Extractive American Politics: Considering Democratic Costs

Fri, September 6, 12:00 to 1:30pm

Abstract

In this era of rapid climate change, American reliance on extraction as a central source of value creation has come increasingly into question. Concerns about externalities like pollution and increased emissions are central points of contestation among environmental activists. Similarly, political economists have long traced how extractive industries tend toward corruption, often undercutting democratic governance along the way. However, systems that deplete natural resources are not the only extractive force shaping contemporary American democracy. Rather I argue in this paper that extraction also exists as a political ethos that prioritizes the accumulation of private profit over the needs of existing communities. I theorize a system of extraction that relies on the siphoning of collective resources into reserves of private coffers through (often unseen) policy regimes. This system, I assert, is at work in many contemporary American political institutions. Crucially, this process need not be explicitly tied to material practices of extracting resources. Creating lucrative tax rewards for firms or the transferal of public utility management to private-sector actors, for example, removes social resources that might otherwise be collectively managed, harming democratic institutions in the process. Thus I show how an increasing trend toward extractive governance, not just extractive material practices, has steep democratic costs, cordoning off many areas of American life from democratic deliberation. To accurately take stock of the country's democratic health, this submerged form of extractive governance must be understood; to that end I offer a preliminary theory of extraction as a growing threat to contemporary American democracy. I conclude by considering some policies that might limit extractive governance's democratic costs, namely through broadened public oversight in decision making and meaningful regulation of private interests that are entangled in the governing process.

I. Introduction

For decades (at least) environmental activists have raised alarm about the process of extracting material from the Earth without regard for the conditions left behind. Movements to stem the expansion of or end altogether the practice of hydraulic fracturing, for example, have framed fracking as an unnecessarily dangerous extractive process that places the planet's future in great harm (Hopke et al 2015). Indigenous water protectors brought connections between violent colonial pasts and extractive petrochemical industries into broader conversations beginning in 2016 (Privott 2019; Dennis et al 2020). Western news agencies have increasingly covered movements in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo aiming to minimize the harmful externalities associated with the mining and extraction of precious metals used in renewable energy technologies (NYT 2021). Contemporary critiques of extraction have extended beyond activist communities and into cultural and social understandings of everyday

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life. “Your mind is being fracked,” argued one recent New York Times headline, spotlighting a researcher who theorizes human attention as a site of extractive capitalism (2024). Social theorist Ajay Singh Chaudhary goes so far as to argue that emotional exhaustion and constant pursuit of “resilience” in the modern age constitutes a large portion of “the extractive circuit and all the nodes of exhaustion it produces” (The Baffler 2024).

Extraction, it seems, is increasingly the frame through which we understand the relentless pace of ecological, social, and material crises that make up the background conditions of our contemporary moment. This phenomenon makes sense; the concept can be easily visualized through material processes like fracking, oil drilling, mining, and coal refining. These processes (infamously) pierce the surface of Earth or bodies of water with the desire to take, the prospect of remuneration never on the horizon. These are the ultimate acts of taking or enclosing what were previously natural or perhaps collective materials for the purpose of private value creation in the formal economic sphere. It’s no wonder then that those seeking to understand newer systems of political economy (tech strategies for attention capture, or knowledge production in industries aiming to increase resilience, for example), find the extraction metaphor useful.

How might we take up this conceptual understanding of extraction and apply it to systems of governance? Rather than being tied only to material practices like mining or fracking (as authors like Chaudhary and Graham Burnett have shown), extraction should also be understood as governance structure; a political ethos that prioritizes the accumulation of private profit over the needs of existing communities.

In this paper I shift the frame of extraction from certain practices or industries as “extractive” in and of themselves, to a broader system of governing and policy. I theorize a system of extraction that relies on the siphoning of collective resources into reserves of private coffers on a structural scale. This system, I assert, is at work in many contemporary American political institutions and shapes the political conditions under which those institutions operate. Crucially, this process need not be explicitly tied to material practices of extracting resources and is instead a broader governance structure that exists in the background of many local, city, and state governments in the contemporary US. I begin with a discussion of existing definitions and theorizations of extraction across the fields of critical geography and political economy. I then theorize a broadened conception of extraction that can contain the kinds of institutionalized forms of governance I assert illustrate the extractive ethos. That ethos inspires a form of government that rewards putting public services and infrastructure increasingly into the hands of

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private or corporate actors. I argue that this kind of structural extraction is increasingly common in American political life ang enacts costs in the form of a smaller and less democratic public sphere, fewer and less robust public goods, and fewer chances for public deliberation.

II. Existing definitions of extraction

By the term extraction, I allude especially to the work of critical international relations scholars and political geographers (Riofrancos 2020; Bebbington et al 2018; Wenar 2008; Hoffman et al 2016; Zalik 2009; Martin et al 2016; Farran 2016), who highlight the historical and contemporary tensions between industrial development and environmental preservation. More importantly, these studies focus on the ways in which political communities, both large and small, have always played a role in the development of (or resistance to) extractive industries. Drawing heavily from the language of Marxist historiography, these critical scholars often describe these systems in terms of uneven development on a global scale. While these approaches are helpful for my project, the idea of extraction also has a much longer history in political science specifically.

One of the most canonical treatments of natural resource extraction in political science is the literature on the so-called resource curse. First advanced by comparativists and international relations scholars in the 1970's and 1980's, the resource curse hypothesis sought to explain the reasons for struggling economies of resource-rich countries amid resource-dependent economic markets, an interest spurred in large part by the 1970's oil crisis (Auty 1990, 2007; Gochberg and Menaldo 2016). Resource curse-inspired hypotheses and theories aimed to elucidate states' uneven development despite the existence of valuable raw materials.[1] Some resource curse scholarship, like that of Auty (2002) and Sachs & Warner (2001), however, also advances a normative framework for understanding extraction's dangers; tying the resource-richness of poor or underdeveloped countries to a lack of industrial development and an accordant lack of real wage and labor growth. However, this area of literature eventually gave way to theories of dependency (Wallerstein 1974; Smith 1979; Cardoso 1979) and global value chains (Gereffi et al 2005), wherein binary understandings of core and periphery states became the popular means by which to explain long standing inequalities.

[1] The most famous of these, of course, is the Dutch Resource Curse theory that emerged in the wake of Holland's discovery of oil and the subsequent plunge in the resource's value on the global market (Fardmanesh 1991).

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Political economy scholars went so far as assigning dependency theory characteristics to individual citizens as a means of explaining their stagnated growth on the state level (Yates 1996). An important counterpoint to the resource curse, advanced by Menaldo (2016), reversed the causal arrow of the theory, asserting that institutional weakness and not the presence of extractive industries themselves did more to explain the lack of stable democratic regimes in resource-rich countries. Through resource curse theories, political economy scholars set the groundwork for understanding why systems of extraction, even despite their harmful externalities and often unpredictable revenue streams, remain so entrenched in global economic systems. They solidified the field's understanding of global dependence on low-cost raw materials, the role of institutional capacity in stabilizing these industries, and the distinctive nature and fundamental unpredictability of revenue streams derived from natural resource extraction.

A later subset of international political economy scholars eventually illuminated the shortcomings of these state-centered theories by bringing the interests of globalized private capital into in-depth case studies of countries' involvement in global extractive circuits. Zalik (2009), for example, argues that, because the global market for oil is always inherently extractive in nature, the private market interests in oil wield power that ultimately re-shapes the very territoriality and social ecology of countries like Nigeria and Mexico. Zalik and others' (Wenar 2008; Hoffman et al 2016) interventions thus acknowledge the "intensive and strategic commercial investment and technological penetration involved in oil extraction" and in turn bring a specificity to the resource curse and dependency school of thought that I employ and elaborate here. Industries like oil extraction and refining, mineral mining, and large-scale logging differ from industry and manufacturing more broadly, in that they inherently involve intensive penetration into a state's geography, often by private capital, and thus will always create unwieldy externalities in the form of heightened environmental risk.

This analysis of geography and territoriality gives rise to an important historical question: given this fundamental connection between geography and practices of extraction, how might we understand contemporary modes of extraction as distinct from the colonial and imperial regimes that precede them? One way of understanding the distinction is by acknowledging the unification of state and private sector interests under contemporary neoliberal conditions of political economy. As recent political economy scholarship highlights, shrinking public investment since the 1970's has made way for increased privatization, and far less emphasis on government regulations (Harvey 2007; Duggan 2017; Cooper 2011). As my analysis here shows, this contemporary development in political economy has translated into extractive regimes and the interests that drive them facing less accountability through democratic governing structures.

Thanks in large part to the broad movement away from private market regulation beginning in the 1970s, state power now more frequently acts as a handmaiden to private development rather than a check on it (Jessop 2002). To understand the dovetailing of extraction and contemporary neoliberalism, I follow the lead of Petras and Veltmeyer especially, who define extractivism as a far reaching agenda of capitalist accumulation that is distinctly contemporary in its motivations. Extraction in any case, they argue, requires elements of "economic development based on the extraction of natural resources such as fossil and biofuels, minerals and agro-food products extracted in a process of 'large-scale investment in land acquisition' or land grabbing." (19) The "new extractivism" of the 21st century that they outline, however, is distinct from the generalized extractive processes of natural resource and agricultural industries. They argue that a "new world order based on free market capitalism and the financialization of global production" emerged in the wake of overproduction crises of the mid twentieth century. It is in this historical moment that neoliberal globalization, and its attendant focus on macro structural adjustment reforms that trapped many global South nations in relationships of debt with international financial institutions, firmly took hold.

These changes made extractivism an attractive economic model, they argue, especially in nations that faced rapid deindustrialization and compounding indebtedness and thus sought lucrative revenue streams like those provided by oil and mining industries (Chapter 2). In this transition Petras and Veltmeyer center the "the role of the state" itself, as a factor that exists "in support of extractive capital," explaining the importance of the neoliberal moment and its muddling of the line between state and private power for extractive industries. This, the authors note, is "extractive imperialism," a force that at once *exploits* the increasingly globalized nature of capitalist economic forces, and *relies* on the crisis-laden processes of deindustrialization and financialization to shore up dependence on natural resource-based revenue streams (7-9, Chapter 2). While Petras and Veltmeyer focus mainly on Latin America as a site of extraction, their findings and theoretical framework are widely applicable. Most centrally, their conclusion, that "the costs" of natural resource extraction-heavy economies "are externalized, borne disproportionately by small landowners and indigenous communities that are dispossessed of their territorial rights regarding land, water, and other natural resources" can and should be broadly applied. Indeed, as I argue, many economies in the US rely on this structural dispossession and externalization to maintain extractive regimes.

This growing literature on extractive imperialism also points to the fact that political leaders in the states that are host to this new extractivism are often united in their resistance to it based on the harms of the externalized costs (40-42). Thea Riofrancos' recent study of Ecuador's struggle against antidemocratic extractivism, for example, involved "popular mobilization" and "dynamic conflict with state and corporate elites" (2020). In both of the modes of resistance she theorizes, "radical resource nationalism" and "anti-extractivism," citizens and activists registered natural resource-based industries as a threat to their material worlds and the democratic collective. While the former sought collective ownership of resources like oil, the latter fought for an abolition of extraction from their society (2-4).

III. Bringing extraction home

However, this unanimous resistance is far from the case in the US. Indeed, extractive policies that favor private capital at the expense of social welfare are often hailed as generators of economic development, destined only to create jobs and render few if any costs. Especially in the contemporary era of US political economy[2] that valorizes work and job creation at the expense of robust social safety net programs, American political leaders are much more likely to side with extractive interests as long as they are seen as engines of job creation (however mythical or hopeful those predictions of job creation might be).[3] This point of divergence especially adds to the urgency of taking extraction and its consequences seriously as a conditioning factor in American politics, despite its position in the highly developed Global North. While the Ecuadoran movements Riofrancos tracks take extractivism as their object of interest, my schematic of extraction as a regulatory and fiscal regime in the US is in most cases much less likely to be registered as the banner interest of broad-based activist movements. As a result, these extractive systems are less likely to gain the substantial buy-in from diverse actors that lasting social movements need to succeed. Rather, extraction as I theorize it is a

[2] Taking the 1996 welfare reform law as the archetypal example of pro-work policymaking and rhetoric, researchers have tracked how the "ending welfare as we know it" has translated most crucially into shrinking benefits for poor Americans and increased work requirements (Collins & Mayer 2010).

[3] Often referred to as a "race to the bottom," empirical political science and economic research has tracked how state governments have neglected welfare funding in favor of other investments (Volden 2002; Woods 2006; Brueckner 2000). Outside this academic tradition, research from public interests groups like Good Jobs First unpacks the hidden costs of economic development deals that are often touted as net-gain job creation programs by state and local political leaders in the US. See, for example, Ending the Economic War among the States (2019) - https://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/Ending_the_Economic_War_among_the_States.pdf.

background condition which usually fails to reach the threshold of collective threat or mobilizing event.

As a result, I take as a starting point the fact that the US is shaped by extractive politics not just as a participant in global circuits of natural resources and their surrounding extractive industries, but also as a site of extraction itself. Put another way, I argue that scholars of American politics ought to look inward for sites of uneven development, resource extraction, and normatively problematic systems of accumulation in order to understand how these forces operate domestically to limit democratic opportunities, especially on the state and local levels. While most research on extractive forces has neglected the US context, two notable exceptions provide a model for work that takes the conditions of extraction seriously in the American context. John Gaventa's 1980 study of Appalachian miners and their precarious relationship to the forces of private and extractive capital that determined so much of their lifeworlds is one of those exceptions.

Gaventa's theorization of the "power and powerlessness" of individual citizens, even in the venue of their local and community governance systems, models the kind of analysis needed to grapple with the stakes of extraction as a conditioning factor in US political life. In outlining this new dimension of extractive politics I aim to expand on Gaventa's assertion that "patterns of power and powerlessness can keep issues from arising, grievances from being voiced, and interests from being recognized" (1980: vii). In recognizing extraction as one form of that power, I extend Gaventa's argument about power's consequences in asking: how do states and communities in the US imagine their opportunities for democratic resistance? While less of a theoretical investigation, sociologist Robert Bullard's analysis of environmental degradation in *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990) brings the logic of uneven development to the Southern US, and finds fertile ground for political economic analysis of environmental degradation and its impacts. Both of these studies bring arguments about extraction and development into the realm of American political life, supporting my case that extraction is a meaningful force in American politics, that has an outsized role in shaping social and political conditions thanks to recent developments in economic privatization, deregulation, and pro-work rhetoric assisted by neoliberal forces.

IV. Extraction as governance

While the frame of extractive governance might not be regularly used in traditional political science discussion of American politics, the framing has been used fruitfully by historians,

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especially historians of the modern American South. Going back as far as W.E.B. DuBois' groundbreaking *Black Reconstruction*, in which he made the argument that the extraction of funds from the then-struggling Freedmen's Bureaus by largely white bureaucrats, show a willingness to consider public funds and institutions (i.e. generated through taxation) as vulnerable to extractive tendencies. What at the time were identified as wasteful expenditures on or benefits for the recently freed became prime sites for extractive interests to funnel resources away from the Bureaus and into private coffers or industries controlled by White men. Rather than these supposedly economic forces operating on the post-Emancipation South independently, my theory of extractive governance would force us to see the ways this system of privatization is incentivized and, in many ways, made possible by the state.

Historians like Eric Foner and Jonathan Wiener, for example, emphasize that any study of the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods in the American South must acknowledge that "planters, after the overthrow of Reconstruction, were able to use the state to bolster their own interests at the expense of other groups" (1982, 92). Rather than distinguishing between state power and capital's power in this case, in other words, we must consider the power of the state as a handmaiden to forces of capital accumulation and racial hierarchy. This relationship is not necessarily difficulty to trace when considered the 19th Century Southern US, wherein violently-maintained racial hierarchies mapped clearly onto material circumstances in the region. But further studies have expanded this understanding of political economy in ways that highlight how the extractive governing model has retained prominence across space and time in the US context.

Public thinker Chris Hayes argues in *A Colony in a Nation,* for example, that institutions in the US that uphold racial stratification (centrally the criminal legal system) do not create a society that operates as "one system with massive racial disparities." Rather, this continued stratification ensures "two distinct regimes. One (the Nation) is the kind of policing regime you expect in a democracy; the other (the Colony) is the kind you expect in an occupied land" (2017). This racial framing, especially its emphasis on Black subjugation, is in line with plenty of mid-century Black radical writers who invoked a similar system of laws – one for those subject to its protections and another subject only to its punishments. But the addition of political economy as a frame of reference for America's internal colonial structure, popularized in texts like Manning Marable's *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* brings systems of capital and profit accumulation back into the fold, acknowledging the importance of economic structures (and especially those structures' reliance on and deepening of inequality) in creating

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that dual an unjust structure to begin with (1983). By seeing regions of the US with large Black populations as sites for value extraction alone, Marable and his contemporaries argued, the country's governing institutions primed the pumps for neglecting infrastructure development in favor of capital accumulation.

The cordoning off of public resources and spaces from marginalized groups in favor of private benefit has thus been a longstanding feature of American political life, especially in the context of Black history. But the collective work to ensure that extractive governance maintains its hold on political economy, happening both through the public arms of the state and privatized aspects of market society, has resulted in a sort of commonsense belief in its fundamental goodness for the nation. Indeed, long after the Reconstruction era, what policy scholars have deemed "the southern strategy" of economic development has been reified in state legislatures through policy mechanisms in state legislatures across the country but especially in the Southeast beginning in the 1970s.

Chandra Childers with the Economic Policy Institute argues that the push to maintain racialized labor structures never ended; instead dovetailing into the contemporary push to lower taxes and discourage unionization: "this model was deliberately designed to … extract the labor of Black and brown Southerners as cheaply as possible" (2024). The trend among southern states to maintain low wages, for example, is a mode of extraction that prioritizes private accumulation at the expense of a more functional social system. But tools like wage floors are not just products of economic forces alone; they are made possible through the state's endorsement of extraction as a mode of governance. Childers clarifies this point: "Many states across the South promote low wages for many workers by the policies they implement or, in many cases, the policies they choose not to implement." Keeping wages low, maintaining strict anti-union rules, and siphoning off public resources through schemes like tax exemptions all contribute to an extractive ethos that prioritizes the development and accumulation of capital over the development and maintenance of a robust political and social society.[4]

[4] Louisiana, the state discussed below, is a particularly illustrative example. Similar to Bullard's work in the 1980s and 1999s to identify systems of environmental racism, contemporary leaders in many small Louisiana towns have witnessed this race to the bottom and its material effects. As the Times-Picayune recently reported: "Louisiana's pursuit of industrial and petrochemical plants for jobs and economic development has long drawn serious health and other concerns from residents, particularly those in low-income and Black neighborhoods who say they have shouldered an unfair burden when it comes to pollution." See Mitchell, 2024: "A new wave of industrial plants is coming to Louisiana. Residents say there are new concerns too." https://www.nola.com/news/business/blue-ammonia-louisiana-carbon-capture-climate-pollution-louisiana/

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What some have called a race to the bottom, the work of states to lure industrial development through keeping these rules and systems in place, now remains a kind of commonsense political reality in many states, even those beyond the south. This, I argue, is the true power of extractive governance which has yet to be analyzed by policy scholars and contemporary theorists. While continually extracting things like tax revenue and public resources out of a collective or state-owned entity, policies and the interests that drive them also create a landscape where any contestation of the systems that allow it to happen is effectively silenced. This becomes costly to democracy, as the political commonsense of more and more communities remains subject to this extractive mentality. That mentality, especially under the conditions of American racial stratification, has been solidified across decades and even centuries as an unquestionable good, shrinking the prospect of democratic deliberation in the process.

V. Finding extraction: a US case study

Extraction, in its material and structural forms, is often tied to increased levels of pollution. Political economy scholars might identify these externalities as a necessary cost of doing business in the modern age (Klenow and Rodriguez-Clare 2005). However, as activists movements are increasingly pointing out, the prevalence of pollution in all its forms often follows the contours of existing hierarchies; Black and Brown communities have a higher likelihood of enduring increased air and water toxicity (Bullard 1993); low-wage workers in large industries often lack robust labor protections that would limit exposure to risks like emissions and hazardous materials (Childers 2024); and entire industries often rely on routine oversight of existing regulations in order to maximize production (Environmental Integrity Project report, 2024). Extraction as governance is similarly at work in places where hierarchies and inequalities are already a central aspect of political life. Take, for example, the state of Louisiana's generous industrial tax exemption program, which exempts many corporations from paying property taxes for ten years at a time. A recent report commissioned through the Ohio River Valley Institute argued that Louisiana in particular was hurting its own chances at prosperity by continuing the exemption program ("Giving Away the Future, 2024). Those democratic costs, in other words, deepen existing systems of inequality while hurting the prospects of democracy for every member of a political community, not just those currently marginalized.

As I argue in the broader project, the historical methods of extraction by taxation in South Louisiana are a prime example of state mechanisms that effectively funnel resources

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away from local governing bodies and back into private reserves of corporate wealth. I use policy, discourse, and archival analysis to trace the development of the state's generous Industrial Tax Exemption Program (ITEP), which provides ten years of one hundred percent property tax exemptions to manufacturing and industrial firms in an effort to incentivize job creation and economic development. Despite being managed at the state level by an unelected board, this lost tax revenue comes out of municipal and parish-level governing structures as opposed to the state's general fund. I ground this discussion in the specific role of ExxonMobil in the expansion of this program, and the resultant prioritization of industrial and corporate extraction in the state's political development.

Drawing on archival documents outlining approved exemptions since 1960, I have built an original dataset (n = 402) that traces nearly $1 billion in revenue that the state, via ITEP alone, funneled out of local governing bodies and into the private reserves of ExxonMobil from 1960-1980. In a testament to the sheer scale of this extractive regime, my data collection is focused only on the tax benefits granted to one firm (ExxonMobil) in one Parish (East Baton Rouge) and for one site of industry within that parish. My original archival data collection, paired with recent research on the ITEP program in East Baton Rouge from community-based organizations, expands the historical record of extraction as it manifests at this one crucial site of industrial development.

I also trace a recent grassroots movement to enact a meaningful check on the program through democratic oversight. Beginning in 2015, the movement to rein in ITEP's generosity to private industries is ongoing and is anchored by the work of community-based organizations in EBR Parish, activists, and public workers who are most at risk of ITEP's extractive harms, like public school teachers. This movement, I argue, is concerned most fundamentally with community-level costs of extraction, and the threats they present to the ability of East Baton Rouge residents to pursue safe, flourishing, and meaningful lives for generations to come. These activists thus enter directly into a struggle over the terms of contemporary social reproduction. Without hemming in the material and political costs of this extraction by taxation, they argue, the very conditions of life (in the form of sufficient education, police funding, fire protection, etc.) hang in the balance.

VI. The democracy problem

According to the state's own documentation, Louisiana anticipates losing more than 500 million in revenue to ITEP and other similar tax exemption schemes in the coming year (LA Department

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of Revenue 23-24 Budget). The sheer scale of this particular arm of the extractive regime might occasionally draw public awareness or concern, but that is not automatically the case. As I've argued here, the governing logic of extraction does not only involve the pursuit of private profit or enclosure more generally. Rather, it also entails the inherently anti-democratic practice of cordoning off space, materials, policies, or debates from the process of public deliberation. We can see that process taking place in the ITEP example.

In the case of industrial tax exemptions, questions about the veracity or utility of tax breaks are asked only in the context of the state's elusive Board of Commerce and Industry. This body represents not a manifestation of democratic accountability but an outgrowth of the state's political elite. It was established in 1952 with the intent to speed up the administration of industrial programs meant to jumpstart development in the state. With the mid-century trend of underwriting rural and sunbelt development with generous exemption programs and incentives already well underway, the Board with its set of governor-appointed members saw its mission as in line with that goal. Today it boasts 24 members and "meets bimonthly and advises on applications for tax incentive programs, including Enterprise Zone, Industrial Tax Exemption, Quality Jobs and Restoration Tax abatement" (Louisiana Division of Administration). The nature of this body, filled with members appointed by the governor and not privy to democratic oversight, paired with the sheer age of this long-running tax exemption scheme, highlights how extraction can become a background condition rarely questioned or challenged.

Reforms instituted by executive order under Democratic Governor John Bel Edwards in 2016 brought some democratic oversight to the Board, ensuring that some members would be elected by leaders across state government rather than just the governor. But the more recent rightward turn under the Landry governorship has undone much of that change. This body, and the union between the state government and private corporate interests to shelter it from political contestation, shows the democratic cost of extraction as governance. Rather than ensuring that community members or elected officials retain the power to approve or veto these tax changes, the state has effectively cordoned off this aspect of policy from public deliberation.

VII. Conclusion (or, what to do about it)

While the trend toward increasing structural extraction in states like Louisiana is worrying, it occasionally draws political contestation that provides a view of "the way out" of the at least part of extraction's bind. A movement among teachers, students, and activists of the East Baton Rouge Parish school system beginning in 2016, for example, connected the rarely publicized

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industrial tax exemption program to the schools' chronic underfunding and lack of maintenance. This movement, bolstered by the state's Democratic governor, resulted in some reform to the tax benefit's structure and the body charged with overseeing it. However, more important to this paper and the broader project is the longer term (and more difficult to measure) effects of their activism. Those effects came in the form of public discussions around a program that had for nearly a century been an undisputed reality of the state's politics. Part of the movement's success was reframing the benefits provided to private industry actors like ExxonMobil and Dow through these incentive programs; while the language of incentives centralizes the role these business play in the state's private sector economy, the movement to reform ITEP in Baton Rouge and Louisiana shifted to using the language of lost revenue in their messaging about the program. This shift made the unspoken costs of ITEP visible and connected issues like budgets shortfalls and flagging infrastructure to the ability of these companies, with the help of the state, to opt out of "paying their fair share." Under this shifted framing, the costs of extractive governance become clearer to those living within (and paying taxes to) local political communities.

Movements like that in Louisiana are helpful in providing a way out of deeply embedded extractive regimes and show that when the democratic costs of these processes are lifted from the obscurity of the political common sense, they generate substantial concern within communities. However, I also want to consider what mechanisms might keep extraction from extending its creep across many, if not all, levels of American political life. Two categories of political institutions provide opportunities for limiting extraction's democratic costs.

First, we might imagine a version of Louisiana's Board of Commerce and Industry that entails much broader participation from a wider pool of members. If the state were to enact democratic "checks" on its system of extraction via taxation, it might increase the number of positions held by elected leaders; it might ensure that the voices of workers, especially those implicated in public institutions like schools and fire departments, which are impacted by these exemptions. Parents and students who rely on public schools that suffer from the lost revenue might also merit a presence on the Board of Commerce and Industry, if state leaders took seriously the idea of introducing and expanding democratic deliberation around the size, scope, and effects of exemption programs.

Another democratic check on extractive regimes might come in the form of Public Utility Districts, the boards charged with managing and overseeing public utilities in counties across Washington State. In recent years, in response to the intensive power demand of

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cryptocurrency mining operations that have descended on the region, residents in surrounding communities and their democratically elected Public Utilities Districts (PUDs) enacted policies that restricted the practice. These political moves ranged from moratoria on the establishment of new mining operations to more structural policy adjustments like a permanent increase in power prices for any firm or individual engaging in “emerging industries.” The boards are not only made up of publicly elected members, but they also act in response to classic means of democratic objection, like written comments from concerned citizens and regular open meetings about utility management issues.

These institutions, when activated through public participation, may have the potential to open parts of political life back up to deliberation. This would of course require wresting some power away from the private interests that now benefit from extractive regimes; a process that would, as it did in Louisiana, require broad-based movements and grassroots activism. But the fact that these institutions exist at all signals that the process of limiting extraction’s democratic costs is not without precedent.

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