasting, Although long suspected, it was reported definitively only a few years ago that until 1971 **the agency supported both Radio Free Europe**, which continues, with private financing, to broadcast to the nations of Eastern Europe, **and Radio Liberty**, which is beamed at the Soviet Union itself.

The C.I.A.'s participation in those operations was shielded from public view by two front groups, the Free Europe Committee and the American Committee for Liberation, both of which also engaged in a variety of lesser-known propaganda operations.

The American Committee for Liberation financed a Munich-based group, the Institute for the Study of the U.S.S.R., a publishing and research house that, among other things, compiles the widely used reference volume "Who's Who in the U.S.S.R." The Free Europe Committee published the magazine East Europe, distributed in this country as well as abroad, and also operated the Free Europe Press Service.

Far more obscure were **two other C.I.A. broadcasting ventures**, **Radio Free Asia** and a rather tenuous operation known as **Free Cuba Radio**. Free Cuba Radio, established in the early 1960's, did not broadcast from its own transmitters but purchased air time from a number of commercial radio stations in Florida and Louisiana.

In fact, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) states on its own website: "Initially, RFE and RL were funded principally by the U.S. Congress through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)".

When it started, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was called "Radio Liberation from Bolshevism", before changing its name to Radio Liberation in 1956 and Radio Liberty in 1963.

This U.S. state propaganda outlet was a key tool of information warfare during the

first Cold War against the Soviet Union and its allies. Today, it has continued disseminating disinformation about countries like Venezuela, Cuba, China, Russia, and Iran.



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ABOUT RFE/RL REACHING AUDIENCES ADVOCACY MEDIA CENTER



1950s

Founded in 1950, RFE initially broadcast to Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. In 1953, RL began broadcasting to the Soviet Union in Russian and 17 other national languages.

Initially, **RFE and RL were funded principally by the U.S. Congress through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)**. RFE also received supplemental private donations through the "Crusade for Freedom."

On his LinkedIn profile, Edison Research's executive vice president, Rob Farbman, wrote that he has overseen "election polling for international clients, most recently in Venezuela, Iraq, Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia."

Farbman added that he "manages Edison's work with international broadcasting organizations such as the BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Voice of America."

On LinkedIn, Farbman also states that "Edison works with a broad array of commercial clients, governments, and NGOs," although he did not disclose what those governments are.

Edison's corporate clients include Big Tech monopolies like Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Oracle, which have billions of dollars of contracts with the CIA, Pentagon, and other U.S. government agencies.



Search



Rob Farbman

Executive Vice President at Edison Research

Experience



Executive Vice President

Edison Research · Full-time

Nov 1995 - Present · 28 yrs 9 mos

Somerville, NJ

As Executive Vice President, responsible for management of all research operations at Edison. Directs Edison's work for the National Election Pool consisting of ABC News, CBS News, CNN, and NBC News, providing RBS pre-election polling, early voter exit polling, election day exit polling, and tabulation of the national vote across every county in the United States. Oversees election polling for international clients, most recently in **Venezuela, Iraq, Ukraine and the Republic of Georgia**. Manages Edison's work with international broadcasting organizations such as the **BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Voice of America** in countries including Bahrain, Central African Republic, China, Congo, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Myanmar, Niger, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, Turkmenistan, Tunisia, and the UAE. Directs.

Public opinion work includes an ongoing survey of economic anxiety in America conducted in conjunction with American Public Media's renowned Marketplace program. Our national tracking study The Infinite Dial is now in its 27th year in the United States and has also been conducted in Australia, Canada, South Africa and the UK. The syndicated Share of Ear® is an audio listening diary survey that measures all audio respondents listen to during a 24-hour period, and is one of the most widely-cited studies in the audio space.

Since its founding in 1994, Edison Research has conducted over 13,000 research assignments in more than 50 countries. **Edison works with a broad array of commercial clients, governments, and NGOs**, including AMC Theatres, Amazon, Apple, BBC, The Brookings Institute, Facebook, The Gates Foundation, Google, **Voice of America**, The New York Times, Oracle, Pandora, The Pew Research Center, Spotify, SiriusXM Radio, and UnidosUS.

Washington's state propaganda outlets are overseen by the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). USAGM's parent is the United States Information Agency (USIA).

USAGM is funded through Congress. For fiscal year 2025, President Joe Biden's budget requested [\\$950 million for the U.S. propaganda agency](#).

USAGM boasted in its Congressional Budget Justification that its audience has more than doubled in the past decade. According to the U.S. propaganda agency, Washington's disinformation operations are "reaching 420 million people weekly in

63 languages and over 100 countries".

On its website, USAGM emphasizes that it [serves the "long-range interests of the United States."](#)

In 1994, Congress passed the International Broadcasting Act, which maintained U.S. government funding for these propaganda organs following the end of the first Cold War.

This legislation, the [text of which USAGM has on its website](#), states that the work of these U.S. propaganda outlets must "be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States", and that they are "advancing the goals of United States foreign policy".

(4) The continuation of existing United States international broadcasting, and the creation of a new broadcasting service to the people of the People's Republic of China and other countries of Asia which lack adequate sources of free information, would enhance the promotion of information and ideas, **while advancing the goals of United States foreign policy.**

(5) The reorganization and consolidation of United States international broadcasting will achieve important economies and strengthen the capability of the United States to use broadcasting to support freedom and democracy in a rapidly changing international environment.

Sec. 303. STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES.

(a) BROADCASTING STANDARDS

United States international broadcasting shall—

(1) **be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States;**

Venezuelan opposition and Elon Musk misrepresent TeleSUR charts to claim 'fraud'

To claim there was supposed electoral fraud in the July 28 election, Venezuela's U.S.-backed opposition used another deceptive tactic, distorting charts that were published by the Latin American media outlet TeleSUR.

In their disinformation campaign, Venezuela's right-wing opposition got a big helping hand from Elon Musk, the billionaire oligarch and owner of Twitter (now known as X.com).

Musk has received [billions of dollars of subsidies from the U.S. government](#) while providing [assistance to Ukraine's military](#) and aiding [U.S. destabilization operations in Iran](#). He also is actively supporting Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign.

The billionaire Tesla CEO backed a far-right coup in 2019 against Bolivia's democratically elected socialist President Evo Morales. Following the putsch, a critic on Twitter accused "the U.S. government [of] organizing a coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia so [Musk] could obtain the lithium there." The oligarch responded writing, "We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it".



Armani  @historyofarmani · 16h

You know what wasn't in the best interest of people? the U.S. government organizing a coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia so you could obtain the lithium there.

56 503 5.4K 

Elon Musk  @elonmusk

Replies to [@historyofarmani](#)

We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it.

4:32 AM · Jul 25, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

4.2K Retweets and comments 2.8K Likes

The day before the 2024 election in Venezuela, [Elon Musk tweeted an enthusiastic endorsement](#) for the South American nation's far-right opposition leader María Corina Machado, who has repeatedly called for a [U.S. military intervention to](#)

[overthrow Venezuela's government.](#)

After the vote, Musk echoed the unsubstantiated claims of the opposition, claiming there was “major election fraud by Maduro”. As purported proof, [Musk shared the suspicious exit poll](#) from the U.S. government-linked Edison Research.

In another deception, Musk and Venezuelan opposition figures pointed to a chart from TeleSUR, a left-wing broadcaster that has been funded by numerous governments in Latin America and is headquartered in Caracas.

A graphic designer at TeleSUR made a mistake and created a misleading graph that showed the other opposition candidates with 4.6% of the vote *each*. In reality, there were 10 candidates in Venezuela’s presidential election, and the other eight minor opposition figures only received 4.6% *combined*.

<https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1817932850664226872>

Part of this confusion was due to the language used in the announcement by



Venezuela’s National Electoral Council (CNE). In a press conference late on the night of the election, CNE President Elvis Amoroso reported that Maduro won 51.2% of the vote, with Edmundo González at 44.2%, and he added that “other candidates obtained 462,704 [votes], 4.6%”. (In Spanish, his exact words were: “*otros candidatos obtuvieron 462.704 [votos], un 4,6%*”.)

In this press conference and in its [written statement](#), the CNE lumped the eight

other candidates together. TeleSUR's graphic designer failed to communicate that this 4.6% was *shared* among the eight candidates.

While this error was clearly a serious problem in TeleSUR's broadcast, it was not proof of supposed electoral fraud.

On the contrary, international observers, such as those from the U.S. [National Lawyers Guild](#), said they monitored an electoral process in Venezuela that was free and fair.

<https://x.com/MarioNawfal/status/1817860085508374749>

<https://x.com/BenjaminNorton/status/1817937280251674877>

U.S. government support for Venezuela's opposition and coup attempts

This is by no means the first time Venezuela's opposition has cried fraud, without any concrete evidence. In response to every recent presidential election, they have made similar claims, going back to [Maduro's first successful presidential race in 2013](#).

Like Edison Research, Venezuela's right-wing opposition is closely linked to the U.S. government.

U.S. soft-power organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy ([NED](#)) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have spent many millions of dollars funding and training opposition groups in Venezuela, including political parties, media outlets, and so-called NGOs.

[Washington has sponsored numerous coup attempts in Venezuela](#), including one in 2002 in which U.S.-backed Venezuelan military officers briefly overthrew

democratically elected President Hugo Chávez, before the [people rose up, filled the streets, and restored Chávez to power.](#)

In another coup attempt in 2019, the Donald Trump administration recognized little-known right-wing opposition politician Juan Guaidó as supposed “interim president” of Venezuela, despite the fact that he had never participated in a presidential election.



Washington proceeded to seize billions of dollars worth of Venezuelan foreign assets in violation of international law while imposing illegal unilateral sanctions and an embargo that sought to crush the country’s economy.

A Trump administration official bragged that the sanctions were like [Darth Vader's death grip](#) on the throat of the Venezuelan economy.

The [U.S. Energy Information Administration gloated](#) in 2019 that, due to the

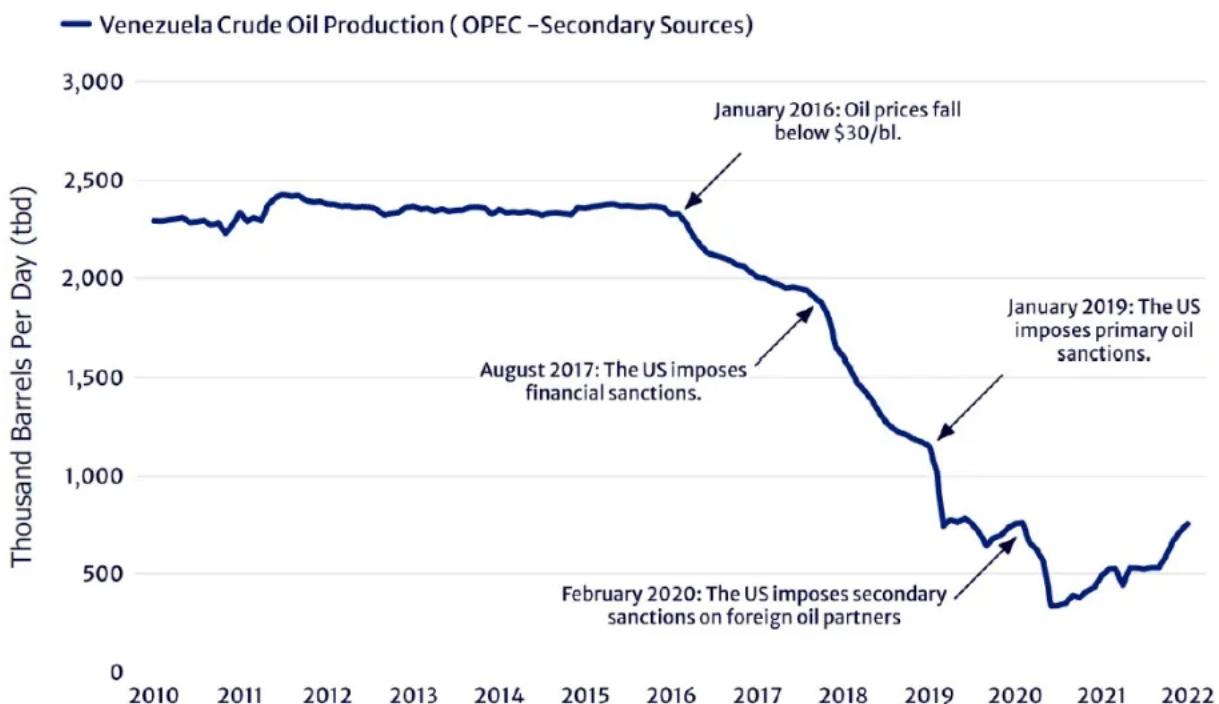
devastating U.S. economic war, Venezuela's oil production crashed to the lowest level in decades, starving the state of revenue it needed to fund social programs.

According to the [top UN expert on sanctions](#), Special Rapporteur Alena Douhan, "[unilateral sanctions increasingly imposed by the United States](#), the European Union and other countries have exacerbated the" economic crisis in Venezuela, and the "[government's revenue was reported to shrink by 99%](#) with the country currently living on 1% of its pre-sanctions income".

In a research paper published by the U.S. think tank the Center for Economic and Policy Research, economists Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs estimated that [U.S. sanctions caused 40,000 deaths in Venezuela](#) from 2017 to 2018.

Figure 15

Venezuela Oil Production, 2008–2022



Source: Author's elaboration based on OPEC: Monthly Oil Market Report.

Trump's neoconservative National Security Adviser, John Bolton, admitted in a CNN interview that the operation he [oversaw in Venezuela was a coup attempt](#).

During the coup, one of Guaidó's allies was the far-right Venezuelan opposition figure María Corina Machado. But when Guaidó failed to even come close to power in Caracas, despite Washington's staunch support, the extremist [Machado rose](#) to become the de facto leader of Venezuela's opposition.

Machado was prohibited from running in the 2024 election due to the many crimes she has committed, including participating in numerous violent coup attempts; [calling for the U.S. military to invade Venezuela](#); and lobbying Washington for, in

her words, “more sanctions”, to bring about the “total financial asphyxiation” of her country.

For years, Machado has run opposition organizations funded by the U.S. government. She is so close to Washington that she was personally [invited to the White House](#) for a one-on-one meeting with [President George W. Bush](#) in 2005. (The Bush administration had supported the briefly successful [military coup against Chávez in 2002](#), which Machado also backed.)

Machado was largely the power behind the main opposition candidate who ran against Maduro in the 2024 race, Edmundo González Urrutia. Machado campaigned for him, and on the night of July 28, she held a press conference in which she claimed, without any evidence, that [they had won the election](#), declaring, “Venezuela has a new president-elect, and he is Edmundo González”.



Edison Research's meddling in Georgia

Edison Research's Executive Vice President Rob Farbman is not the only employee at the firm who has worked extensively with U.S. government propaganda outlets.

[Edison Senior Advisor Nino Japaridze](#) likewise did work for the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, RFE/RL, and Voice of America, as well as London's BBC.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is the U.S. government propaganda organ that was renamed the U.S. Agency for Global Media in 2018.

In 2019, Japaridze sat down for a friendly [interview with U.S. propaganda outlet Voice of America](#), to discuss “the importance of media independence for Georgia’s democracy”.

Washington has targeted Georgia in recent years, seeking to bring the former Soviet country into the U.S. imperial sphere of influence. Since 2008, the U.S. government has insisted that [Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO](#), despite opposition not only by Russia but also by Germany and France.

Washington's pressure on Georgia greatly accelerated in 2024, when the country's democratically elected [parliament voted for a bill](#) that required organizations that receive more than 20% of their funding from outside the country to register as foreign agents.

U.S. soft-power [organizations](#) like [the NED](#), along with other Western governments, bankroll many pro-EU “civil society” groups and pro-NATO media outlets in Georgia, which would be forced to register as foreign agents under this law.

The U.S. State Department lobbied heavily against the bill and even [imposed sanctions on Georgian officials](#) who supported it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its U.S. government ties, Edison Research published a poll in December 2023 that claimed that a staggering 90% of people in Georgia want [close ties with the European Union](#), 80% want close ties with the U.S.A, and just 43% want close ties with Russia. This confirmed Washington's narrative right at the moment when it was escalating its interventionist pressure campaign against the country.

Source: [Geopolitical Economy Report](#)

