



This is a repository copy of *Revisiting 'resilience': politics and state practices in a new conjuncture*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/233051/>

Version: Published Version

Article:

Collier, S.J. orcid.org/0009-0000-0416-5759, Cox, S. orcid.org/0000-0001-7686-0865, Grove, K. et al. (1 more author) (2025) Revisiting 'resilience': politics and state practices in a new conjuncture. *Geoforum*, 166. 104377. ISSN: 0016-7185

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104377>

Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>



Revisiting ‘resilience’: politics and state practices in a new conjuncture

Stephen J. Collier^{a,*}, Savannah Cox^b, Kevin Grove^c, Nathaniel O’Grady^d

^a University of California, Berkeley, United States

^b University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

^c Florida International University, United States

^d University of Manchester, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This special issue explores the striking proliferation of robust government interventions and forms of political mobilization around resilience today. In contrast to a “first cut” of critical scholarship that tied resilience to depoliticizing neoliberal regimes of governance, the articles in this issue identify resilience as an explicit aim of state actions, a central pillar of state legitimacy, and a contested terrain over which political claims and counter-claims are made. They examine a range of geographies and scales, from major state interventions in the US, the UK, and Southern Africa, to community level actions in the Caribbean. From these varying perspectives, the articles explore how resilience is both shaping and being shaped by a new contemporary conjuncture—one in which international trade, energy security, and planetary life are being reconfigured by state interventions that challenge the norms of liberal politics and economics. Collectively, the articles sharpen our understanding of the present and equip us to ask what kinds of futures are being built, foreclosed, or deferred in the name of resilience.

1. Introduction

In the last several years, resilience has increasingly been invoked as an organizing principle, objective, and justification for ambitious government interventions that seek to shape social and economic life. The proliferation of robust state actions to bolster resilience—understood as the ability of social and economic systems to maintain their vital functions or adaptively change in the face of disruptions—is framed, in part, by acute events. These range from large-scale disasters and the Covid-19 pandemic to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and US abandonment of longstanding security commitments in the early days of the Trump administration. It has also been framed by longer-term processes: growing tensions between the US and China, for example, and the inexorable progression of anthropogenic climate change. In this complex context, the norm of resilience has underpinned large-scale government efforts to ensure the functioning of vital systems—from energy and health to technology and trade—around the world. Resilience has also emerged as a goal of state-led projects of transformation related to problems such as decarbonization, economic and energy security, and military defense. At the same time, resilience is central to new kinds of politics and political claims. On the one hand, governments are linking resilience to core state obligations and sources of state legitimacy: economic development, social justice, and national security. On the other hand, resilience has increasingly served as a rallying point of political contestation. In some cases, political mobilizations in the name of

resilience articulate demands on governmental resources to advance goals such as redistribution or environmental justice. In other cases, resilience is invoked to contest government policies and programs or to assert local agency.

This special issue explores the striking proliferation of robust government interventions and forms of political mobilization around resilience today. The articles in the issue examine a range of geographies and scales, from major state interventions in the US, the UK, and Southern Africa, to community level actions in the Caribbean. From these varying perspectives, they investigate how the present conjuncture may prompt a scholarly recasting of resilience as a central concern of contemporary politics and governance. In the early 2010s, a “first cut” of critical geographic scholarship examined resilience as a norm of state practices that govern through market self-regulation and responsibilized individual choice. As such, resilience was understood to bear an affinity to—and to be a “key term of art” for—neoliberal “regimes of governance” (Chandler and Reid, 2016, p. 1). This conceptualization of resilience is profoundly challenged by developments in the 2020s. Resilience today is increasingly cast as a state responsibility, an objective of robust state interventions, and a focus of political demands. On both the left and the right, and in both official discourse and in political contestations, resilience is being mobilized in forms that are “no longer recognizable as neoliberal” (Davies and Gane, 2021; see also Collier, 2025; Zebrowski, 2025).

The aim of this special issue is to gather concepts and exemplary

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: stephenjcollier@berkeley.edu (S.J. Collier).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104377>

Received 29 July 2025; Accepted 31 July 2025

Available online 8 September 2025

0016-7185/© 2025 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

cases for investigating the novel formations of resilience that are taking shape today, and to weigh their significance for broader mutations in contemporary politics and governmental practice. The papers in the special issue advance empirically rich and theoretically novel lines of inquiry on resilience that are rooted in particular places—making *Geoforum* a fitting home for this project. Taken together, the papers both define and help to spatialize the contemporary conjuncture. They attune geographers to key sites where resilience—as a key norm, objective, and responsibility of government—is being embedded in the built environment, reimagined through central planning, and reworked through local political contestation.

2. Critical theories of resilience—revisited

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the financial crisis of 2007–08, geographers and scholars in adjacent disciplines identified resilience as a pervasive form and objective of contemporary governmental rationality (Evans and Reid, 2014; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012; Walker and Cooper, 2011). Interpreting resilience by way of a genealogy that runs through the ecological thought of C.S. Holling and the neoliberal economics of F.A. Hayek, they associated resilience with a science of the self-organization of complex systems. Correspondingly, critical geographers argued, resilience implied a highly circumscribed scope of state activity. Government actions in the name of resilience, they held, are limited to establishing a “framework” for markets and individual choice (Chandler, 2014), reducing the vulnerability of infrastructures that underpin market exchange (as in critical infrastructure protection policies (Cowen, 2014; Walker and Cooper, 2011)) and restoring self-regulation in the wake of disruptions (as in the bailouts that followed the 2007–2008 financial crises (Cooper, 2011)). In this scholarly understanding, resilience serves to depoliticize social and economic issues, whether by establishing a specific type of expert authority over government (in)action or by transferring responsibility for social and economic outcomes from the state to individuals and communities (Joseph, 2013; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012; Mikulewicz, 2019; O'Malley, 2010; Welsh, 2014).

More recently, critical geographers have challenged this first-cut account, observing that resilience can be “many kinds of things” in practice (Anderson, 2015, p. 60). For example, scholars observed that state practices in the name of resilience may be oriented to collective welfare provision, or to redistributive goals (Sage et al., 2015; Wakefield, 2020). As such, resilience can align with a range of governmental rationalities that “exceed their designation as neoliberal” (Anderson, 2015, p. 64; Bourbeau, 2018; Grove, 2018; Nelson, 2020; O'Grady, 2025a; Rogers, 2017; Simon and Randalls, 2016a). Moreover, norms of resilience are contested and reshaped when state programs are developed and implemented locally (Cox, 2022; Naef, 2022). These empirical observations pointed to alternative ways of conceptualizing resilience. Rather than seeking out a fixed ontology of resilience—or treating it as an emanation of neoliberal rule—scholars called for pragmatic and contextual modes of analysis that treat the “linkages between resilience and any economic-political apparatus [as] questions to be explored rather than presumptions from which analysis begins” (Anderson, 2015, p. 60).

Today, a little over a decade after critical geographic scholarship began to make sense of the proliferation of resilience initiatives in a post-9/11 and post-financial crisis world, these scholarly discussions seem both invaluable and in need of further consideration. The basic proposition of the first-cut scholarship—that we must address resilience as an increasingly central norm and objective of contemporary governance—appears if anything more pertinent. In a world of proliferating megadisasters and “polycrises” (Tooze, 2022) governments are, indeed, ever more concerned with the ability of critical social, economic, technological, and military systems to persist or adaptively change when faced with the prospect of uncertain future shocks that they cannot reliably anticipate, prevent, or control. Meanwhile, the critiques of first-cut

scholarship—that resilience cannot be pinned down to a single logic or rationality—seem similarly apt. Resilience does, indeed, appear in diverse practices and rationalities of government.

But given the recent proliferation of massive state interventions in the name of resilience, and the corresponding emergence of novel politics of resilience across geographic contexts, we must do more than highlight empirical diversity. Instead, we need accounts that explore how a limited number of significant forms of resilience are both shaping and being shaped by a novel contemporary conjuncture or problem-space.¹ Following Jeremy Gilbert's recent commentary on conjunctural analysis, such accounts would steer between a theoretical approach that ontologizes or essentializes resilience and one that insists on multiplicity or particularism (Gilbert, 2019, p. 5). The forms of resilience, as Simon and Randalls put it, paraphrasing Annemarie Mol, are “more than one” but not ultimately fragmented into “many” (Simon and Randalls, 2016b, p. 4; see also Zebrowski, 2025). More concretely, the aim of such analyses is to identify and conceptualize *specific* forms of resilience that are significant for broader configurations of government and politics today.

3. A new problem-space: governmental rationality and politics

This section draws on the articles in this special issue to more clearly define some elements of the contemporary conjuncture in which new forms of resilience are now taking shape. One way to define this conjuncture is by pointing to acute events and to more slowly-unfolding issues that shape a problem-space in which novel forms of resilience are being defined and contested. For example, a striking number of articles in this issue point to the Covid-19 pandemic as an event that animated expansive new state actions to pursue resilience. Similarly, climate adaptation and decarbonization appear in paper after paper as long-term processes of change that are both shaping and being shaped by resilience initiatives. Beyond specific events and processes, however, a conjunctural analysis also explores the proposition that—across many geographies and sectors, and in response to diverse problems—we observe the workings of a new kind of “common sense”: about the kind of problem that resilience presents, the kinds of interventions that can be organized to address resilience, and the political aims and projects that can be linked to and mobilized around resilience.

In exploring the contours of an emerging common sense about resilience, a conjunctural analysis does not propose a strict periodization, in which a given form of resilience is associated with a particular time, and in which new forms of resilience supersede or displace the old (see Cox, 2025). Instead, it explores “continuities and discontinuities at multiple scales” (Gilbert, 2019, p. 14)—and, as the papers in this special issue demonstrate, in multiple sectors and multiple geographies—in order to grasp the contours of our contemporary conjuncture, as well as its dangers and possibilities (see also Rabinow, 2014). Nor does reference to a new common sense about resilience suggest that contemporary forms of resilience operate according to a singular logic. As we see in the articles in this special issue, the contemporary forms of resilience are heterogeneous, they exhibit tensions (between, for example, increasingly centralized state actions and demands for local control), and are contested.

Reference to a new common sense does, however, suggest that certain elements of current forms of resilience and directions of tendential change can be identified across multiple sites, scales, and contexts. Increasingly, we suggest, resilience is not understood as an objective that can be achieved through the self-regulating mechanisms of markets and individual choice; it is not a technocratic framework that depoliticizes social and economic outcomes. It is, rather, an explicit aim of state interventions, a central pillar of state legitimacy, and a contested

¹ Along with Gilbert, see Anderson (2021) on conjunctural analysis. For a discussion of the related concept of the problem-space or problematization, see Rabinow (2014).

terrain over which political claims and counter-claims are made.

The present discussion explores these propositions by mapping the contributions to the SI on two registers. The first register is that of governmental rationality and practice. Here we refer to the way states constitute and frame objects of state action through reasoned reflection and forms of knowledge, to the instruments and techniques employed in governing, and to broader projects (economic development, military security, etc.) to which resilience is linked (Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1996). The second register is that of politics and political contestation. Here we refer both to the way that resilience grounds the legitimacy of state actions and to the way that these claims to legitimacy are contested and reshaped through political demands and mobilization outside and in relation to the state (Barnett, 2017).

3.1. Governmental rationality

As noted above, the first-cut literature understood resilience primarily as a theory of self-organizing systems. As such, resilience was understood to be consistent with elements of neoliberal rationality, and in particular with government through the calculative choices of autonomous individuals and communities. In this understanding, to the extent that resilience is a norm of state action rather than a norm of “inaction” or an injunction against intervention, it is oriented either to the creation of a “framework” for autonomous choices or to the restoration of self-regulation following shocks. Substantive outcomes—such as the geography of supply chains, the direction of economic development (e.g. toward particular areas of industrial production or the extraction of particular strategic minerals), the construction of infrastructure services, or the provision of basic needs—are shaped by market self-regulation.

In contrast to this picture of resilience, the articles in the SI point to a range of contemporary situations in which states are treating resilience as a basic government responsibility and are acting to directly shape substantive outcomes with the aim of bolstering resilience. Two of the articles—by Zebrowski and Collier—focus on recent initiatives in the US and the UK that explicitly frame robust state actions in the name of resilience as responses to the failures of “neoliberal” approaches. Zebrowski (2025) examines the “build back better” frameworks that were developed in many countries and by multi-lateral organizations (such as the OECD and the World Bank) in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Focusing initially on the official Covid-19 inquiry in the UK, he argues that a striking theme in many of these frameworks was the argument that austerity programs introduced after the 2007–2008 financial crisis “degraded preparedness to future events resulting in inadequate stocks of [personal protective equipment], underfunded health care systems, and rampant economic inequality which exacerbated the damage of Covid-19.” In this context, a longer-standing critique of neoliberalism combined with calls for forceful government policies to pursue resilience, giving shape to a distinctive “political imaginary and attendant set of policy solutions.” Zebrowski explores some of these policy solutions by focusing on the US Build Back Better plan, formulated under the Biden administration (2021–2024). Many of the policies proposed in the Build Back Better plan—such as massive state investment in infrastructure and expansions in social welfare programs—harkened back to the New Deal and post-WWII social liberalism. “In this respect,” Zebrowski argues, “the idea of resilience advanced within Build Back Better policies appears both new and old, drawing on antecedents to the concept of resilience as it emerged in the 1970s.”

Collier (2025) examines some of the major legislative acts that grew out of the Build Back Better framework in the US as well as other state and federal policies related to industrial policy, infrastructure, and disasters. Across these domains, he argues, resilience is now the target of and justification for massive volumes of state expenditure and powerful regulatory controls: large-scale investment in climate resilient infrastructure, trade and industrial policies to support the development of “resilient” supply chains, and state interventions to shore up disaster

insurance systems. Like Zebrowski, Collier observes that today such state interventions are often framed in terms of the failure of “neoliberal” policies that sought resilience through flexible markets—and left outcomes such as the location of strategic industries or the direction of industrial development to the logics of least cost and comparative advantage. Drawing on the state theory of Claus Offe, Collier argues that these contrasting forms of resilience—the “neoliberal” variant of resilience oriented to self-organization that predominated in the 2000s and 2010s and the more statist and interventionist variant that is emergent today—should be understood in terms of the dynamic tension of what he refers to as the “disaster contradiction.” The legitimacy of advanced capitalist states rests on their ability to shape the outcomes of events that disrupt vital systems—from natural hazards and pandemics to climate change impacts and economic shocks. But government policies oscillate between state-centered and market-centered forms of resilience, each of which is prone to its own patterns of failure and breakdown.

The articles by Meredith DeBoom and Savannah Cox—which focus on different aspects of the energy sector in southern Africa—also explore how resilience is now the objective of robust state actions that aim to shape substantive outcomes rather than rely on processes of market self-organization and individual responsibility. DeBoom (2025) describes how resilience has become a central concern for the Government of Namibia since the 2010s, evolving from a “policy line item” related to climate change and sustainable development to an “overarching state strategy” that is a key pillar of broader developmental projects. She focuses on “large-scale, long-term planning and investments” in two kinds of capital-intensive energy projects: oil extraction and green hydrogen. DeBoom points out that investment in renewable power is often understood to contribute to various “resilience-related goals” of low-income countries by addressing both the effects of climate change and the “carbon risks” (e.g. the risks of stranded assets) associated with economic reliance on fossil fuel economies. Set against this conventional understanding, the Namibian government’s simultaneous pursuit of fossil fuel and renewable energy development may seem paradoxical. But DeBoom shows that it can be understood as a coherent resilience strategy of “hedging.” Hedging addresses not only the risks that decarbonization and climate change present to developmental states (e.g. through stranded assets or losses from climate extremes) but also the “multi-scalar risks associated with low carbon energy production itself.” Among these are the risk that emission reduction will be deferred, that donor commitment to renewable energy projects will wane, or that the promised economic returns of such projects will not materialize. In short, the state strategy is to “support the long-term resilience, development, and diversification” of the Namibian economy regardless of what becomes of planned energy transitions around the world—a strategy that seems ever more pertinent as states and corporations retreat from emissions reduction commitments.

Cox (2025), focusing on the electricity sector in South Africa, deploys the concept of “infrastructural time” to explore several significant resilience projects that are unfolding simultaneously. The South African government is pursuing large-scale debt relief and investment in Eskom—the national electricity utility—to shore up its ability to deliver reliable electricity. Wealthy residents are pursuing resilience in the face of endemic interruptions in centralized energy service by deploying household solar and storage systems. Regional governments, meanwhile, are building utility-scale solar to stabilize local electricity supply. These various projects of resilience, Cox shows, may be in tension. For example, state subsidy for household solar systems addresses the short-term problem of “load shedding”—service interruptions when demand cannot be met by available generation and transmission capacity. But in the medium term the proliferation of household solar and storage systems may contribute to a “death spiral” of the larger system, as “elite infrastructural secession” by those who can afford such systems deprives the incumbent utility of revenue that is essential for investment in aging infrastructure (Fatti et al., 2023). This dynamic, Cox observes, fundamentally threatens the legitimacy of the post-Apartheid state, since

electricity provision has been “central in majority rule projects of redistribution.”

3.2. Politics

A second register on which a novel conjuncture is both shaping and being shaped by new forms of resilience is that of politics and political contestation. Here we refer to how resilience grounds the legitimacy of state actions and to individual and group demands on collective actions and resources. As we have seen, first-cut accounts identified resilience as an increasingly central norm for states, but one that was—perhaps paradoxically—depoliticizing. As [Wijsman \(2025\)](#) points out, this literature advanced two arguments about resilience and depoliticization. First, scholars argued that resilience, insofar as it is understood to be a property of self-organizing (ecological, economic, or social) systems, precludes state actions that would disrupt processes of self-regulation. Here, resilience is depoliticizing because it constitutes certain kinds of problems—such as the ability to manage disruptive shocks—as an individual rather than a collective responsibility. Second, and relatedly, scholars have argued that because knowledge about resilience is based in technocratic expertise about complex systems, judgement about resilience is removed from political dispute. In either case, resilience is understood to “naturalize, rather than question, social and ecological outcomes, and thereby to also justify a...retreat of the state [from action on] collective problems” ([Wijsman, 2025](#)).

The articles in the SI offer a very different picture of resilience and politics. As already described, they examine many domains in which, today, resilience is considered a core government responsibility that grounds state legitimacy. This does not imply, however, that state officials or policymakers can shape the meanings and forms of resilience in any way they please. Rather, as robust state interventions are rolled out—whether in the context of Covid-19 relief measures, investments in climate resilient infrastructure, or large appropriations for disaster relief—the substance of resilience is worked out through disputes over matters such as the design of infrastructures, distribution formulae for grants, and practices of valuation.

Two examples are found in articles by Katinka Wijsman and Nathaniel O’Grady, which examine how large-scale interventions in the US open avenues for contestation about the forms that resilience takes. [Wijsman \(2025\)](#) adopts a pragmatist approach that asks: “What is it that governments and other actors do when they are creating resilience?” One thing governments do when they pursue resilience, she observes, is that they plan, finance, and build infrastructure. And when they do so, they deploy techniques such as cost-benefit analysis (CBA) to evaluate the public “goods” that are generated by infrastructure projects. Many scholarly assessments of CBA have understood it as an instrument of expert authority that depoliticizes infrastructure planning. But Wijsman finds that the mobilization of expertise through CBA may generate rather than suppress political controversy. Considering the case of post-disaster reconstruction after Hurricane Sandy struck New York City in 2012, she observes that CBA became the focal point of high-stakes debates about how resilience is “substantiated” through concrete practices and material transformations. Not only did citizens criticize government assessments of regional plans for resilience infrastructure, they also demanded transparent and explicit cost-benefit analysis when the City of New York made unexplained adjustments to a large-scale coastal resilience project. For example, CBA became the focal point of debates about whether the values provided by green infrastructures—such as recreation and the provision of species habitat—should be accounted for in project assessments. It also focused debates on the spatial and temporal distribution of benefits from climate resilient infrastructure: What areas would be protected by a given project? How should the discount rate—which determines the value placed on future benefits that are weighed against project costs—be defined?

Also considering US resilience initiatives through a pragmatist lens, [O’Grady \(2025b\)](#) details how US government officials crafted the

Justice40 initiative, a key piece of the Biden climate agenda that sought to direct 40% of certain categories of federal funds to communities that are “marginalized, underserved, and overburdened.” O’Grady observes that in the US context, the turn toward “just resilience” arose from a particular historical moment defined by the mobilization of state resources to address climate change, the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the upsurge in concern with historical injustice that was crystallized by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, among other developments. Alongside its commitment to distributional justice, the Justice40 initiative established engagement mechanisms—such as the White House Environmental Advisory Council and the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool—through which communities could influence, monitor, and provide feedback on resilience projects. These tools spurred political debate over the modalities of justice in the program: Should the 40% standard refer to the distribution of funds or the distribution of benefits? Which communities should be eligible?

Laurian Rosa-Rosa, Bárbara López-González, and Kevon Rhiney take up questions of resilience and justice in a very different context—examining the activities of established community organizations in Puerto Rico against the backdrop of profound failures in governmental response following Hurricane Maria, which devastated the island in 2017. They find that, in the aftermath of Maria, these organizations adopted the rubric of resilience in strategic ways that reflect a “spectrum of political orientations and varied interactions with state power” ([Rosa-Rosa et al., 2025](#)). One organization, Comedores Sociales, positioned its efforts to promote resilience as overtly political, aligned with longer traditions of anti-colonial struggle. This organization’s activities focused on mutual aid through “smaller-scale and place-based projects,” and sought to foster radically alternative “imaginaries of community economies.” A second organization, PECES, constituted resilience as a politically neutral aim that made it possible to engage with—and garner substantial resources from—the Puerto Rican and US federal governments, philanthropic foundations, and the private sector. Given the delayed but ultimately massive influx of government aid following the disaster, this stance allowed PECES to support larger-scale activities in areas such as the repair of damaged housing, schooling, and job training. These cases, argue Rosa-Rosa, López-González, and Rhiney, point to the limitations of a “dualistic” view of post-Maria recovery, which frames “all community initiatives as arising largely in response to the resources gap that had emerged in the storms’ immediate aftermath, and later in direct opposition to state-led efforts to reform Puerto Rico’s economy along neoliberal lines.” The state ultimately allocated large-scale resources to post-disaster resilience, and some forms of “resilience from below” were made possible by strategic engagement with state programs.

4. Conjunctural analysis and geographic thought beyond a heroic mode of critique

What might these reflections suggest about critical geographers’ role in studying resilience today? As Kevin [Grove \(forthcoming\)](#) argues in his contribution, a particular critical stance was suggested by the claims of first-cut scholarship. If resilience has a fixed and coherent meaning that can be traced back to a foundational origin, then the role of critical geographers is to reveal the singular truth of resilience. In doing so, critical geographers purport to unmask a discourse that authorizes itself by reference to nature or expert truth, both of which remove resilience from the domain of legitimate political contestation. Geographic critique, thus constituted, places itself in a heroic position of re-politicizing the governance of socio-ecological relations in time-spaces of uncertainty and crisis.

One potential limitation of this critical stance, as [Wijsman \(2025\)](#) demonstrates, is that it presupposes a tension between expertise and politics. This presupposition may obscure the ways in which the technical practices of resilience—such as the cost-benefit analysis that Wijsman studies—may be politicizing rather than depoliticizing.

Another issue, following Grove (forthcoming), is that such analyses may neglect the wide range of practices and world-building projects through which people living with social, psychic and systemic insecurities mobilize resilience to make claims on resources or for community empowerment (see also DeVerteuil et al., 2021; 2022). More broadly, as literature that has been critical of the first-cut geographical scholarship on resilience has argued, variable formations of resilience are observed in different times and places. A critical project that seeks a singular truth of resilience runs the risk of dulling our perception of changing formations of resilience.

And yet, the challenge presented by first-cut scholarship is as important as ever. Resilience remains a key norm of governmental rationality in the present—though its forms are changing—and a critical geography that seeks insight into broader ensembles of power relations must engage with it. In this essay we have proposed a conjunctural analysis of resilience as an alternative to both a “heroic” critical mode and to a project that focuses on the multiplicity of resilience. Such an analysis seeks to understand significant formations of resilience that take shape in particular historical situations or problem-spaces. The goal is to both make explicit and perhaps defamiliarize the “common sense” that underpins such formations of resilience, as well as to identify dynamic tensions and contradictions that run through them. Drawing again from Gilbert’s (2019, p. 5) account of conjunctural analysis, such a critical study of resilience is one means of “mapping the specificity of the present, of situating current developments historically, and of looking out for political threats and opportunities.”

Given the significant events that unfolded while we completed work on this special issue, this mode of critique seems urgent today. To conclude this essay, we explore some of these developments and the value of a conjunctural perspective in analyzing them. In doing so, we also suggest how a collection of exemplary cases like those presented in the contributions to this special issue can aid in grasping the contours of this contemporary conjuncture and understanding its stakes.

Resilience 2025: moves and counter-moves

In March 2025, newly-(re)elected US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on “Achieving Efficiency through State and Local Preparedness,” which ordered the preparation of a new “National Resilience Strategy.”² The strategy would, among other things, explore ways to shift responsibility for making US “infrastructure, communities, and economy resilient to global and dynamic threats and hazards” to states and local governments. Resilience has also featured in the Trump administration’s signature tariff strategies. For example, in April, Trump signed an executive order on “Ensuring National Security and Economic Resilience” that instructed the Secretary of Commerce to investigate US vulnerability to disruptions of foreign supplies of critical minerals, most notably from China.³ The order further instructed the Secretary of Commerce to make recommendations for actions that could alleviate this vulnerability, such as the imposition of tariffs and policies to incentivize domestic production, processing, and recycling. A fact sheet that accompanied the executive order placed it among a broader range of measures taken by the Trump administration to bolster national security and economic resilience. Most notable among these were the

administration’s program of “reciprocal tariffs”—which had upended world trading relationships earlier in the same month—and investigations of vulnerability to disruptions in foreign supplies of other products, such as copper, timber, and lumber.⁴ In these actions of the early Trump administration, the political urgency surrounding “resilience” has, if anything, been amplified—as a response to existential threats to national sovereignty—in a fashion that in many ways recalls resilience discourses and politics of the early Cold War (Collier and Lakoff, 2021; Collier, 2025).

These recent US developments can be understood as continuous with a series of moves and counter-moves by other countries, stretching back at least a decade. Since the mid-2010s, for example, Russia has taken steps to increase its resilience following the onset of US sanctions. Among these are the creation of an alternative international payments system (the System for Transfer of Financial Messages, overseen by the Russian central bank), the promotion of domestic production of key industrial products, the diversification of its trade partners, and the construction of a “shadow” tanker fleet that would allow it to maintain oil exports. China, meanwhile, responded to the tariffs of the first Trump administration by seeking to diversify its export markets (through, for example, the Belt and Road Initiative, whose participant countries now account for a growing portion of Chinese foreign trade), a “Made in China 2025” initiative that seeks to increase national self-sufficiency in critical technologies, and support for electronic payment infrastructures that offer an alternative to US dominated platforms. The EU, in turn, has responded to disruption of Russian gas deliveries following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by formulating a REPowerEU Plan that seeks resilience by diversifying energy sources, enhancing energy storage, reducing demand, and accelerating renewable energy installations.

How are we to take stock of the political “dangers and possibilities” of this moment? What are the political entailments of these forms of resilience? In the policies of the Trump administration, a more securitized and autarchic form of resilience has been coupled with—and has catalyzed—other shifts in the landscape of resilience policies in the US. Among these are a withdrawal from commitments to renewable energy transition; the rollback of programs oriented to “just resilience;” and a devolution of domestic responsibility for resilience—as in the order on “Achieving Efficiency through State and Local Preparedness” referenced above. Yet if we again consider the broader landscape of resilience forms taking shape today, it is not at all clear that these elements go together in a coherent package. They are, instead, sites of dynamic tension.

Take, for example, the renewable energy transition. The Trump administration has increasingly articulated a vision of national resilience through energy independence that is opposed to renewable development. But in other contexts—and at other scales—resilience through self-reliance is being pursued precisely through investments in zero-carbon energy. Examples range from the pursuit of household or local self-sufficiency through investments in solar and battery resources, as in Cox’s (2025) discussion of South Africa, to the reduction of national dependency on fossil fuel imports, as in the EU and China examples cited above. The question of whether an increasing orientation to energy resilience through self-sufficiency will propel or undermine decarbonization thus appears not as a foregone conclusion but as a central political question of the present moment.

A similar point might be made about the way that resilience is being rearticulated in relation to international trade. Many recent state actions in the name of resilience described above have taken increasingly autarchic forms. But we also see resilience initiatives that seek out new

² Donald J. Trump, “Achieving Efficiency through State and Local Preparedness.” Executive Order, March 19, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/achieving-efficiency-through-state-and-local-preparedness/>.

³ Donald J. Trump, Ensuring National Security and Economic Resilience through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Materials and Derivative Products. The White House. April 15, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/ensuring-national-security-and-economic-resilience-through-section-232-actions-on-processed-critical-minerals-and-derivative-products/>.

⁴ Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Ensures National Security and Economic Resilience Through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Minerals and Derivative Products. The White House. April 15, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-ensures-national-security-and-economic-resilience-through-section-232-actions-on-processed-critical-minerals-and-derivative-products/>.

internationalisms, as in the construction of alternative trading networks and alliances pursued by Russia, China, Europe and—in different ways under the Biden and Trump administrations—the US (Collier, 2025). Meanwhile, actors at various scales that occupy more precarious positions in the world economy are pursuing the resilience strategy that DeBoom (2025) refers to as “hedging”: investing in multiple and seemingly contradictory energy futures to withstand policy uncertainties and disruptions in the global economy.

Parallel observations may be made about the normative and political dimensions of resilience: a conjunctural analysis can simultaneously recognize the dominant features of a contemporary problem-space and sites of dynamic tension. Consider, for example, how emerging formations of resilience relate to the distribution of agency. Will these formations reinforce “top-down” measures imposed by states? Or will they enable “bottom-up” measures, in which individuals and communities ensure their own resilience? And will such alternate scalings of agency lead to empowerment or disempowerment, security or exposure? The Trump administration’s emerging approach to resilience in domestic preparedness policy—mentioned above—signals a devolution of responsibility. As one advocacy organization has warned, this policy may amount to an abandonment of states and communities that are “ill-prepared to respond to disasters on their own without investment and unified leadership from the federal government.”⁵ These centrally-driven devolutionary moves contrast with actions by communities that—for various reasons—seek resilience by cutting off dependencies on larger systems. The effects of these emergent practices in the name of resilience may be alternatively empowering or disempowering for marginalized groups. Take, for example, the sharply contrasting cases of “elite infrastructural secession” from centralized electricity infrastructures—which leave poorer citizens stuck with an increasingly disinvested national grid (Cox, 2025)—and the diverse resilience strategies of community groups in Puerto Rico, which strategically engage with the state (Rosa-Rosa et al., 2025).

Similar considerations pertain to the fate of “just resilience.” The Trump administration summarily dissolved the Justice40 program described by O’Grady (2025). Yet “just resilience” mechanisms that employ measures of social vulnerability to shape the allocation of state resources directed to resilience have proliferated at other scales and in other cases. For example, various US states have committed to investing in “just resilience” programs to compensate for the loss of federal funding (Hassanein, 2025). The EU, meanwhile, has reaffirmed its commitment to “just resilience” as a central pillar of its climate adaptation strategy (European Environment Agency, 2022), and the UK is structuring its climate adaptation according to equity concerns (POST, 2025). In parallel to the other issues we have considered, it might be best to say that “just resilience” is not so much a casualty as a central stake in emerging forms of resilience.

In sum, these examples illuminate some general directions of travel for resilience today: for example, toward greater autarchy in a “post-neoliberal” world. But they also underscore that there is no singular political truth of resilience to uncover, and no single remedy to be found. In this light, the task for geographers is to engage with the messy politicization of resilience in the current conjuncture, staying attentive to its dangers and possibilities. Such engagement sharpens our understanding of the present and equips us to ask what kinds of futures are being built, foreclosed, or deferred in the name of resilience.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Stephen J. Collier: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing –

original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Savannah Cox:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Kevin Grove:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Nathaniel O’Grady:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

References

- Anderson, B., 2015. What kind of thing is resilience? *Politics* 35 (1), 60–66. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12079>.
- Anderson, B., 2021. Affect and critique: a politics of boredom. *Environ. Plan. D* 39 (2), 197–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02637758211002998>.
- Barnett, C., 2017. The priority of injustice: locating democracy in critical theory. University of Georgia Press, Athens.
- Bourbeau, P., 2018. On resilience: genealogy, logics, and world politics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Chandler, D., 2014. Beyond neoliberalism: resilience, the new art of governing complexity. *Resilience* 2 (1), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.878544>.
- Chandler, D., Reid, J., 2016. The neoliberal subject: resilience, adaptation and vulnerability. Rowman & Littlefield International, London.
- Collier, S.J., 2025. The disaster contradiction of contemporary capitalism: resilience, vital systems security, and ‘post-neoliberalism’. *Geoforum* 159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104204>.
- Collier, S.J., Lakoff, A., 2021. The government of emergency: vital systems, expertise, and the politics of security. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Cooper, M., 2011. Complexity theory after the financial crisis: the death of neoliberalism or the triumph of Hayek? *J. Cult. Econ.* 4 (4), 371–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2011.609692>.
- Cowen, D., 2014. The deadly life of logistics: mapping violence in global trade. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Cox, S., 2022. Inscriptions of resilience: bond ratings and the government of climate risk in Greater Miami, Florida. *Environ. Plan. A* 54 (2), 295–310.
- Cox, S., 2025. The infrastructural time of resilience: accounting for new (and old) forms of government in the South African grid. *Geoforum* 160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104209>.
- Davies, W., Gane, N., 2021. Post-neoliberalism? an introduction. *Theory Cult. Soc.* 38 (6), 3–28.
- DeBoom, M.J., 2025. Hedging energy transition: green hydrogen, oil, and low-carbon resilience as state strategy in Namibia. *Geoforum* 161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104267>.
- DeVerteul, G., Golubchikov, O., Sheridan, Z., 2021. Disaster and the lived politics of the resilient city. *Geoforum* 125, 78–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.07.004>.
- European Environment Agency, 2022. Towards ‘just resilience’: leaving no one behind when adapting to climate change. URL <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/just-resilience-leaving-no-one-behind/towards-just-resilience-leaving-no> (accessed 5.26.25).
- Evans, B., Reid, J., 2014. Resilient life: the art of living dangerously. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Fatti, C.C., Khanyile, S., Rubin, M., Modiba, M., Anciano, F., Lemanski, C., Cooper-Knock, S., 2023. Off-grid cities: elite infrastructural secession and social justice. *Guateng City-Region Observatory*. URL <https://www.gcro.ac.za/research/project/detail/grid-cities/> (accessed 5.26.25).
- Gilbert, J., 2019. This conjuncture: for Stuart Hall. *New Formations* 96–97, 5–37. <https://doi.org/10.3898/NEWF:96/97.EDITORIAL.2019>.
- Gordon, C., 1991. Governmental rationality: an introduction, in: Burchell, G., Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Grove, K., 2018. Resilience. Routledge, London.
- Grove, K., n.d. Resilience, Critique, and the Limits of Geographic Thought in the Anthropocene. *Geoforum*.
- Hassanein, N., 2025. Trump has canceled environmental justice grants. Here’s what communities are losing. *Stateline*. URL <https://stateline.org/2025/04/14/trump-h-as-canceled-environmental-justice-grants-heres-what-communities-are-losing/> (accessed 5.26.25).
- Joseph, J., 2013. Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach. *Resilience* 1 (1), 38–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765741>.
- MacKinnon, D., Derickson, K.D., 2012. From resilience to resourcefulness: a critique of resilience policy and activism. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 37 (2), 253–270.
- Mikulewicz, M., 2019. Thwarting adaptation’s potential? a critique of resilience and climate-resilient development. *Geoforum* 104, 267–282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.05.010>.
- Naef, P., 2022. Resistances in the “Resilient City”: rise and fall of a disputed concept in New Orleans and Medellín. *Polit. Geogr.* 96 (22), 102603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102603>.

⁵ American Rivers’ Statement on Administration’s Latest Executive Order Undermining FEMA. March 20, 2025. <https://www.americanrivers.org/media-item/american-rivers-statement-on-administrations-latest-executive-order-undermining-fema/>.

- Nelson, S., 2020. Resilient arts of government: the birth of a 'systems-cybernetic governmentality,' in: Chandler, D., Grove, K., & Wakefield, S. (Eds.), *Resilience in the Anthropocene*. Routledge, London.
- O'Grady, N., 2025a. (Re)framing the politics of climate change: resilience, reparative critique and affective life in situations of extreme heat. *Crit. Stud. Secur.* 13 (1), 70–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2024.2410521>.
- O'Grady, N., 2025b. On the possibility of 'just resilience': a pragmatist approach to justice-based climate change governance. *Geoforum* 159, 104163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104163>.
- O'Malley, P., 2010. Resilient subjects: uncertainty, warfare and liberalism. *Econ. Soc.* 39 (4), 488–509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2010.510681>.
- POST, 2025. Addressing climate transition challenges and opportunities. URL <https://post.parliament.uk/addressing-climate-transition-challenges-and-opportunities/> (accessed 5.26.25).
- Rabinow, P., 2014. *Anthropos today: reflections on modern equipment*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Rogers, P., 2017. *The governmentality of disaster resilience*. Routledge, London.
- Rosa-Rosa, L., López-González, B., Rhiney, K., 2025. Towards a relational reading of resilience: community networks and the politics of disaster recovery in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane María. *Geoforum* 163. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104315>.
- Rose, N., 1996. Governing "advanced" liberal democracies, in: Barry, A., Osborne, T., & Rose, N. (Eds.), *Foucault and political reason*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Sage, D., Fussey, P., Dainty, A., 2015. Securing and scaling resilient futures: neoliberalization, infrastructure, and topologies of power. *Environ. Plan. D* 33 (3), 494–511. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d14154p>.
- Simon, S., Randalls, S., 2016a. Resilience and the politics of multiplicity. *Dial. Human Geography* 6 (1), 45–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820615624072>.
- Simon, S., Randalls, S., 2016b. Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future. *Dial. Human Geogr.* 6 (1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820615624047>.
- Tooze, A., 2022. Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. *Financial Times*. URL <https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33> (accessed 7.29.25).
- Wakefield, S., 2020. Urban resilience as critique: problematizing infrastructure in post-Sandy New York City. *Polit. Geogr.* 79, 102148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102148>.
- Walker, J., Cooper, M., 2011. Genealogies of resilience: from systems ecology to the political economy of crisis adaptation. *Secur. Dialogue* 42 (2), 143–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611399616>.
- Welsh, M., 2014. Resilience and responsibility: governing uncertainty in a complex world. *Geogr. J.* 180 (1), 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12012>.
- Wijsman, K., 2025. Accountants of adaptation? Cost benefit analysis and the politics of resilience. *Geoforum* 162, 104290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104290>.
- Zebrowski, C., 2025. Postneoliberal resilience: interrogating the value of the resilience multiple in the post-Covid-19 conjunctural crisis. *Geoforum* 158, 104162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104162>.