

# The New-Normaling of Blackouts

On Christmas Eve, 2022, in North Carolina, something happened that had never happened before in living memory. People across the state were alerted by their power company, Duke Energy, that there would be [rolling blackouts](#) in the aftermath of a severe (but “[not exceedingly rare](#)”) winter wind storm. At least [12 other states](#) received similar and previously unheard-of warnings.

Before, rolling blackouts were a California problem, then they also became a Texas problem. Blackouts are spreading faster than even [Imperial College London modelers](#) would find believable.

Duke was [still warning](#) North Carolina customers of potential blackouts two days later on Monday the 26th, when people would be returning to work. At this point there was nothing unusual at all in the weather, except that it was colder than normal. The only thing unusual was Duke’s warning, in combination with its [thanking customers](#) for conserving enough energy to avoid blackouts on Christmas Day.

It already seems as if people are being conditioned to *expect talk of rolling blackouts* whenever the weather outside seems frightful.

To be very clear: rolling blackouts are not now, nor have they been, normal in the US. Therefore, having to expect rolling blackouts going forward would be *abnormal*. Nevertheless, as utility providers and power grid monitors have recently warned, the more grids are saddled with intermittent, unreliable wind and solar facilities, the more unreliable they are becoming. They’re [more prone to capacity shortfalls and blackouts](#).

The Biden administration is dead-set on adding more wind and solar generation to the grid, which requires shuttering existing, reliable power plants. Along with much higher electric bills, it means more rolling blackouts. Electric customers would be incensed, however, given their current expectation of power at the flip of a switch. There are only two ways to go: change the plan to destabilize the grid with politically favored renewables, or try to change people's idea of normal grid operations.

Changing people's idea of what's normal...we've seen this process before. Remember April 15, 2020, when the governors of several US states all began speaking of the "[new normal](#)" of government reordering their lives in dealing with COVID-19? The rollout was inartful, but effective. Almost three years later, people wonder whether the next cold and virus season might prompt fresh rounds of government lockdowns, face mask mandates, school closures, and worse. All these concepts were plain unthinkable before 2020.

We've seen similar new-normalling of other inevitable bad outcomes of Biden policies, including inflation, COVID vaccine mandates, and illegal immigration. So I write with a high degree of confidence of how changing expectations on blackouts will play out, though I confess I'm not sure which of *The Atlantic*, *Washington Post*, or CNN will be first with the inevitable "I Love Blackouts" column, or whether it'll be "Rolling Blackouts: Why Saving the Planet Has Never Been So Much Fun."

Following is an outline of the new-normalling process, in general:

*1. It's not happening; everything is normal. If it were happening, it would be really bad. Those who say it's happening are trying to scare you.*

Denial is always the first step. Key to this denial is

agreeing with people on the abject undesirability of the inevitable outcome. Opponents warning people to this outcome must be demonized to render them untrustworthy. This is the “Actually, you’re saving 16 cents on a hotdog lunch this July 4th” step.

*2. It’s not really happening. This was a unique set of circumstances not to be repeated. If it were actually happening, it would be really bad. Those who say it’s happening are trying to scare you, and they ought to be silenced.*

When it becomes too obvious to be denied, the next step is to acknowledge the problem, but only as an isolated one, denying it as an emerging problem. This step still requires agreeing with people that the inevitable outcome is a bad thing. As always, opponents must be demonized. This is the “inflation is transitory” step.

*3. OK, yes, it happened, but those who keep harping on that are just out to scare people and not focus on solutions.*

This step attempts to redirect growing awareness of an emerging problem by making it seem as if being aware of the problem is a stubborn, perhaps unpatriotic, act of political intractability. It still treats it as a one-off event. This step is deliberately vague, making people feel confused, wondering what solutions are there and if the bad guys are keeping them away from us.

*4. It is happening, and you should expect it to keep happening. Those critics saying it’s because of our policies are trying to scare you from seeing that we’re actually providing the solution, and we need to press ahead.*

This step adds confusion upon confusion. Gone is any agreement as to whether the problem is new or emerging, or even if it is to be considered a problem at all. Only the enemy is clear. This is the “Communism doesn’t work because not every country

is Communist" step.

*5. Yes, it's happening, and we're glad! You should be, too. It's pushing us toward a solution. The people telling you it's bad are trying to divide society, because they're scared we have the solution.*

Here, the problem is simultaneously bad and good. It's the last gasp of acknowledging the undesirability of the outcome in order to assuage people, while pulling them into welcoming the outcome as the solution. Anyone doubting the desirability of the outcome is made to feel unpatriotic, in league with the bad guys, or in the way of progress. This is the "while the vaccines may not prevent transmission, you might not be hospitalized as long, and we all need to do our part" step.

*6. It's happening, and that's proof that the change we're bringing about is working. People saying it's bad are trying to drag our society back to the Dark Ages. They are spouting misinformation and should be denied any public forum.*

This step is the full embrace of the undesirable outcome, along with the full demonization of the opposition. The only thing lacking in this step is that the undesirable outcome is still considered new, which implies abnormal.

*7. This? Anyone who says it never used to happen is lying. You only think you remember when it didn't happen. This is all normal.*

Here is the final bit of [gaslighting](#). At this step there is no need to acknowledge that the undesirable outcome is happening, because there is no need to address the obvious. All that remains is to *make people doubt their own memory*. This is the "wages are growing faster than inflation" step.

Early in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith watched his fellow citizens react to an announcement that the government was "raising" their chocolate ration to

twenty grammes a week. Winston remembered the announcement from the previous day, however: the government was *reducing* the chocolate ration to twenty grammes a week. He marveled as everyone all celebrated what was actually bad news, which they should have all remembered was bad news.

Winston thought: "Was he, then, alone in the possession of a memory?"

With respect to that great achievement long ago of cheap, reliable electricity, how many of us in the new normal will even allow ourselves to remember it?

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