

OCT 23, 2022

Decisions for People and Planet

This is *The Weekly Letter* for October 23, 2022. [About this newsletter](#)

I have been writing about politics in some form or another for over a decade, and this newsletter may be the project that I am most proud of. I have enjoyed the challenge of creating something from scratch (almost) every week that says something interesting and meaningful about politics and the news. So, it is with some sadness that I have decided to draw *The Weekly Letter* to a close. Although working on this newsletter has been time well spent, it does take up a lot of time, and I'm ready to move on to new things—including new forms of political engagement.

However, I'm not signing off quite yet. After this week, there will be two more issues of *The Weekly Letter*—on October 30 and November 6. And it would be an honor to keep in touch after this newsletter ends. You can find me on Twitter [@KemptonSchuyler](#) or you can send an email to theweeklyletternewsletter@gmail.com (I will continue monitoring that email through the end of this year). Finally, you can check out my blog politicscolumn.org, where I plan on continuing to post occasionally.

Thank you for reading!

My View

The political struggle against ecological collapse and for a just, livable world is fought one election, one policy, one conversation, one conference, and one protest at a time. And before the end of 2022, there will be at least four major decisions—two elections and two global summits—with significant ramifications for people and the planet.

On October 30, **Brazil will vote in a run-off election** between the far-right incumbent president Jair Bolsonaro and the left-wing challenger and former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as Lula). Among the stakes in the election is the future of the Amazon rainforest, as Indigenous activist and newly elected congressperson Sônia Guajajara argues in an [opinion piece](#) for *Time*:

"The next four years are crucial for the rainforest. Parts of the Amazon [may have already passed a crucial tipping point](#), after which the lush landscape begins to degrade into savannah, and the forest [emits more carbon than it absorbs](#). If Lula wins, he has pledged to lead a '[relentless fight](#)' against deforestation, restoring enforcement of our forest code, replanting cleared areas, and bringing the rate of deforestation to 'net zero.' His path will be complicated by the high number of anti-environmentalist lawmakers, but [recent analysis](#) by researchers at Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, the University of Oxford and the International Institute for Applied System Analysis, suggest that a Lula victory could cut deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon by 89% by 2030."

The destruction of the Amazon is exacerbating climate change, depleting biodiversity, and threatening the rights and lives of the Indigenous peoples who live there. The presidential run-off will determine if the world's most dangerous wrecking ball continues to operate.

On November 6, the **COP27 UN Climate Change Conference** will begin in Egypt. According to [an article](#) on the website of the think tank Chatham House, countries have been asked to "strengthen the 2030 targets in their NDCs [Nationally Determined Contributions] to align with the Paris goal by the end of 2022." Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, countries have committed to keeping "the rise in global average temperature to 'well below' 2°C, and ideally 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels."

Meeting these goals means "global emissions must fall between 2020 and 2025" and to possibly hit the 1.5 degrees Celsius target, "global emissions must halve by 2030 and reach 'net-zero' by 2050." However, the vast majority of countries have so far failed to submit pledges that raise their climate ambitions since COP26 last year.

There is also the crucial matter of justice. According to the Chatham House article, climate finance and loss and damage—which "refers to destructive impacts of climate change that cannot be avoided"—are on the COP27 agenda, and it is imperative that there is a just outcome. Wealthy countries have contributed the most to causing climate change, while poorer countries are hit hardest by it. Because of this, climate activists in the Global South are demanding that wealthy countries take responsibility and pay up.

The **U.S. midterm elections** are on November 8—although because of mail-in ballots and early voting, many will have voted before then. The results of the midterms will determine how much President Biden can accomplish in the second half of his term. In his first two years, Biden has enjoyed Democratic control of both houses of Congress, but he has often been hamstrung by the wayward Democratic senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema.

On the environment, the limitations of the current Congress became clear during the long and painful negotiations over the Build Back Better plan, which ultimately became the smaller Inflation Reduction Act. While the Act is a game changer for the growth of renewable energy, provisions related to oil and gas leasing are a grim concession to Sen. Manchin. If the Democrats can add two seats in the Senate, Manchin and Sinema will no longer hold the balance of power.

However, that is easier said than done, and furthermore the Democrats face an uphill battle to retain control of the House. If Republicans win a majority in the House, the chances of progressive legislation passing Congress in the next two years are slim.

In addition to COP27, there is another COP—Conference of the Parties—this year. The **COP15 UN Biodiversity Conference** begins on December 7 in Canada. (The UN climate change and biodiversity conferences were both established at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.) You may recall from [last week's newsletter](#) that a recent report found a 69% decline in the global wildlife population between 1970 and 2018. COP15 can address this crisis.

The Guardian biodiversity reporter Phoebe Weston [wrote](#) in a reflection, "The world [failed on all of its previous UN biodiversity targets](#), but we cannot afford another decade of failure. Targets are pointless unless you take them seriously, and we must take this seriously because we depend on nature to survive."

The advocacy organization Greenpeace has [called for](#) "more than 30% of all land and seas protected by 2030," just funding for biodiversity protection, and the centering of Indigenous peoples in implementing biodiversity protection.

With the awareness of everything that is at stake comes the distress of not knowing what the outcome of these crucial decisions will be. One way to avoid the paralysis of fear is by taking action. We can all choose the side of people and the planet. As Jackson Browne put it in [a song](#) from last year,

"I wanna see you holding out your light/I wanna see you light the way/But whether everything will be alright/It's just a little soon to say."

Longform

Laurence Cox on [the life of U Dhammaloka](#): Irishman, migrant worker, docker, Buddhist monk, and threat to the British Empire. (Aeon, 10/4)

Have some thoughts about a current event? Want to reply to an opinion article featured in the newsletter? To create a conversation about the news, all are encouraged to share their views. Send your letter along with your name and where you're writing from to theweeklyletternewsletter@gmail.com or reply to this email. Please be aware that the newsletter is published on the website theweeklyletter.ghost.io and sent by email to subscribers. Letters that are hateful or contain misinformation will not be published.



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