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The disaster contradiction of contemporary capitalism: Resilience, vital systems security, and 'post-neoliberalism' ☆

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ABSTRACT

In the last few years, governments in the U.S. and Europe have responded to a series of events—from the Covid pandemic and energy shocks to a series of large-scale disasters—by directing trillions of dollars to measures that seek to bolster "resilience." These interventions aim to ensure the function of vital systems by restructuring supply chains, investing in infrastructures, and providing governmental backstops for critical social and economic functions. The proliferation of such robust state actions challenges scholarly accounts—which were based on state practices of resilience in the 2000s and 2010s—that analyzed resilience as a philosophy of state *in*action, or, at most, a norm of government actions to restore market self-organization following disruptions.

Drawing on the Marxist state theory of Claus Offe, this article analyzes the variable forms of resilience in terms of the coherent dynamics of a 'disaster contradiction' of contemporary capitalism. Contrary to the dominant assessment of recent scholarship, it argues that the increasing centrality of resilience as a governmental norm reflects an ongoing *politicization* of disaster outcomes: contemporary capitalist states are held responsible for ensuring the continuous functioning of vital systems, and for fostering adaptive adjustment to shocks. But this responsibility is pulled between contradictory imperatives. On the one hand, events that disrupt vital systems threaten capital accumulation and social welfare, catalyzing state actions to curtail the scope of markets or individual choice. In this moment of the disaster contradiction, *interventions* in the name of resilience impose social, economic, and spatial order. On the other hand, such interventions create rigidities, inefficiencies, and unintended consequences, including a heightened risk of future catastrophes, that result in what Offe referred to as *crises of crisis management*. In this moment of the disaster contradiction, resilience appears in critiques of planning and intervention, and as a norm of state actions to establish—or, following crises, restore—market self-organization. It is argued that government interventions in the name of resilience in the 2020s may be analyzed as a distinctive episode in the development of the disaster contradiction, in which resilience is emerging as a key mode of 'post-neoliberal' government.

1. Introduction

One of the most striking recent developments in governmental rationality and practice has been its increasing orientation to *resilience*, understood as the ability of social and economic systems to maintain their vital functions or adaptively change in the face of disruptions. In the 2010s, an influential body of scholarship argued that state actions to bolster resilience foster the self-organizing capacity of social, economic, and ecological systems. This orientation to self-organization complements neoliberal forms of rule that govern through the *self-regulating* mechanisms of markets and individual choice and *depoliticize* the consequences of disruptions to systems that underpin collective existence. Developments in governmental practice in the early 2020s profoundly challenge this scholarly account. Robust state interventions in Europe and the US address resilience as a problem that *exceeds* market self-regulation and impose *substantive order* on social and economic life. In these interventions resilience is not depoliticized as the responsibility of individuals. Instead, it is approached as a basic responsibility of the state.

This new era of robust state intervention in the name of resilience was crystallized by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted global supply chains and threatened economic and financial systems. Governments around the world responded to these breakdowns with emergency measures to ensure the continued functioning of economic, financial, health, food, and other systems. Even as emergency measures were rolled back, countries in the global north (and some outside it) rolled out a new wave of massive interventions to bolster resilience in the face of a range of

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problems, from climate change, inflation, and energy shocks to geopolitical tensions. In the US, trillions of dollars have been appropriated for infrastructure, industrial, and trade policies that address supply chain resilience, the resilience of infrastructure systems, and resilience in the face of natural disasters fueled by climate change. Parallel European initiatives address climate change and the confluence of energy and military security problems sparked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

This article revisits resilience in light of this striking recent proliferation of governmental interventions to ensure the continued functioning of vital systems. Drawing on the Marxist state theory of Claus Offe, it argues that the varying forms of resilience we have observed in recent years can be analyzed in terms of a distinctive pattern of contradiction and crisis in late capitalism. Specifically, the changing forms of resilience can be understood in terms of a 'disaster contradiction'. Contrary to the assessment of much recent scholarship, the proliferation of resilience as a governmental norm reflects an ongoing *politicization* of disaster outcomes: contemporary capitalist states are held responsible for the continuous functioning of vital systems and for facilitating adaptive adjustment to shocks. But this responsibility is pulled between contradictory imperatives. On the one hand, events that disrupt vital systems threaten capital accumulation and social welfare, catalyzing government actions to curtail the scope of markets or individual choice. In this moment of the disaster contradiction, resilience appears as a norm of *interventions*, which Offe understood as state actions that impose substantive (social, economic, and spatial) order. On the other hand, such interventions create rigidities, inefficiencies, and unintended consequences that result in *crises of crisis management*. In this second moment of the disaster contradiction, resilience appears in criticisms of planning and intervention, and as a norm of state actions to establish—or, following crises, restore—market self-organization.

These two 'moments' of the disaster contradiction refer in the first instance to underlying dynamic tensions in contemporary capitalist states and not to distinct temporal periods. But the concept of the disaster contradiction may be employed to analyze shifts in the direction of change of capitalist state forms (see Fig. 1). In the post-World War II period, interventions in the name of resilience addressed problems—such as military attack or economic shocks—that could not be managed through market self-regulation. In the 1970s through the 2000s, resilience was mobilized in criticisms of the unsustainability and unintended consequences of these interventions, and in actions to restore processes of self-regulation. Today, state interventions in the name of resilience are again mobilizing formidable regulatory authority and massive resources to address the limits of self-regulation and to impose social, economic, and spatial order.

1.1. Background

Over the last fifteen years a substantial body of scholarship in geography and adjacent fields has analyzed resilience as a central norm and objective of contemporary capitalist states. This 'first cut' of scholarship on resilience, which was kicked off by Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper's article 'Genealogies of Resilience', traces contemporary practices of resilience to a theory of *self-organizing systems* that emerged from ecology and economics in the 1970s (e.g. Walker and Cooper, 2011; Zebrowski, 2013). This theory took shape around a critique of government planning and intervention and posits a limited role for the state (Joseph, 2013). To the extent that states take actions to pursue resilience, according to such accounts, these actions target the 'choice architecture' of autonomous agents (Chandler and Reid, 2016: 31). They facilitate 'more adaptive and capable individual choices' and 'enable the better and more efficient use of markets and market-based forms of choice-making' (Chandler and Reid, 2016: 4). Government in the name of resilience is thus oriented to individual rather than collective responsibility and depoliticizes the consequences of disruptions to systems that underpin social and economic life (Reid, 2012; Mikulewicz, 2019). In all these ways, resilience bears an affinity to—and is a 'key term of art' for—neoliberal 'regimes of governance' (Chandler and Reid, 2016: 1).

This account of resilience has been critiqued from various perspectives. Scholars have argued, for example, that it elides the diverse ways in which resilience is mobilized in governmental reflection and practice. '[R]esiliences, rather than an ideal type "resilience"', as Anderson (2015: 64) has put it, 'are always connecting up to a range of economic-political logics that exceed their designation as neoliberal' (see also Sage et al., 2015; Grove, 2018; Rogers, 2020). As such, resilience may involve apparently contradictory elements, as in 'top-down' forms of resilience

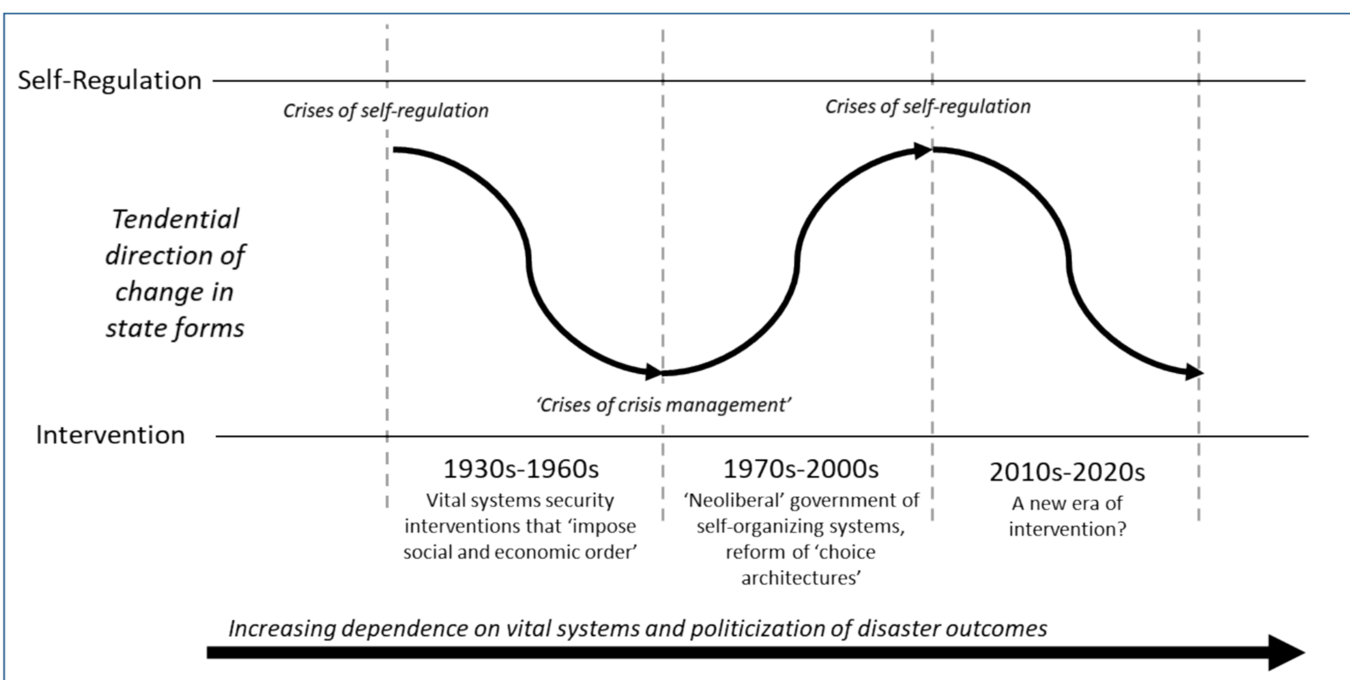

Fig. 1. The disaster contradiction and the politicization of disaster outcomes.

that require 'bottom-up' action (Chandler, 2014; DeVerteuil et al., 2021; O'Grady and Shaw, 2023) or the deployment of forceful state actions to maintain 'free' circulation and self-regulation (Simon and Randalls, 2016). Further, scholars have developed a more nuanced understanding of the history of resilience (e.g. Rogers, 2017; Bourbeau, 2018), arguing, for example, that resilience in systems ecology has been associated with varying 'arts of government' that have no inherent fit with neoliberalism (e.g. Nelson, 2020).

The present article builds on these recent efforts to grapple with the empirical diversity of resilience. Yet it also holds on to the question that animated the 'first cut' scholarship: How might we understand resilience as a central objective and norm of government in late capitalism? It proceeds by revisiting both the genealogy and contemporary forms of resilience. The aim of this analysis is not to discover an essential meaning of resilience—or, alternatively, to insist on its polysemy and polymorphism. Instead, the aim is to describe and theorize a limited range of empirical variation in terms of underlying structural dynamics of late capitalist states.

1.2. Overview

Sections 2 and 3 examine two historical episodes in which resilience has been mobilized in distinct ways as a norm and objective of state practices. Section 2 revisits Walker and Cooper's 'Genealogies of Resilience', which has been broadly influential in geography and adjacent fields (Smirnova et al., 2020). The point of revisiting this article is not to summarize or weigh in on the extensive scholarly discussion and debate it has fostered. Rather, it is to situate the form of resilience Walker and Cooper identify in a particular historical conjuncture so that other forms of resilience can be brought into sharper relief. Walker and Cooper trace the theory and governmental practice of resilience to the 1970s, when resilience was mobilized in criticisms of planning and intervention and in efforts to restore market self-regulation. Section 3 contrasts this conjuncture to an earlier episode when resilience was constituted differently as a norm and aim of state practices. In the early Cold War, the vulnerability of critical infrastructures and production chains was understood to present a threat to capitalist production, collective security, and social welfare that could *not* be managed through market self-regulation. State actions addressed this problem of 'vital systems security' (Collier and Lakoff, 2021) by bolstering the resilience of social and economic systems in the face of disruptive shocks. In this context, resilience was mobilized as a norm of *interventions* that impose substantive order.

Section 4 argues that these distinct forms of resilience can be understood in terms of the disaster contradiction, which is described by drawing on Offe's state theory. Offe developed his theory to analyze late capitalist developments in social and economic policy. But his framework illuminates essential features of the disaster contradiction: the *politicization* of disaster outcomes; the *interventions* undertaken by states to shape these outcomes; and the *crises of crisis management* that emerge as the unintended consequences of these interventions and that undermine the legitimacy and functional competency of state administration.

Section 5 returns to the proliferation of state interventions in the name of resilience in the early 2020s, focusing on infrastructure investment, supply chain security, and disaster policy. It tracks the changing forms of resilience in these domains through the successive historical episodes already mentioned. In the post-World War II period, interventions in the name of 'vital systems security' addressed problems that exceeded market self-regulation. In the 1970s through the 2000s, resilience was mobilized in criticisms of the unsustainability and unintended consequences of such interventions and in state actions to restore processes of self-regulation. In the 2010s and 2020s a new wave of interventions in the name of resilience marshal formidable regulatory authority and massive resources to address the limits of self-regulation and to impose social, economic, and spatial order.

The conclusion addresses how an analysis of resilience in terms of the disaster contradiction contributes to an understanding of emerging capitalist state forms. Some scholars have argued that robust state actions in the name of resilience should be understood as adaptive responses within a neoliberal hegemonic project. This understanding of resilience in terms of what Peck (2010) refers to as the 'market/order dialectic' of neoliberalism is contrasted to an understanding of resilience in terms of a disaster contradiction. The Offean distinction between state actions that restore self-regulation and interventions that impose substantive order is presented as a basis for conceptualizing state forms that, following Davies and Gane (2021), are 'no longer recognizable' as neoliberal.

2. Resilience as Neoliberal Government: 'Genealogies of Resilience' Revisited

Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper's 'genealogy' of resilience begins with the ecosystem ecology of C.S. Holling, in which, they claim, 'the contemporary usage of [resilience] originated' (Walker and Cooper, 2011: 144). Holling's influential work in the early 1970s critically assessed the dominant practices of ecology and resource management of the post-war period. Ecologists at this time assumed that ecosystems proceeded to a 'steady state'. Accordingly, resource managers planned interventions to stabilize ecosystems, whether in the name of natural preservation or to create conditions for the reliable extraction of economic value. Holling's early work addressed the unintended consequences of such resource management strategies (Holling, 1973). One salient example was the large-scale aerial application of pesticides in the forests of eastern Canada to manage budworm outbreaks that caused the collapse of a commercially harvested fir species. Holling observed that, alongside their ecological consequences, such spray campaigns were counterproductive. They reduced outbreaks but failed to eradicate budworm, leaving forests in a 'semi-outbreak' condition, dominated by mature but increasingly unhealthy fir trees. In the medium term, 'moderate but persistent budworm defoliation' led to declining yields and 'major crises' in timber production (Gunderson et al., 1995: 493).

Holling drew various lessons from this and similar examples. What seemed like an ecosystem's instability was in fact a regenerative cycle. Resource management practices that interrupted this cycle, based on incomplete knowledge of complex system dynamics, undermined the system's 'resilience'. Holling generalized this critique of planning and intervention beyond ecology and resource management. For example, in an article that compared ecological management to city planning (Holling and Goldberg, 1971), Holling analyzed the unintended consequences of rent control, urban redevelopment, and freeway construction programs that presumed certain knowledge and fixed goals and ignored the self-organizing dynamics of complex systems.

Walker and Cooper seek out the significance of Holling's critique of planning—as well as an explanation for the proliferation of resilience in state practices—by linking his ecosystem ecology to F.A. Hayek's 'neoliberal' political and economic thought. Hayek, like Holling, was oriented by a critique of a particular approach to planning, and by an explication of the dynamics of self-organizing systems. In Hayek's case, the target of critique was an approach to economic planning based on the assumptions of marginalist neoclassicism. This theory posited that if a central planner possessed information about the marginal products of alternative allocations of resources, then it would be possible to rationally plan and manage an economy as a whole. Beyond the practical question of how such information could be known and processed, Hayek rejected the formulation of the 'economic problem' on which such planning was based (Hayek, 1945). For Hayek the economy was not a machine for optimizing a known system to achieve social goals. Instead, it was a collection of individuals with heterogeneous and always-emergent values, responding to specific problems of time and place. Central planning and management distort this system of distributed knowledge and action—with perverse consequences. By the time Holling published his first papers on resilience in the early 1970s, Hayek had come to conceptualize economic processes through an analogy to adaptation in biological systems. As Walker describes the implications of Hayek's late thought, the 'natural complexity of market phenomena was such that no centralized authority could hope to predict, much less control, the precise evolution of individual elements in the system.' Rational planning was impossible. Efforts to practice it 'risked inducing long-term crises that would not have occurred without the undue interference of government' (Walker, 2018: 322).

Walker and Cooper identify various affinities between Hayek's neoliberal economics and Holling's ecosystem ecology. Among these are shared emphases on the limits to knowledge, on the self-organizing properties of complex systems, and on the pathologies of planned intervention. These affinities are the linchpin of Walker and Cooper's broader claim about contemporary governmental rationality: the success of resilience in 'colonizing multiple arenas of government' is explained by its 'intuitive ideological fit with [Hayek's] neoliberal philosophy of complex adaptive systems' (Walker and Cooper, 2011). Indeed, Walker and Cooper's analysis illuminates a striking connection between a historically specific discourse and practice of resilience and a particular episode of neoliberal reform that begins in the 1970s, when state interventions were rolled back. Examples include trade liberalization and infrastructure deregulation, both discussed in section 5 below.

It is notable, however, that these are *not* the kinds of examples that Walker and Cooper cite. Instead, their examples date to the early 21st century, and relate to areas of government policy that involved expansive state *actions*. One such example is the emergence of resilience as an 'operational strategy of emergency preparedness, crisis response, and national security' following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Walker and Cooper point specifically to policies to protect 'critical infrastructure', understood as 'national utilities so vital "that their incapacity or destruction would have a debilitating effect on the defense or economic security of the United States"' (ibid.: 152). In apparent tension with their genealogical account, Walker and Cooper observe that critical infrastructure protection addresses the *limits* of market self-organization: critical infrastructure policies, they claim, are based on 'an at least tacit recognition' that risks generated 'by the widespread privatization of vital national services could themselves be construed as a significant threat to civil defense' (ibid.: 153). A second example is the expansive actions taken by states to address the 2007–2008 financial shocks. Among these were actions to manage 'systems risk' (ibid.: 152) such as 'macroprudential regulation' that targeted 'critical nodes of interconnected and counterparty risk operating across institutional and national boundaries' (Cooper, 2011: 379). These actions were based on 'non-predictive, futurological methods of vulnerability analysis such as scenario planning' that 'aim to make planning "more manageable"' by 'improving the "resilience" of the financial system' (Walker and Cooper, 2011: 152).

Walker and Cooper's genealogy offers little guidance in understanding the governmental practices found in these examples, such as the concern with 'critical infrastructures' and 'critical nodes' of vital systems, or the use of 'non-predictive futurological methods' to identify these critical nodes and to plan interventions that will mitigate their vulnerability. As such, these examples complicate Walker and Cooper's claim that the matrix of governmental reflection found in Holling and Hayek's writing of the 1970s is an origin point for forms of resilience in the 2000s.[1] Indeed, these examples bring into focus the specificity of the historical conjuncture in which Hayek and Holling were writing, and of the problems to which they were responding. As such, these examples invite further investigation into the historically variable forms of resilience, and into other conjunctures in which resilience has been constituted differently as a norm and objective of capitalist states.

3. Vital Systems Security: Resilience in the Early Cold War

In the middle of the 20th century, roughly three decades before Holling's influential writings on resilience were published, very different state practices of resilience were taking shape in response to a contradictory dynamic of capitalist modernization in the US (and other countries). With ongoing industrialization and urbanization, collective welfare and security increasingly depended on vital systems—such as infrastructures and production chains—that were vulnerable to catastrophic disruption (Mitchell, 2011; Collier and Lakoff, 2021). The present section describes one domain in which state actions aimed to bolster the resilience of such systems: civil defense in the early Cold War. The practices of resilience deployed in this context—the antecedents of critical infrastructure protection and systemic risk regulation (Collier and Lakoff, 2008; Ozgode, 2017)—were interventions in Offe's sense: they addressed the limits of market self-regulation and imposed substantive order.

A significant backdrop to concerns with systems vulnerability and resilience in early Cold War civil defense was the experience of the World War II air war.[2] One central aim of Allied war planners was to disrupt the German military-industrial supply system through aerial attacks that targeted vital transportation, energy, and production systems. Post-war assessments found, however, that the German war economy was highly 'resilient under air attack' (United States Strategic Bombing Survey, 1945: 2). German authorities brought unused production capacity online to address disruptions. They dispersed and hardened facilities. And they maintained war production by reallocating labor, substituting inputs, and stockpiling supplies. For American officials, the resilience of the German war economy offered critical lessons for post-war planning. Measures to strengthen the United States' 'national resiliency' would be an 'indispensable means to national survival' in a future war (United States House of Representatives, 1956: v).

In the early Cold War, state interventions to promote 'national resiliency' were explicitly justified by reference to the limits of market self-organization. One 1952 report posited that the 'strength of the American industrial system is its resilience', which was a product of the 'resourcefulness and enterprise of independent persons and organizations' and the 'flexibility and adaptiveness' that was 'inherent' in a 'competitive economy'. But the report urged that in some situations the government should undertake 'preparedness and post-attack measures' to address problems that could not be managed through market self-regulation. State action was particularly essential for ensuring the operation of vital systems that were 'of such great importance to the operation of a community' that their disruption would have catastrophic consequences (Hayes et al., 1952: 4).

Government planners of the early Cold War devised a range of such 'preparedness and post-attack measures' to bolster the resilience of vital systems. For example, the government stockpiled essential supplies, from industrial materials to 'health resources' such as medicines and portable treatment facilities. Industrial policies such as trade controls and subsidies were used to reduce American dependence on international supply chains that might be disrupted in a future war, and to reshape domestic supply chains to reduce their vulnerability to enemy attack. Cold War planners targeted these measures by identifying critical vulnerabilities such as the 'dangerous concentration' of vital production in particular facilities, or the nodes in infrastructure systems whose destruction could lead to widespread disruption. For example, a post-war study found that the US transportation system was 'well dispersed

[1] Walker and Cooper passingly acknowledge the tensions between their examples—which involve robust state actions in the name of resilience—and their genealogical analysis, which presents resilience as a philosophy that posits a highly circumscribed role for the state. They comment, for example, that it is 'more than ironic' that the 'influence of Hayek should be making itself felt' in the unprecedented crisis actions of central banks—institutions whose very existence he came to oppose (Walker and Cooper, 2011: 152). These tensions are not, however, treated in a sustained way. See conclusion for further discussion.

[2] This account is drawn from Collier and Lakoff (2021).

and very resilient'. But state actions were nonetheless required to address critical vulnerabilities by stockpiling train cars, trucks, and fuel, building tunnels at 'certain likely bottlenecks', and securing access to materials that would be required to restore transportation after an attack (Ringo, 1957).

Resilience planners of the early Cold War shared with Hayek and Holling a concern with the 'epistemic limits of prediction' (Walker, 2018: 313). These limits were due both to the complexity of vital systems and to profound uncertainties about a future war fought with atomic bombs, in which the US government would face entirely novel situations that, as one planner put it, had 'no experience behind them' (quoted in Collier and Lakoff, 2021: 255). But Cold War planners did not presume that such epistemic limits precluded planning and intervention. Indeed, they developed forms of knowledge precisely to manage such uncertainties in a framework of planning. Among these were what Walker and Cooper refer to as 'non-predictive, futurological' techniques such as catastrophe models and scenario-based exercises that aimed to anticipate the effects of a future attack and to plan measures that might be taken in response.

4. The Politicization of Disaster and 'Crises of Crisis Management'

The prior sections described two episodes in which resilience was defined and operationalized in particular historical conjunctures. In the early Cold War US, resilience was a norm of government *interventions* that addressed limitations of market self-organization. In the 1970s, resilience was mobilized in *criticisms* of such interventions, and as a rationale for restoring processes of *self-organization*. The aim of juxtaposing these episodes is not to argue that one or the other reveals a true essence of resilience. Instead, these contrasting forms of resilience can be analyzed in terms of the dynamic tension in contemporary capitalism that I refer to as the disaster contradiction. This section elaborates the disaster contradiction, drawing on key themes in the state theory of Claus Offe: the *politicization* of social and economic outcomes; the growing importance of state *interventions* that impose substantive order; and the *crises of crisis management* that these interventions provoke.

When Offe began to develop his approach to crisis and contradiction in the late 1960s and 1970s, Marxist theorists were grappling with the success of capitalist states in managing what were previously understood to be insuperable contradictions of capitalist accumulation processes. Specifically, they analyzed how measures such as social welfare policies, economic interventions, and regulatory controls were employed to either manage or prevent crises that arose from the sphere of production. Offe observed, however, that these measures were themselves generating myriad problems, and that capitalist states were entering a crisis of governmental rationality. In analyzing this development, Offe eschewed reference to macro-structural logics in favor of what Eric Olin Wright (2016: x) refers to as an 'analytical Marxism'[3] that understood late capitalist development as the product of 'a contradictory interplay of functionality and dysfunctionality'. Contradictions, from this perspective, were neither fatal weaknesses in capitalism (as Marx imagined) nor internal disturbances in a hegemonic mode of capitalist accumulation and reproduction (as in recent 'dialectical' analyses of neoliberalism—see conclusion and n. 7 below). Instead, contradictions are the source of dynamic tensions that drive the evolution of capitalist state forms.

The traditional Marxist account of contradiction and crisis held that, for various reasons, 'processes organized and formed through exchange lead to results that cannot be dealt with by the exchange process' (Offe, 1982[1975]: 38). Private firms do not reliably produce certain goods that are essential to accumulation processes, whether classic public goods or specialized inputs (Offe, 1975: 130). Capitalist exchange does not 'internalize' systemic risks (ibid.). Nor does it reliably meet basic needs that are required for the reproduction of labor power (Offe, 1975: 126). These failures of market self-organization produce first-order 'crises of accumulation' that may take the form of declining rates of growth or acute breakdowns, e.g. through financial crises or labor unrest. During the 20th century, states increasingly addressed such crises of accumulation through what Offe referred to as *interventions*. In contrast to the state actions of 19th-century liberalism that constituted and maintained a 'framework' for the actions of private economic agents, interventions 'impose a certain order created by the state on an area of social and economic activity' (Offe, 1975: 128).[4] Such 'crisis management' interventions include non-market provision for basic needs, the decommodification of labor power, measures to ensure the production of 'input commodities on which the accumulation of other capitalists depends', and, significantly for our topic, policies that address 'risks and uncertainties' that cannot be managed by firms or individuals (Offe, 1975: 130).

Offe explained these proliferating interventions in part through the familiar Marxian functionalist argument that they were required to secure the conditions for capital accumulation. But he also emphasized another dynamic that was distinct to late capitalist states: the 'politicization' of social and economic outcomes. Particularly with ongoing democratization, contemporary states were increasingly held accountable for economic and social conditions. As a result of such politicization 'market failure becomes state failure, and economic crisis turns into political crisis' (Borchert and Lessenich, 2016: 36). The result was a 'tremendously increased demand for efforts at political legitimation' which was met, at least in part, through 'interventions' (ibid.)[5].

Offe's key insight, however, was not just that that state interventions in late capitalism address contradictions that could not be resolved through exchange processes and secure the acquiescence of democratic publics. Rather, his original contribution to Marxist state theory was his analysis of how these interventions *themselves* produce 'second-order crises', or what he referred to as crises of crisis management.[6] Here, Offe was a sometimes-idiosyncratic voice on the left in recognizing pathologies of planning and intervention that would become preoccupations of the right. State interventions, Offe observed, reduce the productivity of capital and thereby undermine the fiscal basis of the state itself. They tend toward hypertrophic and unaccountable growth of public agencies. And they subvert the ethic of 'possessive individualism' on which capitalism depends (Offe, 1975: 129-130; Offe and Ronge, 1975: 144-146; Offe 1982).

In sum, late capitalist states are pulled between 'simultaneously valid but contradictory functional imperatives' (Offe, 1982[1975]: 64). They must manage the 'dysfunctional social consequences of private production' and assume growing responsibility for social and economic outcomes. But in doing so they are 'forced to rely on means which either violate the dominant capital relation or undermine the functional requirements—the legitimacy and administrative competency—of state regulation itself' (ibid.: 61). The 'substantive, temporal, and social expansion of administrative action' is thus accompanied by a process of

[3] In a similar vein, Borchert and Lessenich (2016: 10) refer to Offe's 'Weberian approach to the study of Marxist questions'.

[4] This definition of 'interventions' corresponds to Hayek's understanding of planning: state actions that define 'precise and definite economic ends' and 'replace individuals as the source of decisions' (Foucault, 2004, 172).

[5] This Offean understanding of politicization is distinct from questions of contestation that have been emphasized in analyses of a 'post-political' condition (e.g. Swyngedouw, 2011).

[6] In contrast to Polanyi's (2021):[1944] portrayal of decommodification as a resolution to the problems of market society, Offe is concerned with problems *produced by* decommodifying interventions. On this point, Offe's analysis should be compared to Luhmann's analysis of functional differentiation in modern societies—on which Offe directly drew (Borchert and Lessenich, 2016)—and Beck's theory of risk society (Beck, 1992).

'internal irrationalization' as capitalist states struggle to manage conflicting imperatives: first-order crises of accumulation and second-order crises of crisis management (Offe, 1982[1975]: 59).[7]

What does any of this have to do with disasters and resilience? In fact, Offe explicitly *excluded* phenomena that 'are external to, or which "break into" the system' (ibid.: 55) from his analysis of contradiction and crisis. This exclusion would apparently encompass disasters, which are conventionally understood as 'sudden calamitous event[s]'[8] such as natural hazards, pandemics, wars, or economic shocks that arise from exogenous causes. It may seem that such putatively 'external' events do not arise from the 'laws of motion' (ibid.) of capitalism, and that episodic state actions to manage them do not interfere with the workings of capitalism.

But on closer consideration, Offe's description of second-order crises of crisis management illuminates a fundamental pattern of contradiction found in governmental actions to address disasters and disaster outcomes in late capitalism. Contrary to the argument of many critical accounts of resilience, the overwhelming tendency in late capitalism—at least in wealthy countries—is not toward 'state abandon' or individual self-reliance in the face of disaster.[9] Instead, it is toward 'politicization': contemporary capitalist states are increasingly held responsible for disaster outcomes.[10] This politicization is manifest in a dramatic expansion of various kinds of state actions to shape disaster outcomes: funding for relief and reconstruction; interventions that manage secondary effects of disasters on broader systems, such as financial bailouts and backstops; and policies to mitigate the impact of disasters by reducing the vulnerability of vital systems.

To claim that disaster outcomes have been increasingly politicized is emphatically *not* to say that governments always, or even usually, rise to the task of managing them. Individual leaders and governments may be negligent, incompetent, or ideologically resistant to state action. More fundamentally, disaster policy in late capitalist states is subject to the same internal irrationalization that Offe analyzed in social welfare and economic management. Disaster relief and recovery measures are understood to impose an unsustainable fiscal burden (Weiss and Weidman, 2013; Foard and Bryant, 2021). Tensions arise between risk mitigation and markets, as in the tradeoffs between resilience and efficiency in supply chain governance (Reinsch, 2021 and section 5 below). And policies to forestall disasters have unintended consequences. Examples include the 'levee effect' (flood protection encourages floodplain development, ultimately producing more destructive floods) and the 'moral hazards' produced by disaster response, from disaster relief payments to financial bailouts (e.g. Miao, 2018; Bayliss and Boomhower, 2019).[11]

To summarize, an analysis of resilience in terms of the disaster contradiction can be described in the following terms. On the one hand, contemporary capitalist states intervene on ever-more-massive scales to shape disaster outcomes, a development that can be explained both by a 'functional imperative' of capital accumulation and by a process of politicization. On the other hand, these government interventions have—or, just as consequentially, are *understood* to have[12]—a variety of unintended consequences: they create unsustainable 'costs' (in efficiency, growth, profits, etc.) and exacerbate the problems they were meant to solve. This account of the disaster contradiction suggests an understanding of the shifting forms of resilience in terms of simultaneous but contradictory demands on the legitimacy and functional competency of contemporary capitalist states. In one moment of the disaster contradiction, resilience is mobilized in interventions that address the limitations of self-organization and impose substantive order. In another moment of the disaster contradiction, resilience is mobilized to diagnose the unintended consequences of such interventions, and as a norm of state actions that restore self-organization.

As noted at the outset, the 'moments' of the disaster contradiction do not have a temporal reference in the first instance. They refer to contradictory imperatives that may be simultaneously at work. That said, the analytical framework of the disaster contradiction may also inform a historical account of changing capitalist state forms. We observe 'gravitational' shifts (Foglesong, 1986) that do not deterministically shape state action in any given sector but that can nonetheless be identified with tendential patterns of development. The two genealogical episodes already examined can be understood in these terms. In the early Cold War, resilience was mobilized as justification and norm of interventions to secure the continuous functioning of vital systems. From the 1970s through the first decade of the 20th century, resilience was mobilized as an argument for rolling back state interventions and regulations and in efforts to restore processes of self-organization following disruptions. The remainder of this paper addresses whether, in the early 2020s, we are observing another gravitational shift, in which the disaster contradiction again pulls toward resilience as a mode of intervention.

5. A New Era of Intervention?

This section returns to the contemporary conjuncture described at the outset: the striking proliferation of robust state actions in the name of resilience in the early 2020s. The discussion focuses on a specific case—the US[13]—and on three specific domains: climate-resilient infrastructure, supply-chain resilience, and disaster policy. But these domains are exemplary of a broader pattern that is observed across many

[7] Offe's analytical Marxist account of contradiction and crisis is distinguished from a 'dialectical' Marxist analysis by: (1) its understanding of 'politicization' as an autonomous process—not one that is reactive and ameliorative in relationship to first-order crises; (2) its specific emphasis on the pathologies and unintended consequences of decommodifying interventions; (3) its lack of reference to broader logics (such as 'neoliberalism') as a structure within which contradiction, crisis, and provisional resolution play out. See conclusion for further discussion.

[8] "Disaster." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disaster. Accessed 2 Oct. 2023.

[9] For somewhat divergent critical assessments of the 'state abandon' thesis see DeVerteuil, Golubchikov, and Sheridan (2021) and O'Grady and Shaw (2023).

[10] To some degree, states have always taken responsibility for 'acts of god' (Dauber, 2013). Yet a comparison of events such as pandemics and floods in the early 20th century (e.g. Barry, 1998, 2005) and the response to recent events suggests a sea change. Recent cases that appear to stand as counter-examples—such as the profound failures of state response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005—in fact support the 'politicization' thesis. The federal government appropriated unprecedented sums for reconstruction—exceeding $120 billion (Miao, 2018)—and the George W. Bush administration's failures constituted a blow to its legitimacy from which it never recovered (e.g. Alpert, 2015). The inflection point in this politicization is the 1960s, when 'Congress [wove] for its citizens an entire disaster safety net' (Steinberg, 2000: 176) but it has continued in recent years (see below).

[11] An implication of this emphasis on the way that disasters result from human actions—including as the unintended effect of crisis management—is that disasters are not 'external' at all. They are anthropogenic. We might consider them 'capitalogenic' if, following Offe, we extend the analysis of capitalism beyond the exchange function to include both the politicization of disaster outcomes in late capitalism and the unintended consequences of decommodifying interventions that address such crises. The disaster contradiction, thus understood, is entirely different from 'disaster capitalism' (Klein, 2007), which concerns the exploitation of disaster situations as opportunities for accumulation.

[12] The present argument does not turn on whether such diagnoses of the unintended consequences of crisis management are justified. 'Crises of crisis management' can result from the perception of failure and from the objective 'irrationalization' of policy that such perception causes. See Offe (1982).

[13] Specificities of the US case include the unparalleled 'fiscal space' with which American policymakers operate, the US's hegemonic role in global trade, and the distinct character of American state forms (such as the centrality of risk-rated catastrophe insurance).

Table 1
The disaster contradiction and forms of resilience.

	1. Resilience as Vital Systems Security (1950s-1960s)	2. Resilience and Neoliberalism		3. Resilience in a new era of intervention (2010s-2020s)
		2a. 'Rollback' Neoliberalism (1970s-1980s)	2b. 'Rollout' Neoliberalism (1990s-2000s)	
Formulation of the disaster contradiction	Uncertain future disasters (war, economic crisis) exceed the self-organizing mechanisms of a free enterprise economy and are addressed through state intervention	Interventions introduce distortions and produce unintended consequences; state actins aim to (re)establish self-regulation	Actions to restore self-organization following disruptive external events (e.g. 9/11 attacks) and crises of self-regulation (e.g. global financial crisis 2007–2008)	Self-regulation and neoliberal reform produce dangerous vulnerabilities that must be addressed through interventions that impose substantive order
State practices	Stockpiling. trade and production controls to reorganize supply chains,, construction of redundant and backup facilities, emergency preparedness	Rollback of distortive interventions, constitution of a 'framework' of individual choice and market self-organization	Crisis interventions to address breakdowns in self-regulation and reduce vulnerability of critical nodes	Vital systems security interventions to address breakdown in critical systems and reduce system vulnerability
Sectoral Examples				
Infrastructure	Construction of infrastructure for risk reduction, efficiency, development, provision of public goods	Regulatory reform, unbundling, commercialization, privatization	Policies to secure infrastructures in private sector and ensure vital flows	State investment in 'climate-resilient infrastructure'; resiliency standards
Supply chain resilience	Production and trade controls, industrial subsidies, managed trade, stockpiling	Efficiency and flexibility through free trade and liberalization	Crisis interventions and hardening of critical nodes to ensure private circulation	Production and trade controls, industrial subsidies, managed trade, stockpiling
Disaster Policy	Government investment in protection, relief, and reconstruction	Insurance shifts responsibility to individuals, indemnifies losses, and incentivizes risk reduction	Crisis interventions (such as bailouts) and measures to restore private markets	'Socialization' of private liability, creation of public pools

sectors and contexts.[14] In them, we can trace a succession of historical episodes in which different moments of the disaster contradiction predominate. A period of intervention in the name of resilience in the mid-20th century (described in Table 1, column 1) was followed by a period during which resilience was pursued through state retrenchment, marketization, and state actions that govern through mechanisms of self-regulation (column 2—the distinction between 2a and 2b is discussed in the conclusion). In the early 2020s (column 3), resilience is being mobilized in criticisms of market self-regulation (Zebrowski, 2025) and in state actions that take the form of *interventions*.

5.1. Climate resilient infrastructure

One domain in which resilience has been mobilized as a norm and objective of expansive government intervention in the early 2020s is infrastructure investment, particularly in relation to climate change. Estimates of global requirements for investment in 'climate-resilient infrastructure'—from flood protection to energy and water systems—are staggering, amounting to trillions of dollars annually (OECD, 2017: 28). In the US and in other countries, a surge of investment in climate-resilient infrastructure is taking shape against the backdrop of a shifting state role in infrastructure planning, investment, and regulation. In the middle of the 20th century, governments made massive investments in infrastructure to mitigate disaster risk and to pursue broader development and social welfare goals. Beginning in the 1970s, states reduced their role in direct infrastructure investment and reformed what were understood to be inefficient infrastructures through commercialization and unbundling (Graham and Marvin, 2001; Collier, 2011). A prior commitment to 'backstop the security of essential systems' was 'abandoned' as 'responsibility for vital systems shifted…to the profit-motivated sensibilities of private actors' (Boyle, 2019: 76-77).

Today, infrastructure policy is shifting again toward a direct state role in ensuring the security of vital systems. In the US, growing concern with climate resilience has converged with mushrooming state infrastructure expenditure in the context of disaster recovery (Lingle et al., 2018) and with broader calls for a revival of the state role in infrastructure investment. Many such calls for expanded infrastructure investment point explicitly to vulnerabilities created by prior 'neoliberal' deregulation and state withdrawal from infrastructure investment. For example, citing a series of recent infrastructure breakdowns, the Roosevelt Institute, a think tank, argued that the US had failed 'on a multitrillion-dollar scale, over decades, to invest in our nation's infrastructure'. It attributed this failure to a tenet of 'neoliberal economics' that 'the private sector, left to its own devices, could provide for the public good', and called for 'transformative' government investments to address infrastructure funding gaps and bolster American competitiveness (Silvers et al., 2016: 4; see also Zebrowski, 2025).

In the US, a key development in this convergence between planning for climate-resilient infrastructure and an expanded state role in infrastructure investment was the 2021 passage of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Hailed as the 'first major US investment in climate resilience' (Davenport and Flavelle, 2021), the Act directs $1.2 trillion to investments in transportation, clean energy, water, and telecommunications infrastructures. Of this sum, $50 billion will be invested in projects to make flood control and water supply infrastructures 'more resilient to the impacts of climate change' (White House, 2022a: 264). Resilience is a central aim of other measures taken by the Act. For example, it instructs the Department of Energy to develop 'tools, metrics, and data to assess the resilience, reliability, safety, and security of energy infrastructure' (United States Congress, 2021: 501). It directs the Department of Energy to bolster electricity system resilience by creating a program for stockpiling high voltage recovery transformers

[14] For example, the European 'Green Deal Industrial Plan' can be compared to the US policies considered here (Rapoza, 2023).

(ibid.: 502) and by investing in smart grids to 'meet fluctuating demand, provide voltage support, and integrate intermittent sources' (ibid.: 512). And the Act supports 'supply chain resiliency' in the power sector by supporting innovation in critical materials mining, recycling, and reclamation that will make 'better use of domestic resources' and reduce 'national reliance on minerals and mineral materials that are subject to supply disruptions' (ibid.: 552).

5.2. Supply chains: From efficiency to resiliency

Supply chain security is a second area in which resilience is being mobilized as a norm and aim of increasingly robust government intervention. Since World War II, supply chain security has undergone an evolution that mirrors the mutations in infrastructure provision just described. In the early Cold War, the US government employed instruments of industrial policy—such as trade controls and procurement agreements—to ensure the resilience of international and domestic supply chains. These measures were rolled back amid broader liberalization in the name of 'market efficiency' (Sullivan, 2023). As Cowen has documented, supply chain security was revived following the 9/11 attacks. But in an age of economic globalization, the aim was not to impose substantive order on production and distribution. Rather, it was to 'build resilience' by 'recover[ing] circulation in the wake of disruption' (Cowen, 2014: 79). Thus constituted, supply chain resilience was a 'paradigmatically neoliberal form' (ibid.: 78).

Two decades later, supply chain security has mutated again, catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a government task force set up to identify ways to 'strengthen the resilience of American supply chains' (White House, 2021b), the pandemic's 'drastic impacts on demand patterns' revealed longer-standing 'vulnerabilities in our supply chains' (White House, 2021a: 6). These vulnerabilities resulted from a 'private sector and public policy approach to domestic production, which for years prioritized efficiency and low costs over security, sustainability and resilience.' Specifically, the global 'search for low-cost production' led to 'geographic concentrations of key supply chains in a few nations' that were vulnerable to 'disruption, whether caused by a natural disaster, a geopolitical event, or, indeed, a global pandemic' (ibid.: 11–12). It was imperative, the Task Force argued, to 'address these threats to…economic resilience and national security' (White House, 2021b).

In response to these findings, the administration of President Joe Biden announced a slew of supply chain resilience initiatives (White House, 2022b). In the area of critical materials, for example, the administration took steps to increase reserves in national stockpiles, to promote domestic production, and to support domestic recycling facilities (White House, 2022d). To address dependence on imported pharmaceutical products, it acted to 'build and expand the health resources base' and to 'ensure sufficient [domestic] manufacturing capacity' (White House, 2022c). These and similar initiatives received a massive infusion of resources and authority from three pieces of legislation—the aforementioned infrastructure law, the CHIPS and Science Act (2022), and the Inflation Reduction Act (2022). *The* Economist (2023) referred to these acts as comprising the US's 'most ambitious and *dirigiste* industrial policy for many decades'. Resilience is a central organizing norm of these acts.[15] For example, subsidies for electric vehicles, renewable energy, and microchips are designed to create supply chains that are not dependent on 'unreliable' trading partners (Bazilian and Brew, 2022). As in the early Cold War, these measures are generally structured as incentives for private producers. But they are definitively 'interventions' in Offe's sense: they impose spatial and substantive order on research and development, production, distribution, and consumption.

5.3. Disaster policy and catastrophe insurance

A third domain in which resilience has been established as the norm and aim of increasingly robust interventions in recent years is the management of 'natural' disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. As in the cases of infrastructure and supply chain resilience, recent developments in this domain unfold against the backdrop of shifting state forms. US disaster policy was traditionally organized through post-event response (such as firefighting), direct relief, and measures to reduce vulnerability (such as flood control works). As state interventions rapidly expanded with the politicization of disaster outcomes after World War II, policymakers, officials, and experts became increasingly preoccupied with swelling costs and unintended consequences of relief and protection policies, such as the aforementioned 'levee effect' and the moral hazards associated with disaster relief. The story of natural disasters is different from that of supply chain security and infrastructure policy in the sense that the state has not retreated from disaster spending, which has increased exponentially in recent decades (Lingle et al., 2018; Congressional Budget Office, 2022). Nonetheless, during this period the state has also deployed new instruments to govern disasters through market self-organization and the autonomous choices of individuals. Today, however, these instruments are themselves increasingly destabilized, as disasters disrupt mechanisms of self-regulation and states intervene on a massive scale to shore up vital systems.

One instrument of disaster policy that exemplifies this evolution is catastrophe insurance. Since the 1960s, insurance with premiums that reflect the risk of catastrophe loss to individual policyholders (e.g. homeowners) has been promoted to manage the unintended consequences of disaster relief and protection policies. Risk-rated insurance, it is argued, will both relieve the mounting fiscal burden of disasters and bolster resilience by indemnifying disaster losses and incentivizing risk reduction.[16] In practice, however, catastrophe insurance has proven highly unstable, caught in the competing functional imperatives of the disaster contradiction. Catastrophe insurance is subject to various forms of market failure. Insurers often will not provide coverage due to problems of risk assessment and risk spreading. Catastrophe pools are episodically overwhelmed by large disasters. Moreover, due to their effects on housing markets, insurance crises threaten broader circuits of accumulation. Governments have responded to crises of self-regulation by bailing out private insurers or creating public insurance pools. But such interventions are understood to contribute to the very 'crises of crisis management' that insurance was intended to address (Collier and Cox, 2021).[17] Government bailouts create moral hazards for insurers. Regulated pricing subsidizes choices—such as the choice to live or build housing in high-risk areas—that increase disaster losses (Jaspersen and Richter, 2015). Regulation may also contribute to the collapse of insurance availability in high-risk areas, as insurers seek out more profitable markets or leverage market power (through a kind of 'capital strike' of reduced insurance availability) to push for looser regulatory controls.

These dynamics have recently been on display in the wake of catastrophic wildfires in California that precipitated a crisis in the state's massive private homeowners' insurance pool. The state government

[15] '[T]he main reasons for industrial policy…have nothing to do with "good factory jobs." They're about external threats—climate change and the military threat from China' (Smith 2023).

[16] See Collier (2014) and Barry (2024) for historical accounts of the 'individualization' of disaster risk via insurance.

[17] Along with the California case, discussed here, examples include the Florida market for homeowners' insurance and the public National Flood Insurance Program.

addressed insurer solvency following the fires by socializing tens of billions of dollars of wildfire losses.[18] Insurers, meanwhile, sought to increase premiums and reduce their exposure to the California market (Scism, 2022), thus threatening housing markets in parts of California with millions of residents (Elbein, 2021). To prevent short-term collapse of insurance markets—and, by extension, mortgage and housing markets—the state government used regulatory authority to force insurers to maintain policies and to limit rate increases. In the medium term, it expanded a state-organized insurance pool for homeowners who lost access to private markets. Current developments in insurance are contradictory. The California state government has continued to pursue reforms that advance individualized risk rating to shore up the private market even as it has acted to sustain existing geographies of wealth accumulation by bailing out private insurers, socializing losses, and creating public insurance pools. In this case, the different 'moments' of the disaster contradiction are unfolding simultaneously.

6. Conclusion: Resilience, Neoliberalism, and 'Post-Neoliberalism'

This article presented an analysis of resilience in terms of a disaster contradiction of contemporary capitalism. This analysis started from the observation that with the growing dependence of capital accumulation and social welfare on the functioning of vital systems, disaster outcomes have been increasingly politicized. Ongoing politicization has been accompanied by proliferating forms of knowledge for assessing the vulnerability of vital systems and governmental techniques for bolstering resilience. But the politicization of disaster outcomes plays out through contradictory imperatives. Robust interventions are mobilized to address first-order crises of accumulation that arise from the disruption of vital systems. These interventions are then reformed or rolled back to address second-order 'crises of crisis management' that arise from criticism of their fiscal sustainability and unintended consequences.

The conclusion asks what this analysis of resilience suggests about capitalist state forms in the early 21st century and their relationship to neoliberalism. As we have seen, a central contention of recent scholarship, approached here through Walker and Cooper's influential article 'Genealogies of Resilience', has been that the salience of resilience as a governing rationality can be explained by its intellectual affinity and functional compatibility with neoliberal forms of rule. Walker and Cooper's account illuminates the connection between a particular form of resilience and policies such as trade liberalization and infrastructure deregulation. But it sheds less light on their empirical examples of resilience policies in the 2000s and 2010s—such as critical infrastructure protection and systemic risk regulation—which involve forceful state actions to address what are generally understood to be crises *produced* by neoliberal forms of government. And Walker and Cooper's account offers little purchase on more recent *interventions* in the name of resilience that impose substantive order. How are we to understand the relation between resilience and the robust state actions of the 2000s and early 2010s? And what distinctions might be drawn between these actions and state interventions in infrastructure policy, supply chain security, and natural disaster policy in the 2020s?

One way that critical scholars address the first of these questions is by arguing that robust actions like those undertaken in response to the 9/11 attacks and the financial crisis were adaptive responses *within* a neoliberal hegemonic project. Thus, Cooper (2011) argues that the state response to the global financial crisis did not mark the 'death of neoliberalism as ontology of the free market.' Rather, it 'saved (neoliberal) capitalism from itself' by restoring market self-regulation. Cooper's analysis resonates with broader arguments about the adjustment of neoliberalism to ongoing contradictions and crises. State actions to address crises are understood, following Peck (2010: 19), as part of a 'market/order dialectic which lies at the contradictory heart of the neoliberalization process'. As Slobodian and Plehwe (2020: 6) put it, although the 'the end goal remains constant—safeguarding what neoliberals call a competitive order and exposing humanity ever more to the compulsions of adjustment according to the price mechanism'—the 'means of arriving at this goal shift with time and place.'.

Developments in the 2020s strain such analyses that understand the shifting forms of resilience in terms of a neoliberal 'market/order dialectic'. As Davies and Gane (2021: 4) argue, referring to many of the COVID and post-COVID policies that have been the focus here, 'the number of apparently countervailing tendencies within and against neoliberalism is…growing.' Acknowledging the possibility that once the 'emergency' of the pandemic passed, 'a more familiar, routinized form of neoliberal government will be established', they point to 'critical areas where the events of 2020–2021 will alter the conditions of political and economic activity in ways that may well synthesize something entirely new and no longer recognizable as "neoliberal"' (ibid.: 17). Gane and Davies thus pose the question of whether we are observing the rise of 'post-neoliberal' forms of government, noting that this term refers not to 'something that comes exclusively after neoliberalism, but rather…to a set of emergent rationalities, critiques, movements, and reforms that take root in neoliberal societies and begin to weaken or transform key tenets of neoliberal reason and politics' (ibid.: 10). Their analysis invites—but does not yet offer—conceptualization of governmental practices and state forms that are 'no longer recognizable as neoliberal', and which might allow us to conclude that, for example, government actions following 9/11 or the 2007–2008 financial crisis are examples of the neoliberal 'market/order dialectic', whereas state actions in the wake of COVID are 'something entirely new'.

The preceding analysis suggests tools for drawing such distinctions. Particularly useful is the contrast between government actions in the name of resilience that restore processes of self-organization and governmental *interventions* that impose substantive order. The robust state actions following the 9/11 attacks and the global financial crises may be understood as examples of 'rollout' neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002) to the extent that they sought to restore market self-regulation (see Table 1, column 2b). By contrast, recent state actions related to supply chain security, climate-resilient infrastructure, and disaster policy are interventions in Offe's sense, and, as such, are 'no longer recognizable' as neoliberal.[19] They impose social, economic, and spatial order, whether by substantively shaping market outcomes or through direct state control. Such interventions in the name of resilience are one way that post-neoliberal government is being 'rendered technical' (Rose, 2017).

This analysis points to critical directions for research in geography

[18] Specifically, the liability was socialized by transferring it to the electric power utility, PG&E, based on the doctrine of inverse condemnation, and through disaster relief and reconstruction funding.

[19] Some commentators question whether the policies of the early 2020s are in fact 'post-neoliberal'. Kapczynski (2023) argues that new forms of industrial policy are 'more likely to lead to a mutant form of neoliberalism than to a real alternative to it' because they do not change 'our rapacious carceral state', or provide 'universal access to healthcare or other forms of decommodification', and will 'end up supercharging private profits'. Her observations recall Peck's expansive criteria for designating state forms as genuine alternatives to neoliberalism, which include a 'preference for long-term sustainability over short-term gains', the 'utilization of socializing, rather than competitively individualizing, strategies', and the 'potential for challenging and transforming, rather than deferring and conforming to, markets and market forces' (Peck, 2010: 275). These criteria suggest that a 'genuine' alternative to neoliberalism would no longer be capitalist, and that, conversely, 'neoliberalism' has become another word for capitalism. Here, Offe's analytical Marxism seems to offer more helpful tools than a dialectical Marxist analysis that assigns to neoliberalism an inflationary critical value and, in doing so, dulls our sensitivity to significant change in state forms.

and related fields. For example, we have seen that current forms of intervention revive practices of rule—such as trade and production controls and stockpiling—that were central to vital systems security in the mid-20th century. How is the experience of the intervening decades, including the experience of 'neoliberalism', incorporated into new practices? For geographers, a particularly salient issue is the kind of *spatial* order that will be imposed by interventions in the name of resilience. What spatial forms will be created by investments in resilient supply chains and climate-resilient infrastructure, or in state actions to secure existing geographies of real estate accumulation amid crises in insurance markets? How, moreover, will such forms vary across scales and contexts? If much initial impetus for new interventions in the name of resilience has come from the rich countries of North America and Europe, what are the global effects of these policies? How are other countries—which play a central role in critical supply chains or in decarbonization pathways—positioning themselves on a changing geostrategic terrain (Schindler et al, 2022; DeBoom, 2025)?

A distinct set of questions concerns the durability of these emerging forms of state intervention in the name of resilience, particularly given recent political developments such as the results of the 2024 US elections. The three pieces of landmark legislation that have been discussed in this article were signed into law by the Democratic Biden administration, which additionally used executive authority to orient these bills to a common framework of resilience. Yet the infrastructure bill and the CHIPs Act were passed on a bipartisan basis. The Inflation Reduction Act, meanwhile, enjoys strong support from powerful actors in Republican-dominated states, due to the large amount of investment in such states that has been driven by the Act's subsidies. Moreover, aspects of the Biden administration's strategy on resilience—such as its use of trade policy to secure supply chains that are considered vital to national security—extended and systematized ideas that have their roots in the first Trump administration (Slobodian, 2021: 61). Thus, while certain aspects of the Biden administration's approach to resilience may be quickly dismantled (such as the 'Justice 40′ initiative, which directs investments to marginalized communities (O'Grady, 2025)) others may well survive in the new administration. In sum, it is possible that changing politics will push robust interventions in the name of resilience to the side. But it seems equally plausible that such interventions will come to be part of a new kind of common sense that underpins governmental rationality and practice, setting the stage for future patterns of contradiction and crisis in the 21st century.

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