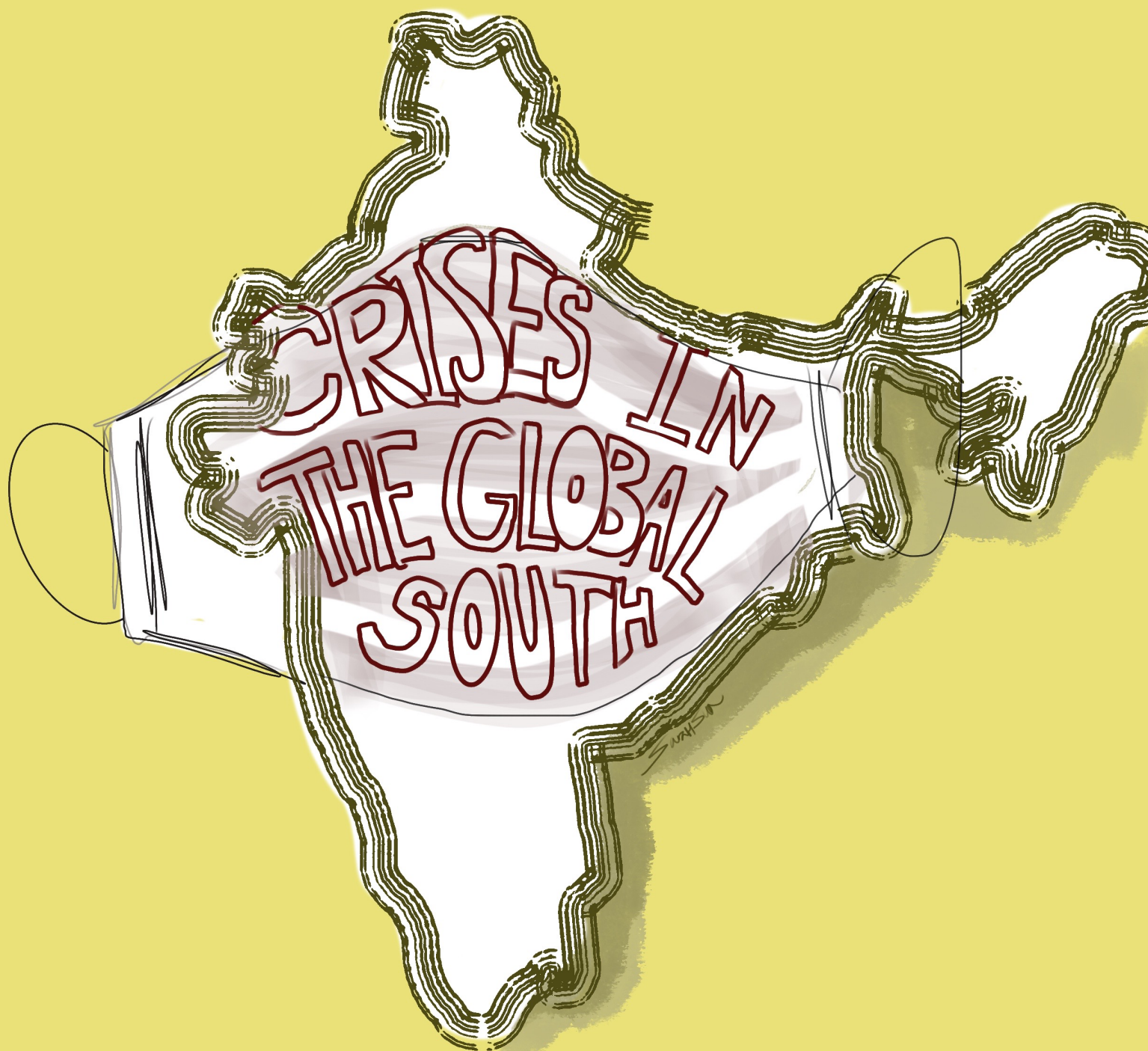


Issue

5

THE HORACE MANN Review



VOLUME XXX - JUNE 2021

Letter From the Editors



Cover image by Sarah Sun

Hello Horace Mann! It is our pleasure to present the final issue of Volume XXX of The Review.

During a year in which almost every week highlighted new questions about the future of the United States, from the course of the pandemic to the election fallout to vaccine rollouts, it was often difficult to look beyond our own borders. However, as daily life continues encouragingly on its path back to normalcy, we are cognizant of the vast global disparities that this year has not only created but also masked.

Thus, for Issue 5, our writers highlight the global south. Despite momentous global progress in the realm of vaccine rollout, writers articulate the ways in which nations like India are still experiencing the pandemic’s tragic ramifications. Additionally, contributors discuss other non-COVID related events such as the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

Moreover, our writers express their views on other pressing topics both at home and abroad by analyzing events and ideas such as Washington D.C.’s statehood, the unprecedented rise of Bitcoin and cryptocurrency, and Biden’s promise to withdraw all American soldiers from Afghanistan.

As we conclude our time as co-editors-in-chief, we would like to thank all of our writers, members of the editorial board, and faculty advisors Dr. Kotchian and Mr. Schlesinger, for their tireless and determined work on the publication this year. It has truly been a joy to present this publication to the Horace Mann community all year, and we can’t wait to see what next year’s leadership has in store.

With much gratitude, we hope you enjoy our final issue.

Sasha Snyder and Alex Gerstenhaber
Editors-in-Chief
Volume XXX

THE HORACE MANN Review

Alex Gerstenhaber
Sasha Snyder
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WHO WON? WHO LOST?

The 2020 Census and Redistricting Cycle

Eshan Mehere

Last week’s release of the 2020 United States Population Census initiated the tedious and contentious process of determining what Congress will look like in 2022, and for the next decade. The census revealed that while the overall U.S. population increased by roughly 25 million people over the past ten years, several states’ populations fell while others’ rose. The 435 seats in the House of Representatives are reallocated every ten years, based on the results of the census. The 2020 count caused thirteen states to either gain or lose representation. This dynamic combined with the fact that the district lines in 46 out of the 50 states are about to be redrawn, means that one party will come out of this census and redistricting cycle with a clear advantage over the other. As a result, for the short term, the G.O.P. has won big.²

Republicans will benefit from their control of most of the state governments in the country. This control allows them, in many cases, to redraw the maps in whatever way advantages them politically. They also benefit from the fact that the places gaining representation in Congress, due to an increase in population, tilt to the right. However, efforts to restrict gerrymandering, the process of manipulating political maps with a specific partisan lean, in addition to the fact that trends in population run in line with the Democratic party’s long-term political prospects, mean that they come out of this cycle with a more robust long-term advantage, even if it means they may have to bite the bullet in the near future.

Republicans enter this decade’s cycle with the ability to draw the lines of over 40% of Congressional districts, compared to a mere 17% for the Democrats. Republicans have full control over the redistricting commissions in up to 21 of the 50 states, including the crucial, population-dense states of Florida, Texas, Georgia, and North Caro-

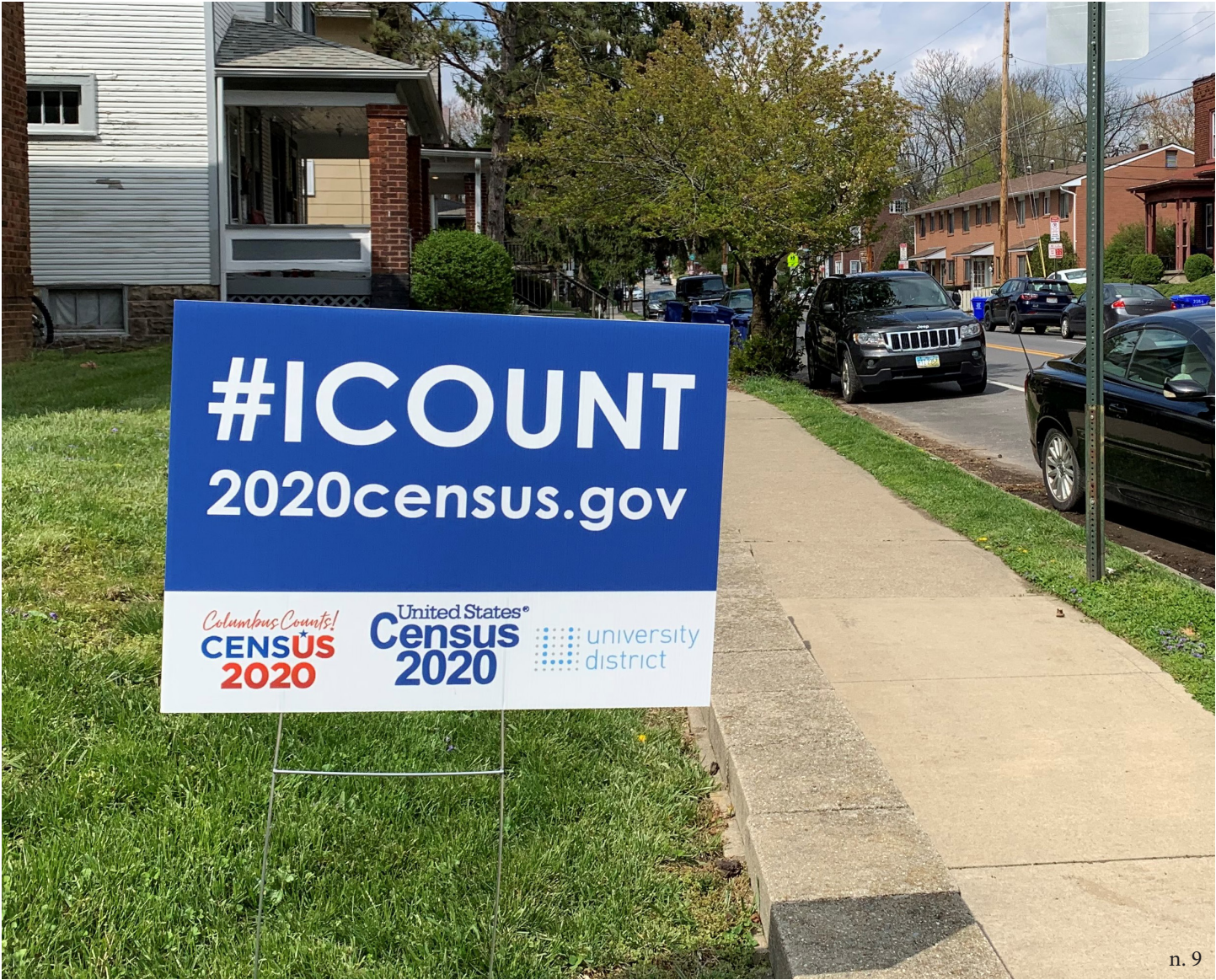
lina. Republicans only have to make up five seats to retake the House in 2022, and so their incredible power over the redistricting process will make reclaiming the majority easier. Indeed, it appears that redistricting on its own is about to secure a Republican victory next November. The Cook Political Report’s predictions of the maps estimate 20 Democrats to be at extreme risk of being taken out as a result of redistricting, compared to just 12 Republicans, and this advantage on its own is enough to propel the G.O.P. to a majority.³

Although the G.O.P. has a significant advantage via gerrymandering, they are also ecstatic with how the Census re-apportioned the Congressional districts throughout the country. To explain, Texas voted for Fmr. President Donald Trump by over 8% last November, and was one of the biggest winners of the Census, gaining a whopping two seats in Congress, a larger gain than any other state in the country.⁴ Furthermore, other states that went red up and down the ballot including North Carolina, Florida, and Montana were among those that gained seats. Meanwhile, several Democrat strongholds, including New York, California, and Illinois lost seats, in addition to other states that voted for President Biden last fall like Michigan and Pennsylvania.

“Armed with the control of many critical state governments, a small deficit of seats to overcome, and a favorable result in the Census, Republicans are likely to be the early favorites to retake control of the House in 2022.”

All of this lines up with one major theme: this year’s census increased red states’ political representation and diminished blue state’s representation. Overall, Republicans, armed with the control of many critical state governments, a small deficit of seats to overcome, and a favorable result in the Census, are likely to be the early favorites to retake control of the House in 2022.⁵

It is not all bad news for the Democrats. After all, as mentioned, Republicans’ path to power is heavily dependent on their ability to draw the maps and create congressional district combinations that are the most beneficial to them. Opposition to gerrymandering is accelerating across the country. Indeed, according to a 2019 national poll, both 59% of Republicans, and 65% of Democrats had an unfavorable view of the practice. A second survey that year showed that over 70% of voters believed the Supreme Court should place restrictions on the practice. This lack of public support, coupled with a bipartisan group of politicians, including Republicans, Fmr. Gov. John Kaisich and Fmr. Sen. John C. Danforth, calling for a regulation on the practice, means that the time of political officials drawing maps may be ending. In fact, several states, including G.O.P. controlled Arizona and Ohio now draw their



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maps via a non-political commission, with several other states likely to follow suit. Restrictions on gerrymandering will hurt Republicans, who have relied on the process for decades.⁶ The more states that use non-partisan processes to draw maps will likely result in a check on any GOP ill-gotten political gains.

As detailed above, the reapportionment of seats in Congress benefits the G.O.P. in the short-term. However, demographic shifts revealed by the census line up with a long-term trend that excites Democrats. The census showed the shifting dynamics in U.S. politics, as the overall trend was that high population states in the North and Midwest lost seats, while states in the South and the Sunbelt gained seats.⁷ Though the states that lost seats in the North, including New York, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, have voted in favor of Democrats

for many years now, in recent years, they have started to trend towards the G.O.P. Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio were either won twice or won once by Trump, after being won twice, handily by Fmr. President Obama. Meanwhile, the states in the South that have gained seats including Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Colorado are mostly Republican strongholds for now, but seem to be more reliable candidates to become a part of the Democratic coalition in the long-term. After years of Republican domination, 2020 was the first time in decades that a Democratic presidential candidate came within 6% of victory in Texas. In addition, Colorado has shifted from being a highly-contested swing state in 2012 to a state which Biden won by over 13%. Florida and North Carolina are still controlled by the G.O.P. but their shifting demographics—an increase in young, urban, and di-

verse voters— and recent electoral history, indicate that they will probably move towards the Democrats in the future.⁸

Overall, while the Democrats may have to swallow a defeat in the next few House election cycles, a referendum on gerrymandering and the U.S. population generally shifting in line with their electoral prospects down the road, indicates that this census and redistricting cycle is likely to position Democrats in a favorable position, long-term.

Republicans must provide alternative policies to mitigate gun violence, or their empty “thoughts and prayers” will continue to drive the mass exodus of American youth from the party’s arms. HMR

JUSTICE? ACCOUNTABILITY? PUNISHMENT?

THE DEREK CHAUVIN TRIAL

Zahra Motwani

Derek Chauvin’s brutal murder of George Floyd sparked unprecedented nationwide unrest. Chauvin’s conviction has provided some solace to Floyd’s family and Americans at large. Indeed, the jury’s unanimous decision even sparked some celebration. More broadly, however, neither justice nor accountability has truly been served. The publicly known, appalling, crime that took place on May 25, 2020, was when, in his former role as a Minneapolis police officer, Chauvin knelt on the neck of Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, for 9 minutes and 29 seconds during an arrest over an alleged counterfeit bill.¹⁰ In his final moments, Floyd pleaded, “I can’t breathe.”¹¹ Floyd’s murder marked another episode in the long history of police brutality against Black Americans. Throughout the video of Floyd’s murder, Chauvin appears indifferent, expressing no remorse as he stole away the life of a fellow American. Though the Minneapolis Police Department had investigated Chauvin for misconduct seventeen times before Floyd’s death, he was still allowed to wield lethal weapons on May 25th.¹² In stark, chilling contrast, a single accusation of using a counterfeit \$20 bill led to Floyd’s murder.

Chauvin was ultimately convicted for second degree unintentional murder, third degree murder, and second degree manslaughter. These convictions reflected a step towards justice, providing some hope that, in the future, cops who fail to carry out their oath to protect their communities will be held accountable.¹³ The trial began on May 29, 2020, four days after Floyd’s death, and the verdict wasn’t delivered until 11 months after Floyd was killed, following multiple court hearings.¹⁴ The penalty for second degree unintentional murder can result in up to 40 years in jail, third degree murder can

result in up to 25 years, and second degree manslaughter can result in up to 10 years. Minneapolis guidelines suggest that Chauvin should be jailed for approximately 15 years.¹⁵ Chauvin will be sentenced in June, but he is currently in solitary confinement for his protection.

There were a wide variety of perspectives on what the verdict would be, given the history of racial injustice and the lack of consequences for vicious cops. Cities across the country increased security in the lead-up to the verdict, fearing riots and protests afterward.¹⁶ In Minneapolis, for example, there were barricades on government buildings, the National Guard was called, and all schools were online during the week that the verdict was released.¹⁷ This increased protection shows how people were unsure about what the verdict would be, although it was quite clear that Chauvin was guilty seeing the amount of tangible evidence.¹⁸

In the trial, there were many witnesses, ranging from teenagers to senior citizens, experts, medical officials, and people close to Floyd who testified. Meanwhile, Chauvin invoked the Fifth Amendment, which the judge declared was a “personal right,” refused to testify, and pleaded not guilty to all

three charges.¹⁹ The jury included 12, seven women and five men of all different ages. Additionally, throughout the trial, there were contradicting opinions whether Floyd died from force, drugs, a lack of oxygen, or a pre existing heart condition.²⁰

The jury took ten hours to decide the verdict while people anxiously waited around the country. There was also a crowd of people outside the store “Cup Foods,” where Floyd was killed, which is now known as George Floyd Square.²¹ As the judge announced the verdict, Chauvin had no emotion on his face. Only his eyes rapidly wandered around the room. After murdering an innocent Black man, Chauvin didn’t show any external remorse. After Chauvin was declared guilty on all three charges, celebration and relief echoed throughout the nation as the Floyd family was “able to breathe again.”²²

Activists and prominent individuals from the trial had a variety of perspectives on the verdict. While most felt a sense of joy, many acknowledged that there is still work to be done. After the trial, President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris spoke to the nation, and later to the Floyd family individually. Biden said, “It

was a murder in the full light of day, and it ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see [systemic racism]...‘I can’t breathe.’ We can’t let those words die with him. We must not turn away.”²³ Harris added, “A measure of justice isn’t the same as equal justice...This verdict brings us a step closer. And the fact is we still have work to do. We still must reform the system.”²⁴

Many activists echoed Harris’ belief that the Chauvin conviction is only the beginning of something new, not an end of social justice. When both Biden and Harris spoke to the Floyd family, Harris thanked the family for their courage and strength and Biden discussed how “[n]othing is gonna make it all better but at least, God, now there’s some justice.”²⁵ Ben Crump, the at-

torney for the Floyd family stated, “This is a victory for those who champion humanity over inhumanity...America where Breonna Taylor gets an opportunity to sleep in peace at night without the police busting in her front door, and Ahmaud Arbery gets to run free and not be lynched for jogging while Black.” Moreover, Floyd’s brother, Philonise Floyd, drew parallels between Emmett Till and George Floyd: “To me, [Emmett Till] was the first George Floyd.” Emmett Till was a child who was lynched on a false criminal accusation in the 1950s. Till’s murder is similar to Floyd’s because they were both killed on an accusation. The conviction is a turning point, but one conviction doesn’t change the whole system as cops still, “act with impunity.”²⁶ Despite the verdict and

the pending consequences, it is not true accountability if Chauvin himself does not take responsibility. A comprehensive understanding of accountability requires both a consequence and the active acknowledgment and apology of the perpetrator. Without Chauvin’s remorse, the verdict is simply punishment.²⁷ Chauvin may be used to feeling above the law and as though he does not need to follow it due to the sentiment of modern policing which immunizes police officers from consequences. Time and time again police officers who murder Black people do not apologize and this has become normalized.²⁸ Society has accepted that punishment is the highest form of consequence, not accountability, because of the lack of responsibility or apologies made by



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police officers. The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (GFJPA), created by House Democrats in June 2020, proposes many new reforms that, if enforced properly, could significantly curb police brutality.³⁰ The GFJPA mainly tackles qualified immunity, data, and police violence.³¹ First, the act aims at decreasing qualified immunity, which immunizes the government and police from lawsuits. Ian Millhiser explains qualified immunity in the status quo: “[If the police officer or government official] does not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known,” they are not held responsible.³² The act also proposes the ‘National Police Misconduct Registry’ which would

track funding, crimes, and uses of excessive force. Additionally the act proposes to increase the use of body and dash cameras for more evidence so the families of victims can receive the footage. The act will also decrease the criminal intent standard which is when an officer commits an illegal act purposely.³³ The act aims to change the definition of ‘abuse of power’ from a willful deprivation of Constitutional rights, to a reckless or knowing deprivation -- making it easier to prosecute the officer on charges of abuse of power.³⁴ Next, the act would make chokeholds, carotid holds, and no-knock warrants illegal. Additionally, “deadly force” would only be used after everything else has been tried, such as “deescalation techniques, nonlethal force, and at

least one verbal warning.”³⁵ Together these measures aim to reduce police officers’ unwarranted use of deadly force. The act also states that there will be more subpoenas to let the US Attorney General investigate departments, stricter rules on sexual abuse by police, and racial profiling will become illegal.³⁶ To incentivize the implementation of the act, Congress is making federal funding for local and state police departments contingent on conforming to the bill.³⁷ Passing the act is imperative because it takes steps toward ending police brutality and increasing accountability.³⁸ The act has already made it past the House twice with a majority of Democratic votes, and no Republican votes. To continue, there needs to be 10 Republican votes to pass the bill in the Senate,

Each and every person must continue fighting injustice everywhere they see it, no matter how small or how insignificant it might seem. We need to move further, past punishment, towards accountability, and ultimately, to dismantle inequitable systems, achieving true justice.

but that might be difficult because the first two times it was voted on, there were no Republican votes.³⁹ Ben Feist, an officer at the ACLU of Minnesota, said, “For us, true justice would be for George Floyd to be alive today. But if we really want to work on finding justice going forward, we really need to end police targeting and violence against communities of color.”⁴⁰ America cannot bring George Floyd back to life. But Americans can, and must, continue working towards justice. The verdict was not truly justice, as the systems that allow police brutality to continue are still present.⁴¹ And although Chauvin was given consequences for his actions, he did not take personal responsibility, leaving much to be desired. Chauvin has been punished, that much is true, but until he accepts and acknowledges his wrongdoing, full accountability has not been achieved. Police officers routinely use more force and violence against Black people, even in routine stops and interactions.⁴² This is deeply intertwined with implicit bias. In a paper by Jennifer Eberhardt from Stanford University, it was shown that white subjects drew a consistent association between Black people and apes, but not between apes and any other racial group.⁴³ Additionally, when implicit bias in police officers was studied, it was found that police officers of all racial backgrounds exhibit implicit bias against Black people. This is the first step, and certainly not the last. Indeed, during Chauvin’s trial, police officers killed 65 Americans, including 16-year-old Ma’Khia Bryant.⁴⁴ Bryant was actually the one who called the police for help, but when they arrived, they shot her in the chest four times. Although officers routinely state they felt their lives were in danger as justification for using lethal force against Black people, there have also been countless instances in which white mass shooters who were clearly armed have

been taken alive and unharmed.⁴⁵ The willingness to shoot first and ask questions later is clearly applied unequally across races, and until that disparity is remedied, no individual verdict will solve the problem. The Black Lives Matter protests from over the summer greatly impacted the Chauvin trial, and without them it is unlikely that the case would have stayed in the public eye. The joint-community efforts to bring some relief to the Floyd family paid off. Achieving this goal warrants celebration. However, it is vital to keep fighting injustice for all the other victims of police violence — to honor the memories of those who will never breathe again, just like George Floyd. Congress must pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, and police departments across the U.S. must implement it. In the meantime, there is much more ground work that can be done on a smaller scale. On a personal level, spreading aware-

ness through social media and directly to friends and family helps others gain new understanding and perspective on issues of racial injustice and police brutality. Chauvin’s trial also demonstrated the power of large-scale protests and demonstrations. Without the national awareness raised by activists and demonstrations, there would have been far less momentum to achieve a sense of justice for George Floyd. George Floyd, his family, and the entire Black community deserve more; Floyd’s murder never should have happened. Each and every person must continue fighting injustice everywhere they see it, no matter how small or how insignificant it might seem. We need to move further, past punishment, towards accountability, and ultimately, to dismantle inequitable systems, achieving true justice. HMR



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Republicans’ Automatic Assault on Biden’s Gun Safety Agenda

Ariela Shuchman

On April 8th, President Biden announced his plan to curb gun violence through a series of executive actions. Biden promised that gun control would be a top priority in his administration from day one, asserting that gun violence in America is both an “epidemic” and an “international embarrassment.” For almost two months after his inauguration, it seemed as though gun policy had fallen off of Biden’s radar. However, the pair of high profile mass shootings in Colorado and Atlanta (that took a total of eighteen lives) thrust the issue to the forefront of his agenda in April.⁴⁸

Biden has announced five initial actions. First on the list is action on ghost guns. Within 30 days, the Justice Department will issue a “proposed rule” to curb the proliferation of “ghost guns.”⁴⁹ A ghost gun is a kit that contains all of the materials and instructions necessary to create a functioning firearm in under thirty minutes.⁵⁰ Ghost guns pose two unique security threats. First, when ghost guns are found at crime scenes, it is almost impossible to trace the weapon back to its source (seller, manufacturer, or purchaser) because of the lack of a serial number—remember, these guns are simply a combination of randomly gathered parts that together form the weapon. Second, it is challenging to regulate a ghost gun because a majority of gun control policies place restrictions on specific classifications of weapons; things get complicated and loopholes are created when the kit is for sale, not the assembled gun, because the law technically only applies to a put together version of the weapon.

Next, Biden hopes to address the “Stabilizing Brace” Loophole. Ahmad Al Aliwi Al-Issa, the perpetrator of the Boulder, CO shooting (ten deaths) on March 22nd, 2021, attached an arm brace to the pistol used, making his weapon more stable and accurate when firing, yet still concealable.⁵¹

Within 60 days, the Justice Department plans to pass a policy that makes it clear when a stabilizing brace effectively turns a pistol or other hand gun into a short-barreled rifle, under the qualifications of the National Firearms Act. This policy will prevent someone from purchasing a pistol (a weapon with limited regulations) and then modifying it into a more powerful and accurate firearm.⁵²

Third, Biden will focus on community violence interventions. Through proven strategies and auxiliary programs, Biden hopes to “reduce gun violence in urban communities with tools other than incarceration.” For example, through the American Jobs Plan, Biden proposes a \$5 billion investment over eight years into intervention programs such as mental health care and drug rehabilitation, with an emphasis on connecting individuals to job training and employment opportunities.⁵³ Five federal agencies have also pledged to redirect funds from twenty-six different programs within their agencies into violence intervention initiatives as quickly as possible to begin investments as we wait on Congress to appropriate additional (and more adequate) funds.⁵⁴

Biden has also ordered an updated Annual Report on Firearms Trafficking. In 2000, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) issued a report summarizing its findings and investigations into firearms trafficking. Firearms trafficking describes the process in which weapons are diverted to the illegal market to be easily purchased by flagged or dangerous individuals, while maintaining anonymity of the purchaser. Local, state, and federal policy makers rely on the ATF’s 2000 report to target the specific areas of trafficking that are most prevalent and dangerous. However, with the growth of the internet, dark web, and innovative weaponry loopholes such as ghost guns, trafficking has changed and adapted significantly since 2000.⁵⁵ The Justice Department will issue a new report this year to be updated annually, giving policy

makers the relevant information required to pass effective regulations.

Red flag laws are a huge priority for Biden, who has both included them in his executive orders and hopes to to expand the policy nationally. Red flag laws allow family members and law enforcement to request a court order temporarily banning people in crisis or with serious mental health problems from accessing firearms.⁵⁶ The ban is lifted when the judge who issued the temporary ban rules that the person no longer presents a danger to themselves or others. Biden urges Congress to pass national red-flag legislation and the Justice Department has published model legislation in hopes that states will soon follow suit.

These five executive actions are a step in the right direction. But, as Biden himself has admitted, the proposals are not nearly enough. On the campaign trail, Biden promised much more, including a ban on importing assault weapons and a national gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone on guns, as the head of the executive branch who is not delegated the task of legislating. However, the limitations of executive action are not Biden’s biggest barrier; the Republican party is the true obstacle standing in his way. Unfortunately, Biden and gun control advocates behind him are in a difficult situation because the most ambitious components of Biden’s plan will need to be passed by the legislative branch, where it is almost a guarantee that Republicans will vote no on any gun law, ambitious or not.

Since Biden’s announcement, countless Republicans have taken to Twitter to express their outrage. Texas Governor Greg Abbott described Biden’s actions as a “liberal power grab” that “we will NOT allow in TX.”⁵⁷ He also expressed his plans to enact legislation that would prevent Texas from enforcing any gun measures implemented by the federal government. Governor Kristi Noem of South Dakota echoed Abbott by tweeting that “taking away guns with Red



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Flag laws is an infringement.” House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy declared that “Republicans will strongly oppose and pursue every option—be it legislative or judicial—to protect the right to keep and bear arms.”⁵⁸

The gun control debate has been one of the most contentious issues of the 21st century.. One’s perspective on the Second Amendment is now an identity, an irremovable characteristic dividing the right and left. However, when it comes to the optics of gun control, the Democrats have the clear upper hand. Unlike economic or tax policy, action on guns (or lack thereof) will have a direct, visible, and virtually undeniable impact on human life. Opposing policies that save American lives can hurt Republicans politically. And the GOP’s case against such policies isn’t a great one.

For starters, a favorite Republican trope is the deployment of “original intent” philosophy. For the past several decades, the

party has nominated originalist judges who weaponize this legal doctrine against judicial activism. Conservatives argue that the proper approach to constitutional interpretation is to discern what the founders intended when writing the clause. Original intent contrasts with many Democrats’ philosophy, which is to treat the Constitution as a living document whose principles and writings, when interpreted, must be adapted to changing historical and cultural circumstances.⁵⁹

Republicans conveniently ignore the flaws in their agenda an originalist interpretation of the Second Amendment would expose. Republicans claim that any and all gun laws are of “constitutional overreach,” because of the alleged scope and protection of the Second Amendment.⁶⁰ However, the Second Amendment was written in 1791, a time when the most powerful weapon was a musket that could shoot one round per minute with little aim or accuracy. If we

adopt the originalist mindset and consider the political and intellectual atmosphere of the time, it is nearly impossible to justify a constitutional right to semi-automatic weapons, a gun with a capability of destruction that the founders never could have imagined. An originalist could certainly present an argument for the right to bear a musket, but that is about it; an automatic weapon and most of the weapons available for purchase in 2021 are not covered by supposed “original intent” protections.⁶¹

President Biden’s announcement in April has once again revealed the problem Republicans face in the gun control debate. Right now, the GOP priorities are skewed, attempting to make voting harder while fighting to make buying a gun easier. Republicans must provide alternative policies to mitigate gun violence, or their empty “thoughts and prayers” will continue to drive the mass exodus of American youth from the party’s arms. **HMR**

Republicans must provide alternative policies to mitigate gun violence, or their empty “thoughts and prayers” will continue to drive the mass exodus of American youth from the party’s arms.

The NCAA's Day in Court : How it Went, and What Will Likely Happen Next

Leo Giorgini



It is an oft-repeated story that the Supreme Court building in Washington, D. C., is home to a basketball court directly above the argument room, making it the “highest court of the land.” In fact, the basketball court has a sign reading “PLAYING BASKETBALL AND WEIGHT LIFTING ARE PROHIBITED WHILE THE COURT IS IN SESSION,” alerting players, to use a legal term, to cease and desist when oral arguments are being held or when the justices are in conference.⁶³

The Supreme Court has once again confronted athletics head on, but this case, instead of an after-hours game between the justices and their clerks, comes in the form of a legal dispute. More specifically, it entails a challenge to the structure and business model of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the organization responsible for managing and regulating varsity college sports throughout the United States and Canada. The NCAA maintains strict rules, at issue in the consolidated cases *National Collegiate Athletic Association v. Alston* and *American Athletic Conference v. Alston*, concerning the treatment and compensation of its athletes, who are full-time college students who also play sports.

One rule forbids student-athletes to contract with or make arrangements with agents until they graduate from college.⁶⁴ This rule no doubt serves genuine and practical purposes. For one, it ensures that student-athletes do not neglect their studies by focusing exclusively on a guaranteed post-graduation career. It also preserves the amateur nature of the sport by preventing student-athletes and their coaches from making tactical decisions based on

which option seems the most lucrative at the time, to the detriment of the team and of the game. But this rule has clear downsides for the student-athletes, not least of which is the fact that, upon graduation, many of them will be competing for limited slots on professional teams against athletes who have been represented by agents for several years and who are better suited to help their clients. An agent can be a young athlete's best bet against underpayment and obscurity.

Another controversial NCAA rule involves the name, image, and likeness (NIL) rights of student-athletes. Under present guidelines, student-athletes may not receive compensation for their NIL during their relationship with the NCAA. Once again, this rule serves a logical purpose, that is, to delineate the boundary between a professional athlete and a full-time student as well as to protect amateur athletes against professional competition. Nevertheless, the policy is lopsided in its terms, allowing the NCAA to profit off of the success and brand of their athletes, in ways as varied as autographs, trading cards, and advertising contracts, while preventing the student-athletes, who actually do the work of playing the sports, from doing the same.⁶⁵ There is also the argument that a person's NIL rights are intimately connected with that person and should belong to no one but that person. To the people holding that belief, there is no right to profit from another person's identity.

Beginning in 2019, the NCAA has engaged in efforts to reform its NIL policy. In September 2020, in response to lawsuits from student-athletes, the three divisions

of the NCAA presented their preliminary copies of NIL reforms, which were finalized in December and approved on January 31, 2021. Under the new rules, which become effective, absent further revision, in August 2021, student-athletes will be allowed to make limited amounts of money through licensing and promoting their NIL through other means, including social media and commercials.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the change in rules does not apply retroactively, meaning all student-athletes who have already completed their careers with the NCAA will see no benefit whatsoever, and those who are already years into college will see far less than they would have had the rule been in place when they first joined.

Finally, the NCAA has one last controversial practice. In order to attract talented athletes, they assist colleges in recruiting high-school students to find candidates for athletic scholarships. A student who receives such a scholarship is able to attend the college for a fraction of the normal tuition, and in some cases, may not have to pay any tuition at all. However, this status is tied to their athletic performance: if they stop playing the sport for which they were recruited, they lose their scholarship. During their time at college, they wind up being treated more as a full-time athlete than as a student who is also active in sports.

The reasoning behind that, of course, is that the student in question was recruited for their athletic talents, rather than academic qualifications, and would therefore not be expected to do as well in a class designed for students who intend to focus their college years on developing their intellectual spheres. As such, this reasoning

goes, these students would be better served by placing them in specialized classes and sometimes even specialized majors, so they can learn at their own pace in an environment tailor-made for like-minded people.

This approach, however, has many flaws. First, it represents a moral failure, on the part of the university, to guarantee all its students an educational experience that leaves them not just more intelligent, but also with a broader view of the world, than they were going in. Second, it enables the NCAA to devote as much of these students' time as possible to developing their athletic capabilities, to the benefit of the NCAA and of the university and at the expense of the students' right to learn and grow. And third, it leaves such students woefully unprepared for life after college, especially those who do not go professional and who, consequently, have far fewer skills and qualifications than a person of a comparable age who had been accepted as an academic, rather than athletic, talent. The low odds of making it as a professional athlete do not outweigh the serious disadvantages this arrangement poses for student-athletes.

Lastly, in order to understand the conditions for the suit now before the Supreme Court, it is necessary to look at the financial world of college athletics. Given the high emphasis placed on the “amateur” nature of college athletics, one might expect it not to entail more than a small amount of money. Instead, in any given year, from the “March Madness” tournament alone, the NCAA generally nets around \$1 billion, with a further \$8.5 billion wagered by professional and individual gamblers alike.⁶⁷ In 2019, the net profit was \$1.05 billion; in 2020, even with the tournament cancelled due to the then-emerging COVID-19 pandemic, the NCAA gained \$520 million.⁶⁸

In March 2014, Shawne Alston, a former running back for the University of West Virginia varsity football team, filed suit in federal court alleging that the NCAA's method of determining the value of athletic scholarships violated the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890.⁶⁹ More specifically, according to Alston in his complaint, the NCAA colluded with member universities to award athletic scholarships which were less valuable than the cost of the universities. The Sherman Act, as amended, prohibits any “contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce.”⁷⁰ The NCAA's practice, Alston claims, has the purpose and effect of manipulating the

price of a service (here, specifically, athletic scholarships) by means of sellers conspiring to form a cartel and raising the price.

The same year Alston filed his suit, another college athlete, former UCLA basketball player Ed O'Bannon, filed a similar suit in the same court. O'Bannon's suit, instead of scholarships, focused on the value of NIL rights, and was on behalf of “all others similarly situated” as opposed to merely in his own name, but also based its arguments in the Sherman Act. The district court found in favor of both plaintiffs,⁷¹ and an appellate court affirmed.⁷² The Supreme Court declined to hear the NCAA's appeal of O'Bannon's suit in 2016, but took up the NCAA's appeal of Alston's suit in December 2020.

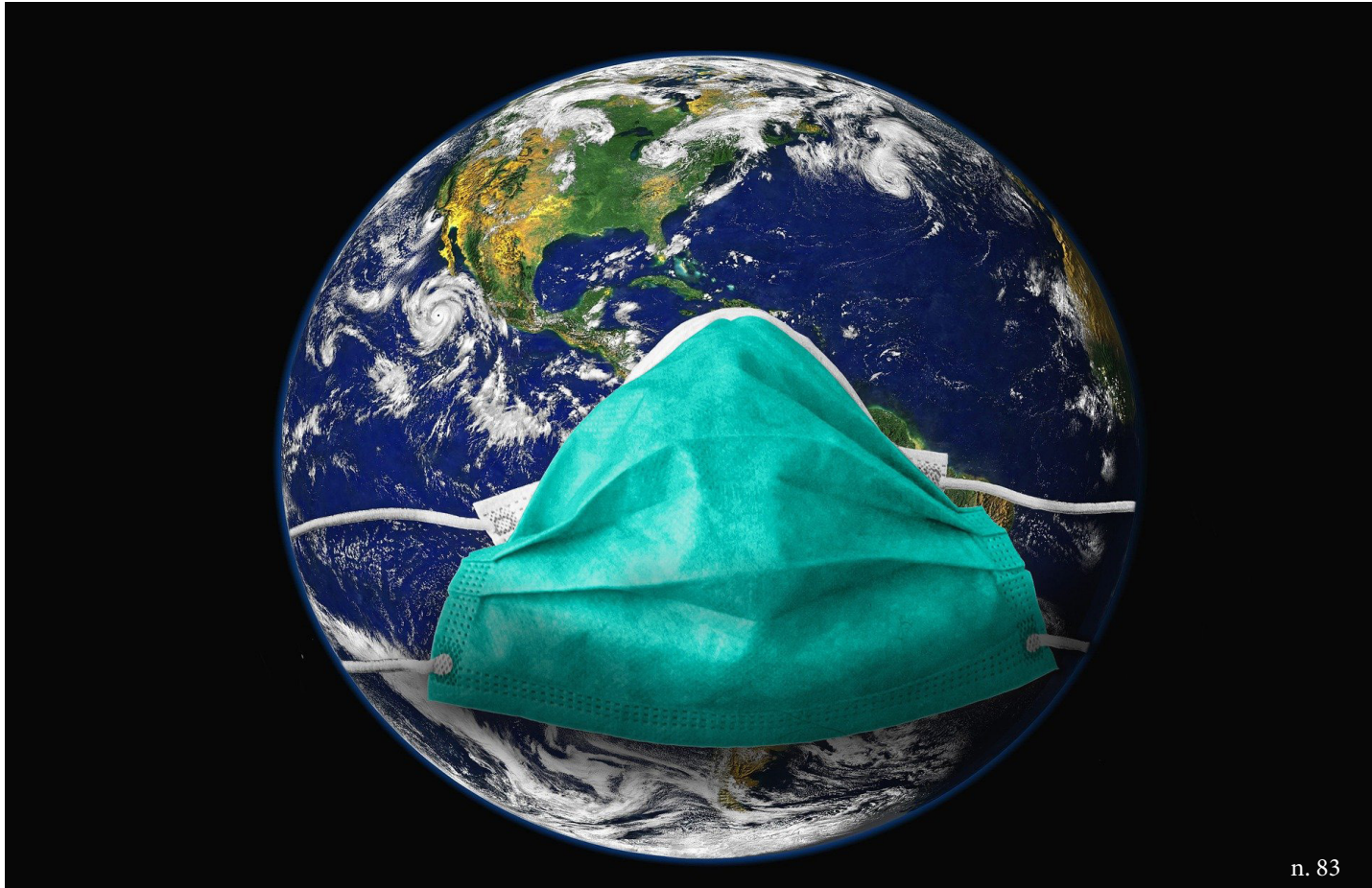
Why the difference in the treatment of the two cases? There are several possibilities. The most likely, according to your author, is that NIL rights were seen by the high court as an issue not requiring further clarification, while price-fixing is an issue which is frequently reexamined, requiring new rulings to illustrate the reach of the statute for each different case. In any case, the consolidated cases were argued March 31, 2021, and the transcript of the argument provides some insight as to how the justices view the NCAA's practices in question, and how they may ultimately rule.

Generally, the justices appeared skeptical of the NCAA's justification for their policies, with two, Justices Samuel Alito and Brett Kavanaugh, insinuating the policies in question constitute exploitation of student-athletes.⁷³ It did not help that one of the NCAA's legal justifications was an effort

to circumvent the Sherman Act. Pursuant to Congress' constitutional power “[t]o regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian tribes,” the Sherman Act only regulates activities in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, or in the District of Columbia. The NCAA argued that their activities are actually not in or affecting interstate or foreign commerce, pointing to the historical exemption from antitrust laws afforded to professional baseball teams. But the NCAA went further, arguing that as its student-athletes are prohibited by NCAA rules from receiving most forms of compensation, their activities are not commercial in nature, and so the Sherman Act does not bind them.

Of course, the NCAA's games are commercial in nature, as it is a highly profitable industry which, as mentioned above, nets profits in the billions. Furthermore, the games are broadcast throughout the United States, and bring in viewers and tickets from every State and territory. Even if the student-athletes themselves do not get paid, and are forbidden from holding their own NIL rights, their activities clearly constitute a part of interstate and foreign commerce. As such, the justices appear convinced that the Sherman Act does apply to the NCAA. All this points to a likely affirmation by the Ninth Circuit's ruling, and a nationwide prohibition of the NCAA's challenged practices. **HMR**





COVID-19’S IMPACT ON GLOBAL WARMING

Rachel Baez

The coronavirus has affected all of our lives in one way or another. At the start of the pandemic, it seemed as if the coronavirus had positive impacts on the climate. Transportation use declined sharply, as did manufacturing, lowering the amount of CO2 emitted into the air.⁷⁶ It became apparent that humans’ everyday life had been creating pollution, but as air pollution decreased, other pollutants began to slowly destroy the environment.

As months went by during the pandemic, it became clear that one of the largest pollutants was from the increase in the usage of personal protective equipment. Masks,

gloves, face shields, and other tools were used by healthcare workers as well as many other citizens. Since we as a society had little knowledge of the coronavirus, the protective equipment was discarded frequently because the majority of the masks were single-use. It is estimated that there have been 129 billion face masks and 65 billion gloves used across the globe since the beginning of the pandemic. These protection gears were often made of synthetic polymers, which contain plastic. Because these plastics can take years to decompose, this becomes a never ending cycle of pollution. The plastics unfortunately found their way to the ocean, which caused the ocean pollution to

increase by 30%.⁷⁷ Though the use of personal protection equipment has increased the use of plastics, the coronavirus has created a domino effect. With the oil market crashing, plastics became cheaper than ever.⁷⁸ Oil and natural gases are essential in manufacturing plastic.⁷⁹ These low prices discourage buyers from using sustainable packaging, since they are significantly more expensive. If buyers were to buy the more expensive, sustainable packaging, then they would have to raise their prices, making them less competitive.

Affordable products have taken priority over more sustainable goods as a result of

the global recession, which has made the ordinary customer more price-conscious. Plastic-wrapped food products are the go-to for shoppers since they are universally less costly. During the pandemic, ordering take-out was common amongst families across the United States, and the plastics used were once again non-recyclable. Due to lockdown, there was a demand for online shopping, and the package material increased waste. This increase in online shopping forced the progression in the use of plastics, which were often used to wrap items. This over time increases to a frightening amount, since the whole world was purchasing items, mainly unsustainable brands.

Recycling is beneficial to the earth, by preventing pollution, preserving minerals and water, saving energy, etc. In hopes to reduce the spread of the virus, countries had postponed recycling activities. For example, the United States limited nearly 46% of recycling programs, as the pandemic worsened, in worries of transmitting COVID-19.⁸⁰ Other countries went a step further and prohibited residents who carried the virus from sorting their waste.⁸¹ In general, the lack of recycling management increased the landfilling and environmen-

tal pollutants worldwide.⁸² The coronavirus had drastically affected global warming. At the onset of the pandemic, it seemed that the coronavirus was having a positive effect on the environment, but it quickly became clear that it was having a negative impact. Though communities weren’t aware that the pandemic was going to occur nor how long it would last, there could have been measures taken to prevent this current situation. For instance, instead of not sorting waste, while carrying the virus, one could have waited to test negative to do so rather than not doing so at all. There were other options available in order to not pollute, such as, not ordering from unsustainable locations, including Amazon, online clothing stores, restaurants, etc. This would have been beneficial as there would have been significantly less plastics used.

Plastic pollution has always been an issue but peaked during the pandemic, specifically because of the increase in protective gear and packaging. In order to change this, treat single-use protective gear differently. For instance, instead of putting our disposable masks into the trash, recycle them properly. To do so, the straps should be cut off, this would allow

for it to be decomposed in separate parts, making it more convenient and more rapid. It would also cause less harm to ocean life; animals see the masks as food. This “food” gets stuck in their system, which slowly begins the process of extinction for this species.

Even though the pandemic has caused environmental issues, negatively affecting global warming, it is never too late to begin the process of recovering from it. Sustainability takes a large part in this issue. Therefore, there needs to be actions taken towards promoting sustainable products to consumers. Make prices more reasonable; for the majority of sustainable products the prices are increasingly higher than non-sustainable ones, turning the consumers away from purchasing the item. Another way to appeal to the buyer would be by displaying what not buying from sustainable locations does to our environment; the majority doesn’t fully comprehend the extent of global warming. This makes it difficult for some to care since they aren’t directly affected by it, but will soon be facing the consequences if not dealt with sooner. **HMR**





Knight v. Trump and Digital Free Speech

Gavin Song

Social media's influence on politics and public discourse is undeniably both unprecedented and ever-growing. That fact raises a major question about regulating and protecting twenty-first-century discourse: what role should social media companies and their platforms play in that effort?

In 2017, the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University tried to answer that question by filing a lawsuit against then-President of the United States Donald Trump and his aides, who had blocked seven people from the @realDonaldTrump Twitter account.⁸⁵ The lawsuit alleged that Trump's Twitter account constituted a "public forum," which was subject

to the First Amendment, and from which the government could not restrict speech on the basis of viewpoint.⁸⁶ That's not to say that *all* of Twitter constitutes a public forum and therefore Twitter itself should be answerable to the First Amendment, but that public accounts (accounts providing official information) of public officials do and should be.⁸⁷ Under this view, Trump, or any other public official, is a state actor—even on Twitter—and his blocking of Twitter users on the basis of viewpoint is equivalent to prohibiting speech in non-digital public fora. The case reached the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in 2019, where the Knight Institute prevailed. In 2020, the Knight Institute filed a second lawsuit for

the same reason.⁸⁸ Following the Executive Office's petition, the Supreme Court granted certiorari (i.e., agreed to hear the case), but didn't release a decision until after President Biden's inauguration, thus making the case moot (the case name became *Biden v. Knight Institute* after Biden took office).⁸⁹ Stare decisis, the principle of following judicial precedent, would compel only courts in New York, Connecticut, and New Hampshire to follow the ruling. But not only that, the Supreme Court vacated the Second Circuit's judgement, making it no longer legally binding.⁹⁰ Essentially, the victory won in the Second Circuit no longer has any legal standing. Even so, it was critical in conceptualizing public officials' accounts as repre-

sentations of their office, and their replies as a public forum. Politicians all over America are becoming increasingly engaged with their constituents on social media, so digital free speech will undoubtedly become one of the most important issues for both the courts and for us. In order to protect free speech rights and advance them into the digital age, it's critical that the Knight Institute's view become standard.

To understand the Knight Institute's argument, we have to first establish some definitions. First, "public forum" has to be defined. The Supreme Court has traditionally recognized restrictions on government power to control speech in certain fora.⁹¹ Among these are government-designated public fora—places, physical or otherwise, designated for use by the public for speech and assembly.⁹² Designated public fora are created when the government intentionally opens a nontraditional forum (for example, an event held at a hotel, which is a place not ordinarily functioning as a forum) for public discourse.⁹³ But can a digital space qualify as a designated public forum? The answer is, without a doubt, yes. Digital exchanges on social media have long replaced the physical interactions that once characterized most public discourse. A large number of people also engage with their public officials (or even directly petition them) and other citizens on social media. Even the Supreme Court has called social media "the most important place [...] for the exchange of views," a sort of modern public square—but far more democratic due to the incredible ease of access.⁹⁴ So, did Trump's Twitter account count as a public forum? The answer is also yes. Twitter's reply feature allows any user's account (provided that it's public) to act as an interactive platform for digital discourse. In particular, Trump's Twitter account is accessible to the entire public, so its replies constitute public political discourse, and the account constitutes a designated public forum.⁹⁵

Since his account functions as a public forum, did Trump's blocking of dissenters constitute a First Amendment violation? A fundamental and familiar principle of American democracy is that the government cannot deny the use of a public forum to those whose views it finds objectionable. Trump's (or his aides') blocking of critics absolutely met the criteria for denying speech to those whose views he did not agree with. On Twitter specifically, a blocked user cannot view tweets from the blocked account, nor can they reply to any tweet from the

user who has blocked them. Effectively, the blocked account is totally excluded from public discourse taking place on Trump's account. Even worse, Trump's history of blocking critics might discourage some users from voicing their criticisms.⁹⁶ Blocking those critics thus undermined the First Amendment's protection of free speech, the most critical feature of which is maintaining uninhibited and robust debate.

"Politicians all over America are becoming increasingly engaged with their constituents on social media, so digital free speech will undoubtedly become one of the most important issues for both the courts and for us."

Here, an important distinction has to be made between the government and Twitter. The First Amendment, and the Constitution as a whole, applies only to the government: "Congress shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech."⁹⁷ Twitter, a private company, isn't legally obligated to follow the First Amendment. Then how can it be that Trump's blocking was unconstitu-

tional? While the First Amendment doesn't apply to Twitter, it's the Knight Institute's view that it does apply to public officials' accounts.⁹⁸ A public official's account is such a distinct place for exchanging ideas that the Constitution should apply to the account itself but not the platform that the account exists on. But if a public official were to create a *personal* account (one that posted information unrelated to their office), they would be free to block any users from accessing that account.

Thus summarizes the Knight Institute's argument. In April 2021, the Supreme Court vacated the judgement (declared the previous Second Circuit ruling as no longer legally binding).⁹⁹ Associate Justice Clarence Thomas published a concurrence with that ruling—when dismissing a case as moot, a concurrence effectively functions as a sort of op-ed from the judiciary, with no legal standing.¹⁰⁰ Thomas' concurrence points out that Twitter's power to block all users' speech is far greater, and therefore more important, than the issue addressed in *Knight*.¹⁰¹ He seems to be correct about that, but at this point it's impossible to tell how the Supreme Court will go about balancing the rights of social media companies with the reality of our reliance on social media for public discourse.

In any case, the Knight Institute's ideas will be invaluable for thinking about free speech in the age of social media. Conceptualizing official accounts on all platforms as public fora allows us to ensure that the balance of power between citizen and state guaranteed by the First Amendment remains relatively constant. And not only does this understanding of such accounts protect individual users from free speech violations, but it also protects the general public from distorted political discussion. And as new digital technologies arise, we have to be cautious about how they might influence our First Amendment rights. After all, the Constitution's guaranteed rights were written to endure.^{HMR}

HOW IS BIDEN DOING SO FAR?

Simon Schackner

When former Vice President Joe Biden was finally acknowledged as the President-elect of the United States on November 7, 2020, four days after the official election night, many people from the US and around the world were hopeful. The former Vice President, before taking office, seemed to have serious plans for the country. Many of these promised to strongly contest the visions of former President Trump and the Republican-controlled Senate. At little more than 100 days in office, it is clear that Biden has taken a different path than his predecessor. He has attempted to take action against a variety of issues that have been polarizing our country, from COVID-19 to immigration.¹⁰³ As his presidency progresses, it will be important to think about how Biden is living up to what he promised on the campaign trail and following being elected. Like many presidents in their initial days in office, he has found some success in living up to the standards he created for himself but nevertheless struggles to realize all of his visions for the nation.

In terms of executive actions and other choices made by the president himself, Biden has remained committed to a variety of promises that he made before taking office. He rejoined the Paris Climate Accord, which shows a commitment to fighting climate change as well as a com-

mitment to America’s international obligations which represents a reversal of the prior administration’s stances. He has made wearing masks in federal buildings mandatory, a sign of his commitment to fighting COVID-19. Prior to the election, Biden said he would appoint a cabinet that, in terms of diversity, represents our country, and proceeded to do so.¹⁰⁴ Many of his other executive actions, which include reversing travel bans and making the Federal Government recognize violations of LGBTQ rights abroad, display a commitment to fighting racial discrimination, homophobia, and xenophobia.¹⁰⁵ These actions taken by the president show that he does, at least on the surface, care about anti-discriminatory policy, something which he consistently emphasized during his campaign. However, executive actions do not mean much in terms of creating change for the average American citizen.

One of the Biden administration’s most significant initiatives is the development and expansion of vaccine eligibility. During a news conference on December 8, 2020, as President-elect, he promised that the nation would get at least 100 million Covid vaccine shots in the arms of US citizens within the first 100 days of his presidency.¹⁰⁶ The goal, which initially seemed like a bold promise by the president, was shattered. The US administered 200 million vaccines within the first 92 days of Biden’s presidency.¹⁰⁷ It is unclear, however, that this success is entirely due to the Biden administration. Under President Trump, the Federal Government pledged 18 billion dollars to support the creation of vaccines intended for the US citizenry.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the administration of vaccines has largely been controlled by individual states, with not much significant support from the Federal Government. It would still be unfair to say that Biden has not helped out, considering that Biden has called on the US military, a federally centralized system, to help out with administering vaccines. Biden has deployed over 10,000 active duty service members to aid the effort.¹⁰⁹

The idea of using the military, like Operation Warp Speed, was born under the Trump Presidency, making it unclear how much of the credit Biden deserves here. Still, the rate of vaccinations, which never eclipsed over one million per day under the Trump administration, has nearly tripled under Biden. Nevertheless, the allegation made by Vice President Kamala Harris

that the Biden administration was “starting from scratch” regarding the pandemic is not entirely true. Much of the vaccination process is state controlled, meaning that the Trump administration was never vital to the vaccination effort. However, many states have complained that the lack of communication with the Federal Government under the Trump administration hurt their effort to inoculate their citizens. In terms of his promise of 100 million vaccines in 100 days, it seems that Biden has done a great job in fulfilling his promise. His positive attitude towards vaccinations, while hard to measure out its effects, has likely had a positive effect on the vaccination effort as well. Still, it remains unclear whether an efficient vaccination effort was Biden’s promise to make.

Biden mentioned on the campaign trail some large promises regarding undocumented immigrants and immigration into this country. Biden said on the campaign trail that he would attempt to find a path to citizenship for what he approximated to be the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US. This promise, while important, has actually been made by all four presidents before Biden.¹¹⁰ Although Biden has proposed legislation for this issue, he has found little success in cooperating with the GOP, which has become increasingly hostile towards undocumented immigrants in recent years. The far more pressing problem for the Biden administration has been holding the promise of raising the refu-

Biden has called on the US military, a federally centralized system, to help out with administering vaccines.



gee cap, which stayed at an incredibly low number of 15,000 per fiscal year under the Trump administration. Biden pledged to eventually increase that number to 125,000 per fiscal year, with 62,500 this fiscal year. The administration has failed to accomplish this and is now announcing that they will aim for a little over the 15,000 set previously by the end of the fiscal year.¹¹¹ Furthermore, because of Biden’s promises to increase immigration and the loss of Central American homes due to hurricanes, the country has seen a huge uptick in the number of people seeking refuge at the border. The number of those crossing the border illegally has allegedly increased as well.¹¹² The attempt to increase refugee numbers is a work in progress, and lack of willingness from the Trump administration to transfer information to the Biden administration is seemingly a large part of the problem here.¹¹³ Nevertheless, Biden has not delivered on this promise.

Perhaps the most widespread and the most unclear claims of the president were

that he would be an across-the-aisle centrist and that he would restore sanity to the White House.¹¹⁴ The American Rescue Plan, which was a huge, \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill passed by the government in March, received zero support from the GOP.¹¹⁵ In an increasingly partisan Congress, it is likely that Biden had no opportunity to negotiate with Republicans in what many felt was a much needed stimulus. Still, the large amount of federally distributed money guaranteed from this plan is quite a liberal concept and abandoned much of the centrism that might have been expected from Biden. He is currently attempting to seek bipartisan support for his proposed Infrastructure Plan, suggesting that perhaps the stimulus bill was an outlier situation that Biden felt was necessary to get done as fast as possible. Biden has ignored left-wing Democrats who say that he should try and pass an Infrastructure Bill right away, showing that despite his liberal Rescue Plan, he still plans to commit to centrism.

The idea that Biden would bring back sanity to the White House is difficult to test, but it seems as if the president has held on to this promise, at least in comparison to Trump. The Washington Post reported that in the first 100 days of the presidency, Trump made 99 false or misleading claims on Twitter. Biden made only one. Biden has also made 36 fewer speeches than Trump in his first 100 days, showing how the current president does not feel the need to weigh in on situations that the President of the US need not talk about.¹¹⁶ While running for President, Biden promised that he would not make “cancel culture” a topic of the campaign. He has more or less held this promise, having declined to comment on the culture wars that have recently plagued this country.¹¹⁷ The president looks to be committed to not stirring up trouble and taking a side on the little arguments. One might disagree with his policies, but it would be hard to prove that Biden has been more outspoken and polarizing than Trump.HMR

Should We Pack the Supreme Court?

Allison Markman



The Judiciary Act of 2021, which would raise the number of Supreme Court seats from 9 to 13, was created by Democrats to combat the current 6-3 Republican majority on the Supreme Court. The bill’s authors argue that with the current ideological balance on the Supreme Court, it is difficult for them to progress on critical issues such as civil rights.¹¹⁹ Further, Democrats want to ensure that some of President Joe Biden’s legislation has a chance in the high court. Many Democrats disagreed with the way in which the Senate Republicans went about the Supreme Court nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, as it was rushed through at an abnormal-

ly fast rate. Barrett’s nomination was made just over a month after the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg; there were a mere 35 days between Barrett’s nomination and the 2020 US Presidential Election.¹²⁰ This marks the shortest period of time in history between a justice’s nomination to the Supreme Court and an election. Progressive groups are also upset about Donald Trump’s appointment of Brett Kavanaugh, following the retirement of Anthony Kennedy, as well as Mitch McConnell’s blocking of Barack Obama’s nominee to the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland, for nearly a year. Though the bill is a direct response to prior changes to the composition of the

court, the bill could be setting a dangerous precedent for politicians to continue adding more justices each time they are discontent with the balance of the judicial branch. The court should be apolitical, and adding justices to it corrupts this founding principle. However, in the course of U.S. history, Congress has changed the number of justices seven times. The last time this was done was directly after the Civil War.¹²¹ Many Democrats believe that the Supreme Court has become a partisan and political institution, rather than an impartial branch of government that stands for integrity and equity. “We are here today because the United States Supreme Court

is broken. It is out of balance, and it needs to be fixed,” stated the Democratic senator from Massachusetts, Ed Markey.¹²² He continued, “too many Americans have lost faith in the court as a neutral arbiter.” While Democrats questioned the court’s legitimacy, Republicans attacked Democrats for scrutinizing the legitimacy of the judicial branch. Mitch McConnell, Senate Minority Leader, stated that Democrats were “threat-

“The current Supreme Court is not representative of the beliefs of the people.”

ening judicial independence from the steps of the court.” Other statements made over social media, such as Senator Tom Cotton’s tweet, claimed that the Democrats actions would “destroy the court.”¹²³ Republicans aren’t the only ones disagreeing with the Bill. The Democrat Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, said that she had no intentions of bringing the bill to the floor. She supports the more moderate approach that Biden proposed of a commission to study the possible expansion of the Supreme Court, though she has stated that expanding the Court is not completely out of the question.¹²⁴ Similarly, Senate Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin would also like to wait for the findings of the report before taking action.¹²⁵

President Joe Biden recently signed an executive order to study reforming the court. Among his inquiries is the question of the size of the court, and whether or not a justice should have the seat for their entire lifetime. Though opposing the new bill, he supports the committee to investigate possible solutions.¹²⁶ Implementing term limits to the position would require a constitu-

tional amendment. Article 3 section 1 of the Constitution states that “the Judges, both of the supreme and inferior Courts, shall hold their Offices during good Behaviour.” This means that they serve for their entire lifetimes, and to change this rule, we would have to change the Constitution. Amending the Constitution is not easy. It would require a supermajority (two-thirds vote) in both houses of Congress, and then would have to be ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures. However, in the Constitution, it states nowhere a specific number of justices that must be on the court. Therefore, the easiest path to creating more balance on the court would be through increasing the number of judges.

While the U.S. Constitution states that Supreme Court justices and other federal judges “shall hold their offices during good behavior,” many believe that Congress should pass legislation limiting the number of years a justice can serve.¹²⁷ Some critics and scholars have proposed a 15 or 18 year term. Implementing these limitations would require a constitutional amendment which would need approval by a two-thirds of the House and Senate, and three-quarters of the states. This explains why Democrats are creating the bill which requires only a simple majority of both chambers, rather than the push for a constitutional amendment.

In 1937, Franklin Delano Roosevelt at-

tempted to add more justices to the court to help in passing his New Deal legislation.¹²⁸ But, this time the Democrats have reason to want to take action. Republicans stalled the Garland nomination, effectively creating a Supreme Court with eight justices. If they are going to intentionally stall nominations in order to put their own choice for justices on the courts interrupting democracy to promote an agenda, there is no reason why the Democrats cannot do the same. It is completely constitutional, and throughout history the number has changed to as low as six.

Many Americans, myself included, are concerned about the precedent it sets, but the current Supreme Court is not representative of the beliefs of the people, and the most efficient way to change that is to alter the number of judges. The court has gone from an institution that is supposed to interpret the Constitution, to a partisan political institution. Change must be made, as they have the power to hear legal challenges to Biden’s agenda, and are a crucial branch of government. Packing the court is not about adding more liberal judges to the court, rather it is necessary to undo the previous actions by Senate Republicans and the Trump administration, in order to create balance from the unfair addition of two conservative judges **HMR**



WHY WASHINGTON D.C. NEEDS TO BECOME A STATE

Samantha Strasser

Washington D.C., our nation’s capital with over 712,000 residents, has been vying for statehood for years. Though its people bear the same responsibilities of citizenship as any other state, their lack of representation in Congress limits their voices. The metropolitan federal district is famous for its federal neutrality—but residents are beginning to stir over their lack of spokespersonship, taking to the streets to speak out in protest. The citizens of Washington D.C. deserve the right to have an equal say in the legislative proceedings of the country, and their requests are completely reasonable and achievable.

First of all, Washington D.C. not only pays more federal taxes than 22 states but also pays more per capita to the federal government than any other state.¹³¹ A popular slogan among supporters for statehood harkens back to the American Revolution: “Taxation without representation,” which citizens have taken to using as bumper stickers or signs.¹³² D.C. currently elects a non-voting delegate to the House of Representatives. They are able to draft legislation but have no voting opportunities. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), a key advocate for Washington D.C. statehood, holds the current delegate seat.¹³³ However, in the Senate, D.C. has zero representation. So, if it is paying greater taxes than other states and already has a representative in the House, why isn’t D.C. afforded the constitutional right to be heard in Congress?

Furthermore, the fact that D.C. isn’t a state has limited it even more during the coronavirus pandemic. The Coronavirus

Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) provides at least 755 million dollars in emergency funds to the least populous states in the country, such as Wyoming and Vermont. However, D.C. was denied access to these funds even though it has a larger population.¹³⁴ This is explicit proof of the federal government prioritizing residents of other states above D.C. residents simply because they are barred state membership into the Union.

One of the major reasons Congressional Republicans are so vehemently against the statehood of D.C. is because they believe the Democrats want this “deep-blue city” to become a state only to add one Democrat vote to the House and two Democrat votes to the Senate. However, as Mayor Muriel Bowser (D-DC), made clear, the issue of statehood is most importantly centered around “securing complete voting rights in a plurality-Black area.”¹³⁵ D.C. is known as a historically Black city. Today Black people make up the lion’s share of their population, at about 47%.¹³⁶ Admitting D.C. to the union as a state would significantly amplify Black voices in congressional issues and raise their voting power from, “75 percent as much representation as the average white American in the Senate,” something that opponents of statehood are afraid of.¹³⁷ Black votes have historically been suppressed and the accurate representation of these voices is crucial to true democracy, especially today.

Other Congress members have worried about D.C.’s potential Democratic influence. Representative James Comer (R-KY) argued that “D.C. statehood is a key part of

the radical leftist agenda,” to essentially infiltrate the government and reshape America.¹³⁸ This argument has become popular among many, but other representatives have retaliated. For example, Representative Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA) explained that “how somebody votes cannot be a test of whether they have the right to vote in democracy.”¹³⁹ This one point sums up the entire argument for D.C. statehood. If one bears all the responsibilities of a state, it deserves access to all the privileges of any other state—irrespective of its political agenda.

Interestingly, part of Washington D.C. did cede back to Virginia through the Alexandria Retrocession Bill of 1846.¹⁴⁰ Hence, the other potential counterargument is that remaining Washington D.C. could simply become part of Maryland. All of D.C.’s land was originally ceded from Maryland and Virginia, so a retrocession does seem probable for some as it has happened before; however, this doesn’t work for multiple reasons.¹⁴¹ Maryland’s citizens and its legislature have by no means consented or expressed any positivity towards this idea. Additionally, though the growth in population would give D.C. representation in the House, it wouldn’t earn any new presence in the Senate. In more current times this option seems less accessible, and D.C. residents are more in favor of their own statehood.

More recently, on April 20th, the Biden administration formally announced their support for D.C. Statehood.¹⁴² This statement was noticeably right before the House voted for statehood, which we now know

resulted in support for statehood as well. The bill, H.R. 51, is now pending Senate approval. It requires the approval of at least 60 senators, which is far less likely to happen than the House vote’s success. H.R. 51 proposes shrinking the neutralized federal district into a two-square-mile enclave which would contain the most important buildings, such as the White House and the Capitol. This area would be deemed the National Capital Service Area.¹⁴³ The Washington D.C. for statehood website notes that “the constitution sets only a maximum size, ‘not exceeding ten miles square,’” for the country’s federal district.¹⁴⁴ This new plan would give citizens their full rights and voices while also following constitutional law. The remaining land would become its own state, which at the moment residents want to name the Douglass Commonwealth (D.C.) after Frederick Douglass.¹⁴⁵

This part of the bill goes against another popular counterargument, that D.C. is an

entirely federal district because it’s meant to be completely neutral and separate from the state voting process. In the past, this idea may have been acceptable, but as the population of people in D.C. grows, more and more people are demanding their voices be heard. Hence, shrinking the federal neutral radius could solve both of these problems while maintaining the capital design our constitution outlines.

The Community of Washington D.C. deserves equal representation and vocal rights in our government. However, the constant debates and disagreements over the topic make D.C. statehood a very unlikely reality.

HMR

The citizens of Washington D.C. deserve the right to have an equal say in the legislative proceedings of the country, and their requests are completely reasonable and achievable.



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The Verdict is In, But Are We Truly Done?

Krish Gandhi

In the Fourth Judicial District court state of Minnesota, the judge read out the verdict in Derek Chauvin's murder trial at 4:05 pm CST on April 20th, 2021, announcing him guilty. Jurors of varying race, color, profession, and gender watched a painfully graphic trial for three weeks, compared meticulous discourses by 38 prosecution and seven defense witnesses, and observed tears of regret streaming from eye-witnesses.¹⁴⁷ They deliberated fairly and impartially over two days to arrive at a unanimous decision of finding Chauvin guilty on all three charges against George Floyd—second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter. The country rejoiced over the verdict. Phones began buzzing as congratulatory words passed from the courtroom to White House to other countries to Floyd's family, and the message was clear: Black Lives Matter. But in reality, one more Black life was lost as we inched closer to justice in one of the largest democracies of the world. While equality

for all has been crisply written in our constitution since 1868, we still struggle to manifest the 14th Amendment into action more than a century later and find sacrifice of innocent lives a valid excuse to crawl another inch closer to an equitable society.¹⁴⁸ Racial discrimination exists, resurfacing in different forms at different times, and this time, it took the shape of police brutality. Even though justice was seemingly served for one man in Chauvin's trial, there are miles to walk before equality can be accomplished for the people of color in America.

The protests that followed George Floyd's killing are one way to seek equality. Another way is the proposal to defund the police. 'Defunding' can be described as a moving marker between completely abolishing the police force, collaborating with other agencies that are usually supported by the municipality, and reorganizing the law enforcement agencies. The notion of defunding transpired out of anger in the aftermath of Floyd killing,

but had been simmering since long, given the history of an uneven justice system that disproportionately targets the people of color. After all, the police force itself evolved from 1800s slave patrols in the South and colonial watch programs in the North.¹⁴⁹ The 1900s once again saw police enforcing racial segregation, sometimes with the help of Klu Klux Klan, continually defying equality. Recently, one Washington Post study reported that even today, for every white person, five Black Americans will be imprisoned. Even more so, Black Americans are three times more likely to be killed by the police.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, approximately 1000 people are killed every year by the police. Spread nationwide with no particular ties to a red or a blue state, that number has remained steady since 2014.¹⁵¹ As appalling as these numbers are, so is the scenery of the present day. While Chauvin was being tried for manslaughter and murder of George Floyd, Daunte Wright was shot just a few miles away from the courthouse. Within weeks, as

the verdict was being read, another Black teenager, Ma'Khia Bryant, was gasping for breath in Columbus, Ohio. While the list of people-of-color perished in police violence does not necessarily end here, defunding the police may not be the right answer at the moment. Abolishing the funds entirely will lead to reckless rises in other crimes and most definitely will create levels of social unrest unmanageable by other law enforcement municipal authorities. At the same time, reducing police funding may take away the resources necessary for essential functions of policing such as manning school premises or attending to 911 calls for medical emergencies. In fact, the recent attack on Capitol Hill on January 6th, 2021 underscores one such essential function of police which is to protect our lawmakers. The events of that day can also present a counter-argument that the police may in fact need additional funding to overcome a sluggish response and lack of intelligence attributed to the attack. A more substantiated effort would be to reduce the scope of policing, not its funding. Grassroots organizations that are better equipped for managing mental health needs, housing for the homeless, and education for incarcerated children can take away some load off of policing. One such organization, Brownsville Community Justice Center (BCJC) in Brooklyn, NY provides alternatives to incarceration through programs such as Learning Labs to offer educational support and Belmont Revitalization Project to help reimagine public spaces.¹⁵² Safe Summer NYC 2021 is another initiative supported by Mayor de Blasio that will launch safe parks and gang-free zones in 31 sites across the city. This program will create 800-1000 anti-violence youth employment slots, hold Saturday night light games in 100 sites, and anti-violence fairs in 30 sites citywide.¹⁵³

Policing and prisons have not solved the problems of our society in more than 200 years. While protests, reduced funding, and revised scope can have an impact, individually or in combination, we have miles to walk. However, every single initiative could be equivalent to saving a Black life, and therefore, is worth an effort. President Joe Biden has proposed police reform measures such as enhanced oversight and training, barring the use of chokeholds, increased funds for community policing, and more outlined in the "George Floyd Justice In Policing Act."¹⁵⁴ Inspired by a Black man who lost his life pleading, "I can't breathe" to a police officer who

forced his knee on this handcuffed man's neck, this reform can revolutionize the way police operate. This Act was introduced in Congress last year and passed the House in March 2021. Forbidding racial and religious profiling by the local, state, and federal law enforcement, this Act will enforce anti-bias training as well as mandate data collection on race, sex, (dis)ability, and religion when police force is used. Drawing a clear line between lethal and non-lethal use of force, this Act will not only ban the use of chokeholds, carotid holds, and no-knock warrants for federal drug cases, but will also direct grants to the agencies that demonstrate adequate training in non-lethal de-escalation. While

"Besides the collaboration challenges, the civilian population will need to be educated about the new resources and modes of access. Key to a well-oiled implementation will be persistent training for all personnel in every involved organization, stringent quality control and compliance practices, and more community awareness programs."

some state books require body cameras already, this Act will require all federal police officers and vehicles to be equipped with body cameras and dashboard cameras respectively. Currently, police officers are insured by the protective shield of qualified immunity that makes it harder to prosecute them. Changing the mens rea (guilty mind) requirement from a 'wilful' standard to a 'reckless' standard will make prosecution easier in the civil courts if the constitutional rights of an individual are violated. Finally, the overarching goal of the George Floyd Justice In Policing Act is to reimagine public safety on the pillars of community-based collaboration, accountability and tracking, and developmental training. Conceptually a well-knitted idea, the implementation of it may come with its own perils. Taking away the central control of law enforcement from police and redistributing it among disparate, and often disconnected organizations will clearly create room for inclusivity and diverse voices. At the same time, achieving consistency in the enforcement of law may become a challenge, amongst other coordination hurdles when many organizations are involved. For instance, each case may pass through several hands

before reaching the courts, and therefore, may entail extended delays. Besides the collaboration challenges, the civilian population will need to be educated about the new resources and modes of access. Key to a well-oiled implementation will be persistent training for all personnel in every involved organization, stringent quality control and compliance practices, and more community awareness programs. All this may translate into additional funding requirements from the federal government.

Through the implementation of the George Floyd Justice In Policing Act, the responsibility of public safety will be evenly shared between the police and community organizations like BCJC, and

the mission of equitable justice will become more realistically achievable. However, the reform legislation has to first pass in the politically divided Senate. While both Republicans and Democrats understand an urgency of such reform and dispose of the idea of police defunding, they do not fully agree on issues such as qualified immunity. With the bill stalled in the Senate, President Joe Biden is urging Congress to resolve and pass the bill before the first death anniversary of the man who lent his name to it. Whether Karen Bass, Democratic Representative from California and primary author of the bill, gets the Senate to vote for it in its entirety, or, Tim Scott, a Republican from South Carolina who has introduced a counter bill, succeeds in his negotiations, is yet to be seen. What is certain is that George Floyd's death and other similar sacrifices in the past year have sparked the biggest outcry for racial justice and police reform in the U.S. thus far. While we still have miles to walk, the George Floyd Justice In Policing Act will be a critical stepping stone in the new era of police equality for people of color.**HMR**

AMERICA’S JOBS PLAN: Reconceptualizing Infrastructure for a New Century

Isabel Mavrides-Calderón

The pandemic has had a devastating economic and human impact across the United States, highlighting underlying systemic inequalities embedded in our society. To mitigate the effects of the increase in unemployment, the Biden administration had deployed a series of policies to revitalize the economy. After passing America’s Rescue Plan, President Joe Biden recently proposed an ambitious two-trillion-dollar infrastructure plan to further his vision for America.¹⁵⁶ Infrastructure plans are not new to the American presidency. President Franklin D. Roosevelt executed a revolutionary infrastructure deployment through the New Deal after the Great Depression. Using the Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and other agencies, the New Deal built countless roads, dams, schools, parks, and airports.¹⁵⁷ These works are what is typically considered infrastructure, but Biden’s plan has re-conceptualized this term to include non-traditional investments with the aim to fight climate change and systemic economic and racial inequities.¹⁵⁸ For example, The Hill, reported that “Biden’s proposal includes repairing 20,000 miles of roads and 10,000 bridges, expanding broadband access to rural and underserved communities, replacing the nation’s lead pipes and service lines for clean water, investing in manufacturing, and expanding access to home and community-based care.”¹⁵⁹ Specifically, a key part of Biden’s infrastructure plan is to dedicate billions of dollars to help reverse systemic racism and racial disparities by improving conditions and salaries for individuals in the care

industry, who in their majority are Black or brown workers. This encompasses setting aside money to support disabled folk and elderly people, and those who care for them.¹⁶⁰ While Biden’s plan sounds promising, it has been met with stark criticism about its cost, who it leaves out, and a broader debate on what infrastructure should mean. Republicans in Congress have pushed back against the significant cost of Biden’s plan, which is proposed to be paid with an increase in taxes for those earning over \$400,000. Leader McCarthy explains: “When the president talks about not raising taxes on people under \$400,000, that’s a lie. Every day you watch the inflation that he is creating. This is the Biden Tax.”¹⁶¹ Despite the opposition to the bill, Biden’s infrastructure proposal is revolutionary. It recognizes that racial disparities are deeply intertwined with infrastructure implementation. For instance, President Biden’s plan includes a proposal to replace the lead-infested pipes in Flint, Michigan, which affected the health of primarily Black children. Another example is the cleaning up of environmental hazards that have significantly affected Hispanic and Indigenous populations.¹⁶² In addition, Biden’s plan includes policies for access to early education for low-income families and communities of color and access to broadband for rural America, which has proven to be sorely lacking during the pandemic.¹⁶³ Furthermore, Biden’s plan recognizes that investing in the care for family members, the elderly, disabled, or children, should be considered “infrastructure”, as it allows millions to join

the workforce.¹⁶⁴ Melissa Boteach, from the National Women’s Law Center, believed that before the pandemic the US had a deficient care system, and therefore “That’s why we saw a total collapse of the care industry and also why we saw so many women pushed out of the labor force.”¹⁶⁵ During the pandemic, it was evident that protections for older adults and the one-quarter of Americans currently living with a disability were inadequate. For the many mothers working from home while raising young children, child care has also proven to be of the utmost importance. People who care for those individuals have often been characterized as low-skilled workers and, therefore, receive minimum wage. These jobs are primarily held by women of color.¹⁶⁶ Republicans fear that many of the new care jobs will increase the number of unionized people who typically vote Democrat.¹⁶⁷ More progressive Democrats, on the other hand, criticize the plan for not doing enough for women and leaving them behind of some major investments. According to a CNN article titled: “Joe Biden’s Infrastructure Plan Could Leave Too Many Women Behind,” while Biden’s plan will help create millions of jobs, many of those jobs are in male-dominated fields like construction and transportation.¹⁶⁸ The emphasis on women’s jobs is pressing, as the pandemic brought more women out of the workforce than men.¹⁶⁹ Between February and April of last year, 13.4 million women lost their jobs, which is proportionally more than their male counterparts.¹⁷⁰ Labor economist Michelle Holder proposes

an alternative plan, which would allocate “5% to 10% of the \$621 billion proposed for transportation infrastructure and \$300 billion earmarked for manufacturing to train women in the jobs being created in those respective fields.”¹⁷¹ In these unprecedented times, we should redefine what we need as a society and prioritize as a country. We can not separate the effect of systemic and historical bias from the way we structure our society’s investments. Defining infrastructure to include a broader conceptualization of what makes us productive as a society is crucial and necessary. In particular, it is time to create investments that provide opportunities for all to contribute to the economy, avoiding band-aids, and thinking long-term. One of the benefits of Biden’s plan is that most projects are not “shovel ready”; they don’t provide only a quick bolster of growth for the short term.¹⁷² Instead, projects in the proposal use federal spending spread over years, providing social and economic support to entire communities that needed long-term support.¹⁷³ The emphasis on climate change and sustainability also speaks of the long-term mindedness of these investments in changing the future of the world. In addition, this plan’s focus recognizes the intersection between environmental justice and racial justice. There is no doubt that there are fears of an increase in our nation’s deficit that could cripple the ability of future generations to achieve prosperity. However, let’s stop and think about the kind of future we will inherit if we don’t take care of those that need us the most, provide social stability for millions of disenfranchised individuals, and stop the effects of climate change. We have to choose between avoiding a deficit and addressing issues head-on. If we decide to take the leap and risk engaging in bold investments we, as a nation, will assure the survival of the US as a global leader. **HMR**



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WHY PUTIN IS SCARED

Avi Rao

On April 20, 2021, a Russian military force of over 100,000 men amassed itself at the Russo-Ukrainian border on the command of Russian President Vladimir Putin as fleets of Russian assault ships patrolled the Azov Sea. The situation was reminiscent of 2014 when Russia took similar actions and annexed the previously Ukrainian Crimea as retribution for the pro-European Ukrainian Euromaidan protests earlier that year, which Russia denounced as an illegal coup. However, just as quickly as the buildup started, it stopped. Russian troops retreated, the force disbanded, and it became clear that Russia's military buildup was solely for purposes of intimidation. When explained this way, Russia's tactics seem simple enough; a simple show of power over their hostile Ukrainian neighbors.¹⁷⁵ However, when examined closely, Putin's actions in Ukraine and elsewhere these past weeks illustrate a much more

complex image. They show that for the first time in a long while, Putin is scared. He's scared about a new, hostile United States. He's scared about his record-low polling for the upcoming election;¹⁷⁶ however, most of all, Putin is scared of his people, and the prospect of unprecedented widespread social unrest, furthered by Alexei Navalny—the man Putin fears most. And Putin's growing anxiety has pushed him into a far more precarious position, one that he feels needs to be bolstered by any means possible.

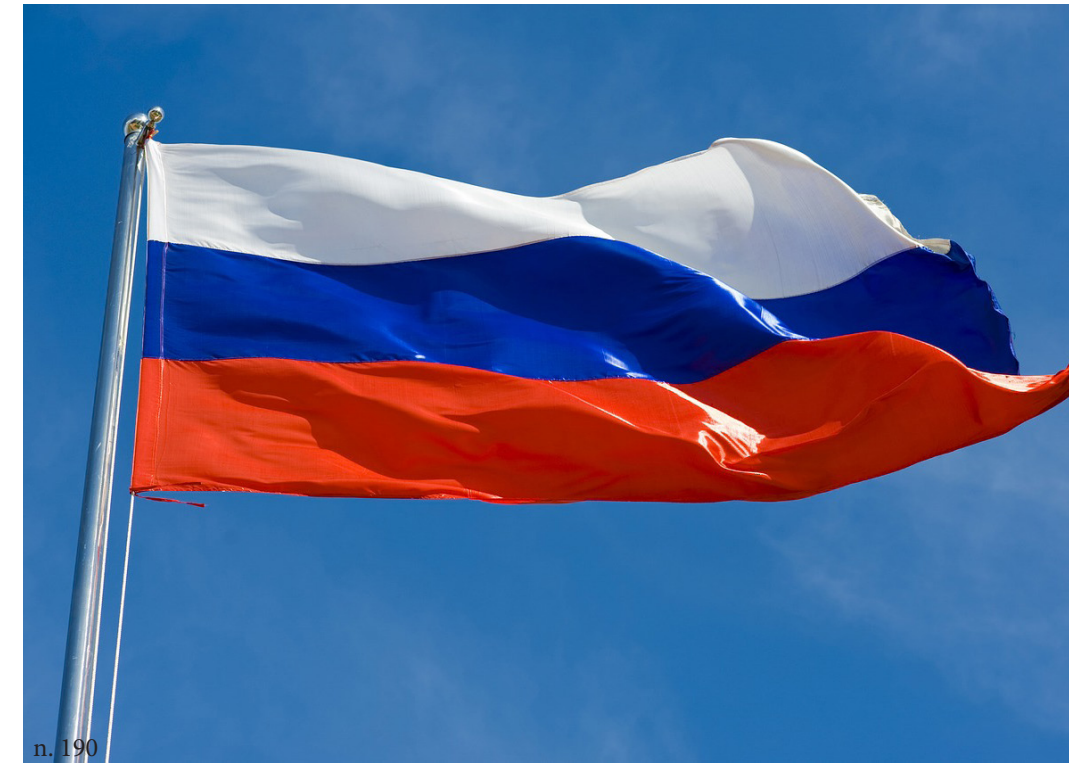
The first reason for Putin's fear is the return of an active anti-Russia United States under President Joe Biden. Since 2016, Russia had enjoyed a relatively friendly relationship with the Trump administration, with minimal American resistance to Russian activity. Putin even interfered in the US election in opposition to Biden, fearful that he would lose the leeway he had with

Trump.¹⁷⁷ However, it was all for naught, as Biden won the election and immediately took decisive actions against Russia. In March, he levied economic sanctions against Moscow for the jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and a month later expelled ten Russian diplomats in response to the Russian SolarWinds hack. Russia responded by expelling ten diplomats in turn and blaming the US for inciting revolts in countries neighboring Russia.¹⁷⁸ However, Russia's most telling response to US sanctions was their personal attacks on Joe Biden. A Russian Parliament member said that Biden has "Political Dementia," a state TV anchor called Biden "the American patient," and Putin rallied anti-West sentiment by condemning Biden's comment that Putin is a "killer."¹⁷⁹ By attacking Biden's mental health and rallying anti-West sentiment by accusing the US of interference in neighboring coun-

tries, Putin turned back to a familiar tactic that he leans on when pressured. He did the same in the aforementioned 2014 annexation of Crimea, where he was able to unite his country against the new pro-West Ukrainian government.¹⁸⁰ By going back to his familiar tactics for stressful situations, Putin has shown that he is scared and that the US's strategy is having an effect.

Putin is also scared about the upcoming Russian parliamentary elections this year, which must be held by September. In the lead-up to the election, preliminary polling shows Putin with record-lows in approval and public trust. Among young voters, Putin's approval rating dropped 17 points, his trustworthiness fell by 5%, and that of his opposition rose by 5%. In addition, the approval rating of his party, United Russia, fell to barely 30% from over 48% two years prior.¹⁸¹ And while it is widely expected that the elections will be corrupt and dominated by United Russia, the decrease indicates the rising popularity of the opposition, which could lead to a return to the streets as Russians protest unfair elections. In addition, even a slight decline in often biased Russian state polling suggests that there may be more parity in Russia's elections than previously thought.¹⁸² Putin knows this, too, which is why he's desperately searching for a way to unify the nation. He attempted to do this through the aforementioned Ukrainian power play, as whenever he feels vulnerable, he tries to unify the nation under an anti-Western banner and make people forget Russia's own domestic issues.

Finally, what Putin fears most is not politics nor the US, but his own citizens. After all, Vladimir Putin is no stranger to revolution. He was a KGB representative in East Germany during the fall of the Berlin Wall, during which he frantically destroyed evidence of KGB espionage activities while his commanders refused his requests for contact amidst the chaos.¹⁸³ Years later, in 2004, Putin found himself again powerless to respond to the anti-Russia Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Putin's experience with these revolutions led him to vow "never again."¹⁸⁴ He responded swiftly with military force to the 2008 Georgian Revolution and the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, and in 2016 he created the 350,000-troop-strong Russian National Guard as a response to growing national unrest, commanded directly by him and led by his former personal bodyguard. The creation of this personal army shows that beneath his facade,



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“What Putin fears the most is not politics nor the US, but his own citizens.”

Putin is truly scared of revolution.¹⁸⁵ And now, he has more to be scared of than ever, as Russia has experienced unprecedented social unrest caused by the actions of one man: Alexei Navalny. Navalny has been the Russian opposition leader for over ten years and has been described as the man Vladimir Putin fears most. What makes him so scary to Putin that Putin refuses to say his name is his ability to turn the international spotlight onto the rampant corruption in Russia that would otherwise go unnoticed. After being poisoned with a Russian nerve agent and going through intensive care, Navalny returned to Russia, only to be arrested on landing.¹⁸⁶ His arrest, as well as his deteriorating condition in a Russian Gulag, sparked massive protests in Russia and condemnation from around the world. Hundreds of thousands of Russians took to the streets over three months to protest the corruption and autocratic rule of Vladimir Putin.¹⁸⁷ Their outrage only intensified after the release of a two-hour-long YouTube documentary detailing the corruption in Russia and how Putin used a network of shell companies, business executives, and

offshore bank accounts to secretly build himself a \$1,000,000,000 mansion on the Black Sea, complete with thousands of security guards and over 17,000 acres of private land around it. That video currently has over 115 million views and nearly 5 million likes from people around the world, which combined equals over 80% of Russia's population.¹⁸⁸ Through his charisma and ability to rally Russia's people to his cause, Alexei Navalny has created the first organized and powerful opposition to Putin and has taken the first step towards restoration of democracy in Russia.

All in all, Russia is at an unprecedented crossroads, that of which we have never seen before. For the first time in a long time, Putin is truly worried, and Russia's people seem more primed than ever to fight for democracy. Now, however, it's time for the US to step in. The US cannot afford to let up on Russia now. If we were to take an even harder stance in support of Navalny, we could drastically speed up the inevitable Third Russian Revolution and radically change the state of global geopolitics forever. **HMR**

CHINA'S FISHING FLEET

Myra Malik



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In recent decades, China has risen from an underdeveloped agrarian nation to the world's most populous country, with a booming population of 1.4 billion. Along with such an immense population comes the inevitable burden of food. How is one nation to procure enough food to feed 1.4 billion people every day? China, in recent years, has turned to fishing. China is the largest global exporter of fish and fishery products, producing 65 million tonnes of food fish in 2015 alone.¹⁹¹ The demand, however, has grown to exceed the readily available supply. While China accounts for a third of the world's fish consumption, over 150 million Chinese people are malnourished.¹⁹² Chinese fishing fleets have been stirring waters around the world in their fishing locations and behaviors, as well as their position as

an extension of Chinese neocolonialism in developing nations. Furthermore, the U.S. should step up to aid nations victimized by China's neocolonialism, instead of using intimidation and empty words to condemn China. China's fishing fleet is by far the world's largest, estimated at anywhere between 200,000 to 800,000 boats.¹⁹³ Some of its most controversial techniques include using banned equipment and fishing in other nations' waters. These dangerous, and in some cases unlawful, practices cause harm to the environment and to local economies. Between 2010 and 2019, Chinese vessels accounted for 21% of all fishing offenses recorded by the fishing crime database Spyglass.¹⁹⁴ China's most notable fishing boat incidents took place in the East and South China Seas, Ghanaian waters, Pacific

Island waters, and Ecuadorian waters. China's fishing practices harm various countries' sovereignty, economies, and ecosystems. China's illegal fishing infringes upon the law within multiple nations, especially those in the Pacific Ocean and in Africa. In June 2020, Ghana's marine police detained Chinese-owned trawler boats, as they were accused of using illegally large fishing nets.¹⁹⁵ Malaysian maritime authorities detained Chinese fishing vessels after accusing them of trespassing in their waters in October 2020. Indonesian authorities also began investigating a Chinese tuna trawler in May of the same year, when it was discovered that four Indonesian fishermen had died on that boat in the South Pacific Ocean. Chinese ships' presence in the Philippines also broke the law by docking

in Whitsun Reef, declared by the U.N. as a part of the Philippines' nautical zone.¹⁹⁶ Foreign fishing also threatens a country's ecosystem. While in the Philippines, Chinese boats have been filmed harvesting giant clams, recently repopulated by Filipino scientists after they went virtually extinct. Ecuadorian officials have stated that Chinese fishing has endangered the biodiversity of the Galapagos, as many animals depend on the squid caught in large numbers by Chinese vessels.¹⁹⁷ Chinese fishing off the Argentinian coast has similarly hurt the food chain in that area-- as Greenpeace concluded in 2019, this type of fishing has "devastated" the Argentinian coast's seabed.¹⁹⁸ Lastly, foreign fishing can harm a nation's economy through its effects on the fishing sector. In Ghana, the size and scope of Chinese fishing vessels outcompetes the smaller fishing canoes of local fish farmers. Axim, a fishing town in Ghana, has suffered greatly from the loss of income and resources to Chinese fishing.¹⁹⁹ Because the Chinese trawlers catch so many fish within the reserved Ghanaian fishery area, local fish farmers are forced to drive 80 miles east to buy fish from Chinese fishermen. This loss of income and resources is especially devastating to countries near bodies of water, such as Ghana, because many waterfront towns in these countries depend largely on fishing for their income. In the nearby country of Sierra Leone, local authorities have stated that illegal Chinese fishing drains \$29 million from Sierra Leone's economy annually -- with relatively little policing.²⁰⁰ The countries China exploits for fishing are always smaller countries, and often island groups, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Galapagos. While Chinese fishing has devastating environmental effects on these island coasts' biodiversity, the economic effects are felt most heavily in African countries. Both Ghana and Sierra Leone suffer high economic losses in the fishing sector due to powerful Chinese fishing. However, because of China's neocolonialist reach in these nations, there is little they can do to push back. In Sierra Leone, China has invested billions of dollars into the nation's infrastructure and mining sectors.²⁰¹ China has also invested billions of dollars into Ghana's infrastructure, in exchange for access to the same value of natural resources.²⁰² At surface-level it may seem generous, but the power dynamic



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“The most effective way to curb Chinese neocolonialism would be for the U.S. to provide better foreign aid and trade services to countries with heavy economic Chinese influence.”

built by a very rich country and a much poorer one -- as in the case of China and its African endeavors -- ultimately has led to exploitation. For example, in Zambia, China has acquired one-third of all national debt and invested heavily in mining and infrastructure-- however, unemployment has shot up in the South African nation and safety regulations in mining are commonly disregarded.²⁰³ It is almost inevitable that this dynamic would spread from natural resources in terms of mining to those in terms of biological resources, such as fishing. Additionally, while China accounts for a third of the world's fish consumption, over 150 million Chinese people are malnourished.²⁰⁴ Although China's rates of malnourishment have been on the decline, the high number of people still experiencing food insecurity points to the fishing fleets being tactics of intimidation rather than of self-sustenance. Solutions to the problems of Chinese fishing -- and on a much broader scale, Chinese neocolonialism -- are difficult to come across, because of China's global economic power. It may seem important for allies of smaller countries to help out in infringements of national sovereignty,

such as the U.S. sending in Navy warships near Chinese vessels docked in Malaysia, but Malaysia expressed “displeasure” at their arrival -- most likely because of the portrayal as a country that needs “protecting” or “saving.”²⁰⁵ The most effective way to curb Chinese neocolonialism would be for the U.S. to provide better foreign aid and trade services to countries with heavy economic Chinese influence. The U.S. does not need to save any country; instead, providing other countries with choices in investments, credits, and aid reduces the risk of exploitation at the hands of neocolonialism. Because China offers soft-power, generous foreign aid in the form of roads, railways, and pipelines, it becomes more approachable than the U.S., which has been known to use intimidation and ‘strings-attached’ policies in the way of aid.²⁰⁶ The U.S. must stop using intimidation of revoking foreign aid to gain votes in the U.N., instead taking a more open approach to foreign relations. It must step up to help other countries, instead of pointing at China with its own dirty finger.**HMR**



Biden's Promise to Withdraw US Troops from Afghanistan: Long Overdue or Unwise Grandstanding?

Sophia Liu

On April 14, 2021, President Joe Biden announced that he would withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by September 11 of this year, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers. “With the terror threat now in many places, keeping thousands of troops grounded and concentrated in just one country at a cost of billions each year makes little sense to me and to our leaders,” President Biden said in his address. “We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan, hoping to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal, and expecting a different result.”²⁰⁹ Since Biden’s speech, Republicans and Democrats alike have attacked his remarks for their risks to the American people. Although former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama both vocally support his decision, their endorsements have not swayed everyone’s opinion.²¹⁰ As CIA Director William Burns said in a hearing on April 14, “the U.S. government’s ability to collect and act on threats will diminish.”²¹¹ This bipartisan concern

is founded in fear that the withdrawal will result in increases in Taliban activity, and undo wins for democracy and women’s rights in Afghanistan. Despite these risks, the pros clearly outweigh the cons. President Biden’s decision to withdraw soldiers from Afghanistan was certainly justified, if not long overdue.

It is important to note that despite the United States’ plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, they do not plan to stop fighting the Taliban through other means. Biden expressed that the U.S. will continue to provide humanitarian, diplomatic, and security assistance to the Afghan government.²¹² On April 21, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the United States plans on giving an extra \$300 million of financial aid to Afghanistan this year, which supports Biden’s claims.²¹³ Thus, the belief that the Biden administration “has decided to abandon U.S. efforts in Afghanistan which have helped keep radical Islamic terrorism in check”²¹⁴ is simply untrue, as the President is only changing the status of the U.S.’s military presence.

U.S. intelligence has shown that the threat of terrorist attacks against the United States is no longer solely or even primarily from Afghanistan. The United States was somewhat successful in their initial goal to decrease the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan; Al-Qaeda’s influence is significantly weaker, and other radical Islamic groups, like the Islamic State of Khorasan, are being attacked by the Taliban.²¹⁵ As one senior administration official to President Biden stated, “Afghanistan just does not rise to the level of those other threats at this point...That does not mean we’re turning away from Afghanistan. We are going to remain...committed diplomatically. But...we believe that other priorities merit that investment.”²¹⁶ Instead of Afghanistan, countries like Somalia, Mali, and Yemen, where terrorist groups like al-Shahab and other affiliates with ISIS and Al-Qaeda are growing in power and prominence, making them the real threats.²¹⁷ If troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan, the United States will have more soldiers and resources to stop real threats internally and externally.

Withdrawing U.S. troops would be beneficial for Afghanistan because, other than diminishing the threat of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, the military’s efforts at increasing democracy or women’s rights in Afghanistan have been unsuccessful. The United States has historically turned a blind eye to the corruption within the Afghan government, such as the reelection of former president Hamid Karzai. Additionally, although the United States has spent over \$126 billion on reconstruction programs in Afghanistan, about \$15.5 billion of that money was wasted in part to fraud and abuse.²¹⁸ In many cases, the U.S. military fueled corruption and instability by bribing politicians, funneling money to opium warlords, and even paying off religious leaders for information.²¹⁹ One such example of the United States allying with shady figures was their relationship with Mohammed Qasim Fahim Khan, a Tajik military commander well known for his brutality.²²⁰ Despite his violent history, the United States invited him to the Pentagon and even greeted him with the ceremonial guard.²²¹

The military has made little long-term change in regards to women’s rights. While women are now able to hold government positions and be educated, these advances in women’s rights effectively only apply to urban women, who make up about 24% of the population of women.²²² In rural areas, women still suffer from the same problems they did before American intervention, if not more. Because of American military intervention, women’s lives are continually disrupted by persistent violence between the Taliban and government forces.²²³ Therefore, it is apparent that the United States military champions in Afghanistan have been largely ineffective and possibly detrimental.

Additionally, American troops have gradually withdrawn from Afghanistan for several years without any negative impacts. Whereas the number of American soldiers in Afghanistan was around 98,000 in 2011, the number of soldiers diminished to around 2,500 as of January 2021—the fewest number of soldiers since the initiative first began in 2001.²²⁴ The drop in numbers has largely been due to the Trump administration, which was also planning on fully withdrawing soldiers from Afghanistan.²²⁵ Considering that so few soldiers are currently in Afghanistan, total withdrawal would result in little change from the status quo. Biden’s plan would only bring a defin-



itive close to a lengthy process that was already occurring.

Despite the number of positives that will come with the United States’ withdrawal, there are still a number of issues the U.S. needs to address to withdraw successfully. In order for this withdrawal to be successful, the Biden administration must be equipped for the risk that the Taliban will gain power. After all, when the Obama administration withdrew soldiers out of Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was quickly able to rise in strength once again. Without as much American military support, Afghanistan is in danger of the same thing happening to them.

It is also crucial that the Biden administration is more upfront about where their financial aid is going, to prevent corruption within the Afghan government and productively spend their resources. The U.S. should focus on counteracting the massive opium industry and boosting economic development. As of 2018, Afghanistan is responsible for 80% of global illicit opium production, despite the United States spending \$10 billion on counternarcotics in the past.²²⁶ As the majority of Afghans continue to live in poverty, with over 25% of them being unemployed, the U.S. should strive to choose where their funding goes to most assist Afghanistan in retaining a simi-

lar level of self-sufficiency.²²⁷

The concerns of women’s rights in Afghanistan need to be officially addressed, including women from all backgrounds and classes. Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, as well as one of the lowest life expectancy rates.²²⁸ Education for females is also extremely low, with most girls receiving barely any schooling.²²⁹ Considering that neither the Taliban nor the Afghan government have been particularly forthcoming about improving women’s rights on their own, the United States should feel obligated to continue fighting for gender equality through foreign aid or contributing to international efforts like NATO.²³⁰

If these prerequisites are met, Biden’s plan to bring soldiers back home is a necessary and beneficial step for the United States to focus on more diplomatic approaches to ending the warfare in Afghanistan. Withdrawal from Afghanistan will give the United States the opportunity to reassess their priorities in terms of funding, both in terms of reorganizing their foreign aid in Afghanistan and reallocating funds to larger threats in North Africa. It is clear that President Biden’s decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan can be viewed as the correct decision. **HMR**

QAnon's Comeback: The Rise of Conspiracy Theory Across European Countries

Maya Westra



The right wing conspiracy QAnon has spread its contagion across Europe. Formed in 2017 during Donald Trump's presidency, QAnon is an antisemitic, far-right conspiracy group which has falsely accused many liberal public figures of plotting war against Trump, sex trafficking, Satanism, and

even cannibalism. The theories QAnon produced have helped polarize the U.S. politically into believing opponents are not only ideologically wrong, but dangerous criminals who must be stopped at all costs. The QAnon group has infected Europe too, fueling the debate over Angela Merkel, anti-vaxxers in Italy, and the Yellow Jackets

in France.²³³

COVID enabled QAnon to gain popularity and spread to Europe. Historically, people have relied on conspiracy theories most in times when they feel they have no control, because conspiracies offer an answer to many unanswerable questions and a scapegoat

for unblamable problems.²³⁴ According to Mark Scott of Politico, "It's not difficult for someone who lost his job and hasn't been affected by the coronavirus to come across these ideas online and jump to the conclusion that something is going on." QAnon gave its followers people they could blame COVID and other problems in the world on.²³⁵

Additionally, QAnon resonates with those who do not acknowledge COVID's existence: it has relentlessly promoted disinformation about the virus, even stating that COVID was a hoax meant to damage Trump's re-election campaign and supporting anti-vaccine propaganda.²³⁶ The spread of QAnon poses a great threat to society, for it also means the spread of vaccine hesitancy. With more people tied to QAnon, it can spread its anti-vaccine propaganda even further, increasing vaccine hesitancy. Vaccines save lives; every seed of doubt planted in a person's mind can translate to a life thrown away to COVID.

QAnon's damaging effects are more than just vaccine disinformation. Recently, QAnon supporters organized a protest they called the "Second Uprising," mobilizing over 7,000 Germans, who marched through the streets carrying QAnon posters, Nazi flags, and other offensive attire. QAnon spread its discriminatory message loud and clear through the march. People were on high alert with the threat of these protesters possibly storming the capital as they did in the US.²³⁷ The riot came as a result of QAnon's theories about Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany. QAnon spread false rumours that NATO maneuvers in Germany during the beginning of the pandemic were an attempt by Trump to liberate Germany from Merkel and thus caused even more widespread disdain for her among the far right. Though it originally surprised many that QAnon was able to spread so quickly in Germany, people later realised that Germany's far right party, The National Democratic Party of Germany, supported QAnon's anti-semitism. QAnon used this together with the promotion of anti-vaccine propaganda to draw in the far right, amassing 200,000 German followers.²³⁸

QAnon has also drawn in members of the yellow vest group that started in France. Originally created as a bipartisan group to contest new tax reforms, raised cost of living, and other changes negatively

impacting the French middle class, their demonstrations have become increasingly violent.²³⁹ Though the Yellow Vest group still remains bipartisan, more and more far-right beliefs have appeared at their demonstrations, including Islamophobia, homophobia, anti-semitism, and racism. After footage of Yellow Vest protests leaked, QAnon took notice of the Yellow Vest group. For the Yellow Vests, QAnon's theory of bizarre crime among the international elite attracted them. Since mid-December, Yellow Vest protests have become flooded with QAnon signs.

In response to QAnon's recent growth, Mike Rothschild, an American economist, tweeted "I really feel like we're heading for a Q movement where Q[']s title isn't necessary," which sums up the spread of QAnon in Europe.²⁴⁰ In other words, the growth of QAnon is fostering the spread of racism, anti-vaccine propaganda, and conspiracies to populations not affiliated with QAnon. The groups which have

adopted QAnon in Europe are much less focused on Q's theories themselves—other than those about Angela Merkel— but associate more with what QAnon stands for.

QAnon's increasing popularity poses a global threat to security. In the US, we have seen the effects of QAnon in capital riots, superspreader events, vaccine hesitancy, and explicit discrimination against minorities. Additionally, if this continues to spread we will be fighting a global force attacking the bonds between society and government. This is a significant threat due to QAnon's massive appeal. Blaming misfortunes on the government takes the blame off of those who feel they have been disappointed. It is scary to see that what was once a 4Chan account has turned into a global far-right group that threatens the lives and livelihoods of millions through anti-vaccine propaganda, discrimination, and violence against the state. It must be stopped. **HMR**

Where does free speech end and extremism begin?





Investigating the Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Pause

Sophie Dauer

On April 13, 2021, United States health officials announced a pause of the distribution of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) COVID-19 vaccine because of rare complications involving blood clots. Eleven days later, U.S. federal health officials lifted the pause, allowing states to continue distributing it but with the warning of rare blood clotting.²⁴³ Many European countries and South Africa followed paths similar to the U.S., temporarily halting the vaccine and then implementing a warning with its distribution.²⁴⁴ As the United States and other parts of the world begin to enter a new phase in which vaccine supply exceeds demand, the message sent by federal health officials and other authorities is incredibly important to minimize vaccine hesitancy. While it is

true that ignoring the risk would have sent the message that health officials are lying to the public, the pause has prompted fewer Americans to get vaccinated. Given that the statistics prove just how small the threat is, the FDA and CDC should not have ordered the halt of the J&J vaccine. Additionally, because single-dose shots like the J&J vaccine play such an integral role in the vaccination of developing countries, the pause will probably be most deeply felt in poorer countries and result in greater international vaccine disparities.

As of April 24, of the eight million people in the United States vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, about sixteen individuals had developed these blood clots.²⁴⁵ The clots have occurred in the brain and are associated with low platelets,

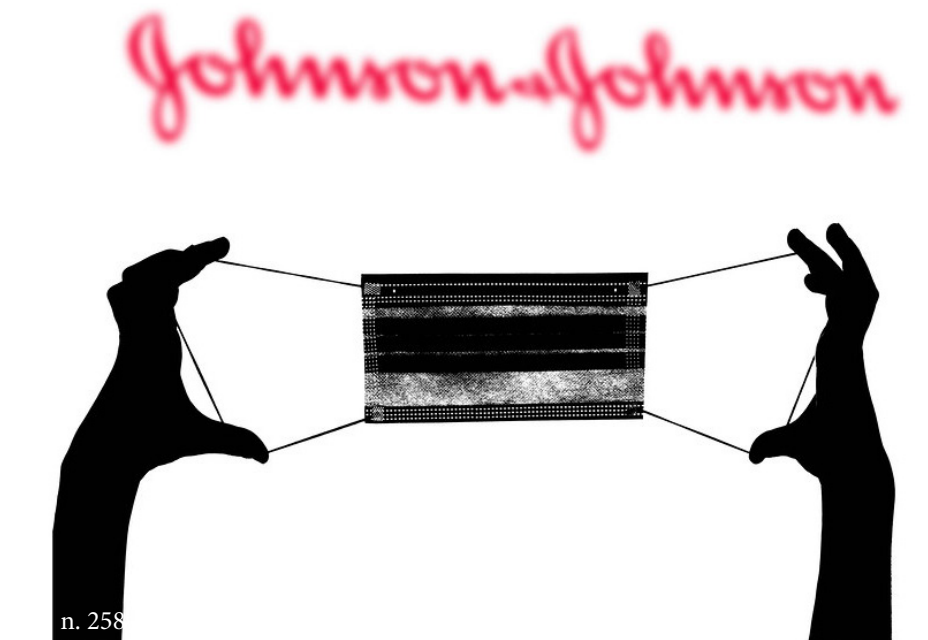
which are cell fragments that stop blood loss. Platelets help to avoid and fix the clotting process, so these very rare instances of the mixture of low platelets and dangerous clotting have struck the concern of some. Of the sixteen people who developed blood clots from the vaccine, the majority were women, but it is currently unclear as to why this is so.²⁴⁶ Although the risk of danger from the J&J vaccine exists, it is incredibly unlikely that one would develop these clots.

The rate of a dangerous clotting reaction is sixteen in eight million. This means that one is twice as likely to get hit by lightning once a year than they are to experience this reaction.²⁴⁷ Why is this risk -- one that is half as likely to occur as the former-- approached with so much more caution? It has been extremely difficult to get the pub-

lic to understand the relative threat posed. About one in 500,000 people experienced clotting from the J&J vaccine, and it is estimated that one out of every 1,000 women on birth control and one of every 1,000 smokers develop a blood clot each year.²⁴⁸ When one thinks of birth control or smoking, they do not think of the risk of blood clotting, and the risk of blood clots in the J&J vaccine is practically nonexistent compared to the risk that these actions pose. Looking at the alternative to being vaccinated, one in five COVID patients are hospitalized.²⁴⁹ Weighing all of these statistics makes it evident that the benefits far outweigh the risks. The FDA stated that their decision to halt the vaccine was made "out of an abundance of caution," but even so, their decision has exacerbated vaccine hesitancy due to an insignificant risk.²⁵⁰

As the United States approaches 150 million vaccinated people, the pace of vaccinations has been slowing. Since the peak number of vaccinations in one day, at 3.4 million, on April 13th, the average number of people receiving their first or single dose has dropped by around fifty percent.²⁵¹ Not only was April 13th the height of vaccinations, but it was also the date that health officers announced a pause of the J&J vaccine. On a national level, the number of individuals receiving both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, along with J&J vaccines, is decreasing.²⁵² We have reached a point where most Americans who wanted to be vaccinated have already been vaccinated, and now it is a matter of convincing hesitant people to go get their shot. So, it is mostly a coincidence that the national decrease is concurrent with the J&J halt; however, the halt definitely exacerbated the decrease, given that one in five unvaccinated people have reported that the pause on J&J's vaccine changed their mind about getting the vaccine in some way.²⁵³ Given that only around 150 million people have been vaccinated in the U.S., according to Antony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief medical advisor to the president, we need another 80 to 130 million individuals vaccinated in order to reach herd immunity and end the pandemic.²⁵⁴ The downward vaccination trend in the U.S. makes the end of the pandemic look quite distant.

The J&J vaccine is cheap, easy-to-transport, and requires only one dose, making it ideal for use in developing countries. President Biden announced that the U.S. had



"We must focus on encouraging vaccination and combating misinformation to put the pandemic behind us."

enough Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to make up for the J&J slowdowns. However, pauses in poorer countries, where there is less vaccine availability, could have major impacts. A major piece of the vaccination effort in developing countries is COVAX, a global network working to distribute vaccines fairly across nations, particularly poorer ones.²⁵⁵ COVAX relies heavily on the J&J vaccine as well as the AstraZeneca vaccine which is another single-dose vaccine that has caused similar blood clots, so questions surrounding their safeties could jeopardize this group and those countries that it helps. The pandemic's continuation in Africa is especially concerning because of new variants, minimal access to vaccines, and a very slow rollout process. While Africa accounts for 17% of the world population, it accounts for only 2% of all shots administered globally, while the United States, accounting for about 4% of the world's population, accounts for almost 30% of shots.²⁵⁶ Another perspective is that the rejection of the J&J vaccine by rich countries like the U.S. could make devel-

oping countries feel like the vaccines they rely on are second-class or that their lives matter less. In these ways, the harmful J&J halt could contribute to ongoing global vaccine disparities and lead to an even-longer pandemic.

The J&J vaccine pause has done far more harm than good. While one in 500,000 experience clotting from the vaccine, one in five unvaccinated people have reported that the pause on J&J's vaccine changed their mind about getting the vaccine in some way. Even worse, the pause came at a critical time for the United States in which Americans that want to be vaccinated have been vaccinated and the focus has shifted to persuading hesitant people to be vaccinated in order to reach herd immunity. Internationally, the pause could increase vaccine inequalities, harming primarily impoverished countries the most. At this point, we must focus on encouraging vaccination and combating misinformation to put the pandemic behind us. **HMR**

THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN INDIA

Karam Malhotra

Regular travelers to India, who are used to the government’s ineptitude, are not surprised by the fact that the task of quelling a pandemic became too large to handle. With hospitals quickly overrun with serious COVID-19 cases, home became the best place if you were seriously ill with COVID. Continuous positive airway pressure therapy devices (CPAP) required for serious COVID cases became invaluable as supply diminished and thus oxygen became scarce. Even if you could afford to pay, the task of finding oxygen became quixotic. So how was India overrun so quickly?

With a population of over 1.3 billion, and a population that is largely unhoused, it is almost impossible to effectively quarantine everyone in India.²⁵⁹ So the size and density of the population are leading causes for the speed at which the crisis overwhelmed India. Major cities like Delhi and Mumbai were hit the hardest due to the large number of people congregating daily.²⁶⁰ In tandem with the lack of health infrastructure, COVID has become so devastating that India cannot accurately quantify the death count.²⁶¹ With a population of over 31 million, and a high infection rate, Delhi has become a very difficult place to avoid the virus.²⁶² While at the beginning of the crisis India boasted one of the lowest COVID rates in the world, a second wave was bound to happen due to India’s large population.²⁶³ However, India did not recognize this fact, so when the second wave hit India was ill prepared.

Initially, India had a relatively low infection rate, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi confidently stated that “The country, which comprises of 18% of the world’s population, has saved the world from disaster by bringing the situation under control.”²⁶⁴ Modi started to relax restrictions on the 24th of May 2020, allowing some shops and workplaces to open despite Dr. Randeep Guleria, the director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, having stated that he was concerned that there was no downward trend in the coronavirus data.²⁶⁵ These

lifted restrictions brought the arrival of 3,900 reported cases in just 24 hours.²⁶⁶ Absurdly, the government did not respond to this outbreak, leading to citizens’ disregard of the disease. Epidemiologist Jayaprakash Muliyil, an advisor for the Indian government, said citizens “are willingly going out into the market today and taking fewer precautions to protect themselves.”²⁶⁷ “Consequently, at least in cities, the epidemic is growing very rapidly. And we know it is spreading in rural areas too. The whole trajectory of the infection is moving upwards more sharply than in many other countries. What happened in many Western countries is that when a big city like London was affected, other cities reacted strongly and reduced transmission. So, everywhere else, the doubling time got longer, but in some Indian cities it is short.”²⁶⁸ The lack of concern about the virus is troubling especially

due to the sheer number of COVID cases in India.

The lack of vaccine coverage in India also contributed to the quick spreading of COVID. Times Now News reported that during India’s phase of vaccination for people in the 18-44 age range beginning on May 1st, many states including Delhi, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab stated that they do not have enough doses to vaccinate individuals in the age group.²⁶⁹ The amount of vaccines required for these large states in India made it difficult for India to properly distribute the vaccine despite the Prime Minister’s original claims that, “Our preparation has been such that vaccine is fast reaching every corner of the country.” He further states that India is completely self-reliant and is actually helping other countries with vaccines.²⁷⁰ These statements held no water as



three months later, India had vaccinated less than 2% of its population of over 1.3 billion, and vaccine centers have stated they are running out of supply.²⁷¹ The prime minister’s plan was in shambles as the second wave of COVID approached, and Indian citizens were undefended as the vaccine program in India had failed. The original plan for distribution had been that the government would purchase vaccines and distribute them equally among states for seniors and healthcare workers, but what happened was a panicked frenzy to procure as many vaccines as possible. The craze to procure vaccines from a dwindling supply led to more conflict.²⁷² A better way to have dealt with the vaccine distribution would have been to create health infrastructure throughout India and make people aware of the issues. Instead, India has become the largest manufacturer and exporter of vaccines and the home of the most COVID cases worldwide. India’s use of app-based technology for its vaccine drive was not effective, as it excluded millions of Indians from the program.²⁷³

If you are unlucky enough to get a serious COVID case in India, you might not even be able to get the necessary equipment to survive. The CPAP devices and oxygen necessary for survival are in short supply in India. China suspended all cargo flights to India, which disrupted the private trade for oxygen and other medical supplies that would help patients in India survive. This suspension is due to the changes in the epidemic situation, according to Sichuan Chuanhang Logistics.²⁷⁴ This suspension, while unfortunate, is logical. It is a heavy blow that India must take, as a resurgence of COVID in China would not help anyone. The lack of oxygen in India is partly due to the government taking eight months to invite bids for 162 oxygen generation plants, machines that generate oxygen, and most still weren’t up and running months later.²⁷⁵ Supriya Sharma and her colleagues, Arunabh Saikia and Vijayta Lalwani, called the hospitals that were supposed to have oxygen plants installed. Of those, only eleven had been installed, and five were operational. The lack of these machines in hospitals have caused many deaths in India, with hospitals running out of oxygen in many major cities, resulting in 14 deaths in Anantapur and 12 more in Delhi.²⁷⁶ However, these cases are just those in hospitals, and families caring for a serious COVID patient must fight for oxygen as well.²⁷⁷ The



“The steps the government claimed to have made simply created more problems.”

lack of transparency from the government is cause for worry. The steps the government claimed to have made simply created more problems.

Most of the issues that I have discussed are symptomatic of a government that suffered from a superior and apathetic attitude when COVID started, causing India, ironically, to become the country with the highest number of cases in the world while being the largest distributor of vaccines. It seems as though the Indian government took few steps towards setting up any health infrastructure, while claiming that they were best prepared. When COVID began to flood India, the Indian government waited eight months before creating any oxygen plants.²⁷⁸ Then later, when only five were operational, the country was desperate for oxygen. When the new variant of COVID started spreading from Maharashtra to its borders and other states, the Indian government decided to focus on an election victory in West Bengal. When millions gathered for Kumbh Mela, a religious celebration, the chief minister of the state claimed that “the blessings of mother Ganga [the most sacred river to Hindus] were

enough to vanquish the virus.”²⁷⁹ They have actively tried to silence people who speak up about the situation in India, in fact: India’s supreme court had to warn the government against silencing people’s pleas for help by dismissing them as false grievances.²⁸⁰ Modi has exacerbated the situation by stating that the state governments were pandering to Muslims by spending more on Muslim graveyards than Hindu cremation grounds, further dividing the population.²⁸¹ Instead of uniting the population against COVID the Prime Minister is pitting the Hindus against the Muslims.

The apathy displayed by the Indian government during and before the surge of COVID in India exhibits the ineptitude of the government. While the task of quarantining a country with over 1.3 billion citizens is certainly very difficult especially with a large homeless population, the insufficient effort from the government made it clear that the fault of the crisis lies with the government.**HMR**



The Unfolding Humanitarian Crisis in Venezuela and its Effects on Women

Alexa Turteltaub

There is a governmental and economic crisis unfolding in Venezuela, inducing poverty, hunger, lawlessness, exploitation, and humanitarian violations. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has not only neglected his duties, but his reckless, corrupt and harmful policies and actions have meant that an estimated 94 percent of Venezuelans live below the poverty line, with millions lacking access to food, water or medical supplies.²⁸⁴ Let that statistic sink in, because that is more than twenty-five million people.²⁸⁵

Nicolás Maduro claimed to be a feminist, and his political success was boosted in part by the hope that he brought to Venezuelan women. Not only is Nicolás Maduro not a feminist, but both his direct actions and the indirect consequences of his actions have crippled the lives and livelihoods of women.

While the humanitarian crisis has affected all Venezuelan citizens to some de-

gree, it is safe to say that women are the most hard-hit victims, particularly those of a lower socioeconomic status who are without protection, both sexually and literally. Venezuelan women have little to no access to birth control and contraceptives. The New York Times reported that around Caracas, Venezuela's capital, a pack of three condoms costs \$4.40 — almost three times Venezuela's monthly minimum wage of \$1.50, with birth control pills costing twice as much. The rising prices are likely due to the scarcity of contraceptives, whose stock has decreased by 90 percent since 2015.²⁸⁶ Abortion is illegal in Venezuela, and these outrageously high prices along with the economic crisis, plummeting wages and loss of jobs essentially means that women have no choice but to continue bearing children whom they cannot feed. This issue not only compounds the impact of Venezuela's crisis on women, but is also an active factor in the cycle of poverty and despair that is

wrecking Venezuelan citizens and endangering the lives of women and children.

The pandemic is adding yet another layer of distress, both economic and medical, to Venezuela and to Venezuelan women in particular. The Venezuelan government reported that COVID-19 cases have increased 86 percent since January 2021, and this statistic likely underrepresents the facts due to the secretive nature of Maduro's authoritarian government.²⁸⁷

General instability and lawlessness also have resulted in a catastrophic rise in sexual violence against women in Venezuela where a severe lack of consequences emboldens offenders. A heartbreaking and deeply upsetting story serves as an example of how many challenges Venezuelan women face impact not only their lives, her family and friends around them. In April of 2021, a teacher and a mother were thrown in jail while a child rapist walked free.²⁸⁸ A thirteen-year-old Venezuelan girl became

pregnant as a result of six assaults by a neighborhood predator, and her desperate abortion implicated both her mother and teacher. Her mother took her to a doctor, and when they were told the pregnancy endangered her life, her teacher provided abortion pills.²⁸⁹ Both women were subsequently arrested. There are examples of many tragedies that clearly evidences why governments cannot abolish abortion; they can only deprive women of safe abortions and medical care. Abortion has always been illegal in Venezuela, but the poverty induced by the economic decline has exacerbated the issue in the country and pushed women towards unsafe and dangerous abortion tactics. This backwards situation is one example that allows us to evaluate the precarious and unbalanced Venezuelan society right now and the implications of this society for women, both young and old, as they struggle to survive during this humanitarian crisis. Widening the lens on this tragedy shows that it bleeds into other issues, such as the economic decline and what I would call an educational crisis.

This young girl was vulnerable because, having been forced out of school by economic despair, she no longer had the basic protection and routine of an educational institution. Education is a human right. Basic protection is a human right. Control over one's body is a human right. This young girl has had all three stripped from her in her first thirteen years of life.

Since Maduro came into power and Venezuela sunk into economic decline, the educational crisis that has emerged will leave

the next generation of Venezuelans unable to create a prosperous and functioning economy and society.²⁹⁰ Students across the country have been dropping out of school due to economic burdens such as the cost of transportation and lack of the previously guaranteed meals at schools.²⁹¹ Of course, children being out of school exposes them to situations and malicious people such as the predator who took advantage of the aforementioned young girl. The responsibility for the trauma that this young girl faced can be traced all the way back up to the arguably unelected yet persistent leader of Venezuela.

Nicolás Maduro is incompetent, unprepared, and completely unqualified to run a government as it should be run. The economic crisis is certainly his fault, and the humanitarian crisis that has emerged as a result mostly falls on his shoulders as well. But the United States and our sanctions have exacerbated the issue, and such actions seem to value economic strategy over human rights. Venezuela was a target of sanctions under the Trump administration, specifically from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.²⁹² Venezuela was identified with the likes of Iran and Cuba, and strict sanctions swiftly impacted its economy. It is important to note that the United States has given 1.2 billion dollars in aid to Venezuela since 2017, excluding COVID-19 supplementary funding, while denouncing Maduro as an illegitimate president and supporting Juan Guaidó, his political opponent, as the democratically elected president.²⁹³

While this aid is moral and absolutely

necessary, there are still broad sanctions imposed on Venezuela by the United States that do not directly target corrupt individuals or institutions, but instead disproportionately affect the struggling population. The sanctions and aid are important to note because they directly impact the Venezuelan population, and they contribute to the economic tragedies that have put women in vulnerable positions.

Something interesting to consider when examining questions of political and economic sanctions is the adverse effect not on the corrupt government leaders and individuals as intended, but on the vulnerable and innocent populations who are struggling under that particular government. In the case of Venezuela, the population that is most affected is women of all ages. Is it worthwhile to punish Nicolás Maduro for his corrupt elections and human rights abuses if, in reality, it is the impoverished civilians who are bearing the brunt of the economic burdens? This question does not have a concrete answer, but it must be considered by the Biden administration as it moves forward with foreign policy endeavors and cultivates the ever so precarious relationship between morals and international relations. **HMR**

"This backwards situation is one example that allows us to evaluate the precarious and unbalanced Venezuelan society right now and the implications of this society for women, both young and old, as they struggle to survive during this humanitarian crisis."



COMPARING GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSES TO COVID-19 IN INDIA AND AUSTRALIA

Owen Heidings

COVID-19, the deadly virus sweeping the country, is not as frightening anymore. There is a vaccine, but getting the COVID-19 vaccine isn't as easy as it looks. In fact, multiple obstacles are obstructing Black Americans from getting the vaccine, including systemic racism, access barriers, and medical mistrust. medical system.

Since March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the globe, killing a reported 3.14 million people, with thousands more deaths occurring daily. Currently, India is experiencing the largest wave of COVID-19 yet, with a reported daily increase of 276,110 cases as of May 19, 2021.²⁹⁶ India is being hit harder by the virus for many reasons, including a lack of adherence to safety protocols and poor government management. On the other hand, countries like Australia have found ways to mitigate the impact of the virus, by imposing strict lockdowns and travel restrictions to keep the number of infections low.

At the beginning of March 2021, reported COVID cases in India began to rise rapidly. By the end of the month, the number of daily cases was six times higher than it had been at the start of it.²⁹⁷ This increase was not unprecedented; the country had experienced a wave of COVID cases in September 2020, but at that time, India was prepared. Cases declined steadily in the months following, and Minister of Health Harsh Vardhan declared that the country was “in the endgame” of the pandemic.²⁹⁸ Subsequently, COVID-19 restrictions became lax. Social distancing plummeted, and mask-wearing was at an all time low. At the end of February 2021, state elections were announced; 186 million people would be eligible to vote for 824 governmental seats.²⁹⁹ Campaigning began immediately,

with little to no safety protocols whatsoever. By mid-March, India's cricket board let 130,000 fans, a majority of whom were unmasked, watch two international cricket games between India and England in person. Weeks later, India found itself in the midst of a disastrous second wave of

the pandemic; by mid-April, the country was averaging more than 100,000 cases per day.³⁰⁰

India's increase in overall cases was worsened by the government's slow response. Prime Minister Narendra Modi stayed silent on the situation until April 20, launch-



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ing “a number of emergency measures to relieve the burden on states and hospitals.”³⁰¹ By this point, however, most of “the damage was done.” Modi not only failed to prepare for a second wave but also “encouraged mass gatherings at Hindu festivals and political rallies.”³⁰² Modi also used the pandemic as a PR move, putting stamps of his face on vaccine cards and tying his prime minister title to the country's COVID-19 relief fund.³⁰³ By relating his name with these positive measures, Modi tried to convince the country that he was doing a good job, hiding his negligence.

In Australia, the reaction to COVID has been a completely different story. As of May 8, 2021, Australia has reported just nine new cases. “When Covid-19 first became a real threat to Australia in March last year, the Federal government responded quickly closing international borders and implementing a mandatory home isolation program for returning Australian citizens. Police were dispatched to homes to check that returned travelers were adhering to quarantine requirements and when breaches were discovered, Australia quickly moved to a mandatory hotel quarantine system in which hotel rooms were often guarded by police or military.”³⁰⁴ Because of these preventative measures, Australia stopped the rapid spread of the virus early, meaning that their healthcare systems were not overwhelmed.

The ability of Australia's government to work quickly and effectively contributed to their successful mitigation of the spread of COVID. Although the country's two main political parties have their differences, when COVID struck they put aside their disputes and arguments to focus on keeping the country safe. “Early in the pandemic, the federal government introduced a \$130 billion economic bailout which included a six-month wage subsidy scheme.”³⁰⁵ Australia's Parliament passed the legislation in a single day, giving citizens immediate relief. This legislation was extremely important for two reasons. First, it relieved economic stress caused by lockdowns, giving residents an early stimulus to survive off of, ultimately leading to less disparity. It also meant that Australians, not having to go to work, could comply with lockdown restrictions more willingly. When Australia suffered from a second wave of COVID-19 in the summer of 2020, authorities re-

“The light at the end of the pandemic's tunnel is getting closer and closer. However, many countries are “jumping the gun” in easing COVID-19 restrictions.”



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quired most businesses to shut down. Police checkpoints were imposed on highways to ensure residents were not more than 25 kilometers from their homes, and offenders faced a fine of up to \$1,300.³⁰⁶ Australia is an island, which allows the nation to have near-complete control of who can enter and exit the country. Only those traveling from New Zealand, Australian citizens, permanent residents, and immediate family of residents can enter, and an arrival cap of 6,362 people has been set as of March 10, 2021.³⁰⁷

As more time passes, the light at the end of the pandemic's tunnel is getting closer

and closer. However, many countries are “jumping the gun” in easing COVID-19 restrictions, and it will be important to see how nations might handle a potential second or even third wave. If managed poorly, we might see more countries fall victim to similar catastrophes as the one in India. If countries mandate vaccinations and restrict travel, they might have outcomes similar to Australia, with few cases present at all. **HMR**



BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN BITCOIN

Jacob Silverstein

In 2008, an anonymous Internet user called Satoshi Nakamoto published a paper titled “Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System,” proposing the creation of a digital currency. In the beginning of 2009, Bitcoin hit the web.³¹⁰ The way that Bitcoin worked was fairly simple: Bitcoin miners verified transactions by using computers to solve complex cryptography problems, and were rewarded for their efforts in Bitcoin. When a transaction was verified, it was stored on a blockchain, an online database that stores large amounts of data.³¹¹

To understand the fundamental difference between Bitcoin and the dollar, for example, it is important to understand how currency works. The dollar, like most modern paper currencies, is a fiat currency, meaning it is not backed by gold,

silver, or another commodity.³¹² However, regardless of whether or not a currency is a fiat currency, it relies on the same principle. Consider a simple example in which one farmer grows corn and the other cotton. If the corn farmer wants cotton, but the cotton farmer doesn’t want corn, the cotton farmer can trade cotton in exchange for a promise from the corn farmer to give the cotton farmer a certain amount of goods later. This promise is called an IOU. Then, if the corn farmer trades corn for apples, and the cotton farmer wants apples, the cotton farmer can cash in that IOU and receive some apples. Now, imagine that IOU comes in the form of gold. If both the corn and cotton farmers believe gold is valuable, and are willing to trade their crops for it, it serves as an IOU. Basically, currency works as a placeholder for a commodity. A piece

of paper is worth almost nothing, yet you can enter a Walmart with an \$100 bill and buy almost anything. Why is that bill worth more than any regular piece of paper? Because a large enough group of people believe that the \$100 bill is worth a certain amount and can be traded for a commodity.

However, governments often try to control the value of their currency by manually inflating or deflating it (by printing more or buying it back).³¹³ Although controlling the value of currency is beneficial in some ways, like promoting international trade and investment through fixed exchange rates, giving the government such power is not always good. For example, governments have the power to devalue their own currency. Under the gold standard, countries were restricted in how much money they could print by the amount of gold they had. Since

Nixon moved the US off the gold standard in 1971, the federal government has been able to print as much currency as it wants. Each year, the US government prints some amount of money. This is a main cause of inflation, and why a small amount of money was worth much more decades ago. As the national debt cruises towards \$29 trillion, it seems increasingly likely that the US will eventually have to massively inflate the currency to escape the debt. This inflation would deeply hurt Americans who have money in the form of the US dollar.

Bitcoin attempts to solve those issues with fiat currencies. It is a decentralized currency, meaning that the Bitcoin blockchain is not controlled by any one person or institution. This is the primary advantage to Bitcoin: no single entity controls the amount of currency in circulation in the same way that the federal government controls the dollar or the European Central Bank controls the euro. The value of Bitcoin is determined mainly by how much people believe it is worth. In other words, the value of Bitcoin is determined by the demand for it.

By inflating and deflating the currency, governments forcibly shift supply and demand curves, creating a top-down system in which powerful institutions control the value of the currency. On the other hand, no one controls the supply of Bitcoin; we know exactly how many Bitcoin will be in circulation at any given point in the future. Hence, Bitcoin’s price is determined only by demand, creating a bottom-up system in which consumers determine the value of the currency. Of course, this demand-based currency valuation has drawbacks: if people fall out of love with Bitcoin, or invest in a different cryptocurrency, demand would fall, causing a drop in price. On the other hand, if Bitcoin becomes a more common form of payment, the price will rise as demand grows. For example, when Elon Musk announced that Tesla would begin to accept Bitcoin as payment for cars, and would not convert that Bitcoin to a fiat currency, the price of Bitcoin rose 5.1%.³¹⁴

In essence, the most likely reason you would invest in Bitcoin is that you don’t trust the federal government. If someone did trust the federal government, they would keep money in the dollar. Alternatively, they would invest money in government bonds, essentially arguing that the bond yields, annual interest payments paid to a bond owner, will outpace inflation.

However, if you believe that the federal government might print more money to pay off debt or to allow itself to spend more money, then you might invest in Bitcoin. On the whole, Bitcoin seems like a sustainable business model: in the US, the amount of people who trust the federal government has been continuously declining since 2001.³¹⁵

Another benefit of Bitcoin is lack of competition. Many new cryptocurrencies have been launched since 2008, including Ethereum and Dogecoin. Recently, Facebook has backed Diem, a cryptocurrency controlled by the non-profit Diem Association. In most industries, competition would drastically harm a company. However, in the cryptocurrency space, one can support multiple cryptocurrencies by accepting them as payment, for example, in the same way that one can support the euro and the dollar by accepting either as payment. The fact that cryptocurrency is not a zero-sum industry, meaning that gain for one cryptocurrency does not necessarily mean loss for another, only con-

tributes to Bitcoin’s durability over time.

Bitcoin provides a much-needed alternative to government-issued currency. Before Bitcoin and cryptocurrency, if you didn’t trust the government controlling a currency, the only option was to exchange for a different government-issued currency. The issue is that all government-issued currencies have similar problems, mainly the risk of inflation. However, Bitcoin allows a consumer to hedge against government bureaucracy and massive inflation. As Bitcoin only has to compete against government-issued currency, and trust in government continues to decline, the currency’s value will, in the long-term, strictly increase. **HMR**





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The \$15 Minimum Wage: Help or Hindrance?

Will Bramwell

The fight for a \$15 minimum wage has recently become an important and controversial topic in political discourse. Though it was eventually dropped in the Senate, President Biden attempted to include a \$15 minimum wage provision in his \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill. The policy is touted and has been pushed by several progressive politicians, including the most prominent members of the Progressive movement Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York. However, the minimum wage is in fact a very regressive measure, as it heightens previous economic disparities.

The minimum wage is a regressive measure for two primary reasons. First, it heightens the gap between workers with high and low productivity, ultimately hurting those who are less educated and of lower socioeconomic status. Required to follow a higher minimum wage, employers are forced to keep only those employees whose work would justify such

a wage. As a result, the first jobs to be lost would be those held by workers with the lowest wages, as they are not productive enough to employers to be paid what the new minimum wage mandates. These workers thus find themselves structurally unemployable. As economist and political commentator Thomas Sowell once keenly observed, “Unfortunately, the real minimum wage is always zero, regardless of the laws, and that is the wage that many workers receive in the wake of the creation or escalation of a government-mandated minimum wage.”³¹⁸

Furthermore, what will not be lost in employment will instead be lost in total earnings or benefits like pension or healthcare plans. Often, instead of laying off workers, a business will instead cut their hours. Thus, while many workers hold onto their jobs and their wage rate increases, their real earnings fall. Bernie Sanders, an ardent supporter of the \$15 minimum wage who had boasted of having unionized workers on his campaign trail, learned of

this reality when he was forced to cut the hours of his employees in his presidential campaign as funds dried up.³¹⁹

The minimum wage would also prevent less privileged and educated workers from increasing their productivity. Though in the very short term they are not paid too well, they can in the near future increase their wage by learning the skills of the job and therefore justify a higher wage. This income mobility is seen in the fact that more than two thirds of minimum wage workers earn higher wages within a year of employment.³²⁰ In addition, minimum wage induced unemployment creates a drag on productivity growth, and has been linked to lower income mobility and lower wages in the long run (i.e. over the course of a career) for workers earning the minimum wage.³²¹ By raising the minimum wage, one merely inhibits a process by which young workers get better jobs and higher pay in the future. A fact often ignored by progressive policy makers is that the median age of the minimum wage worker is 24.³²² By

mandating a higher wage, the government in effect prevents these workers from rising up the wage ladder, or even entirely inhibits them from getting jobs and entering the workforce.

As Congress pushes for a \$15 minimum wage, it should be aware of the policy’s potential risks. The Congressional Budget Office estimated in February of 2021 that a minimum wage would permanently eliminate approximately 1.3 to 1.7 million

job reservation left in the building industry, and in the circumstances I support the rate [minimum wage] for the job as the second best way of protecting our white artisans.”³²⁹

This is not to say that advocates of a higher minimum wage are eugenicists or social Darwinists by any stretch of the imagination, but the laws of supply and demand have not been overturned over the course of the 20th century. Raising the price of a good or service above the equilibrium

purchasing power of consumers. A study on McDonald’s by the National Bureau of Economic Research found a “full or near-full price pass-through of minimum-wage-induced higher costs of labor.”³³² This means that the near entirety of the gains in workers’ purchasing power through the minimum wage hike were offset by higher prices. In effect, it would be a regressive tax on consumers, as lower wage workers’ expenditures are proportionally more on

“The minimum wage also heightens existing disparities between small and big businesses. Small businesses are simply unable to pay as high wages as big businesses are, as they lack the billions in funding and resources that big corporations and publicly traded companies possess. Thus they would be crushed by any increase in the minimum wage.”

jobs. Additionally, Congress should consider the disastrous effects of a recent \$13 minimum wage hike in Seattle.³²³ When the Seattle City Council passed a \$13 minimum the total number of hours worked by low wage earners in the city fell by 3.5 million per quarter.³²⁴ On average, these low wage earners lost \$120 per month.³²⁵ Moreover, since the passage of its \$13 minimum wage in April of 2015, Seattle has seen the greatest decrease in the size of its labor force over a three month period in its history, even greater than during the Great Depression or the Great Recession of 2009.³²⁶

Some progressive economists claim that a \$15 minimum wage would not increase unemployment. However, the first minimum wage proposals intended to do exactly that. Some social scientists and economists around the turn of the nineteenth century were growing sick with the free market’s ability to raise the wages and living standards of everyone, regardless of race, color, creed, or previous disposition. Many notable and mainstream economists of the area recognised that instituting a minimum wage would be akin to preventing the “inferiors” from getting jobs and rising through the market. As British socialist Sydney Webb wrote, “Of all ways of dealing with these unfortunate parasites, the most ruinous to the community is to allow them to unrestrainedly compete as wage earners.”³²⁷ A more recent example of racist minimum wage laws can be found in the South African apartheid state.³²⁸ The head of the South African Builders’ Union in 1987 released a statement declaring, “There is no

set by the market inevitably results in less of that good or service being purchased, no matter the intentions of the policy makers.

The minimum wage also has disparate effects across the country. States with lower standard of living costs, typically the poorest states in the US, will face higher unemployment as a result of high minimum wage laws. A study done by the Bureau of Economic Analysis found that a \$15 minimum wage would be the equivalent of over \$20 in states such as South Dakota, Alabama, and Mississippi, but in rich states like New York and California, it would be barely over \$15.³³⁰ The result would be that in comparison to richer states, the poorer ones would become even more poor through increased unemployment. A one size fits all policy makes no sense in such an economically and socially diverse country.

The minimum wage also heightens existing disparities between small and big businesses. Small businesses are simply unable to pay as high wages as big businesses are, as they lack the billions in funding and resources that big corporations and publicly traded companies possess. Thus they would be crushed by any increase in the minimum wage. In fact, Amazon is lobbying for the \$15 minimum wage.³³¹ They are not doing this out of some noble commitment to the common worker, but because it would bankrupt their small business competitors who do not have the hundreds of billions of dollars in resources that Amazon does. Having cornered the market, Amazon would be able to charge high monopoly prices on goods, thereby lowering the

necessities such as food than higher wage workers.

Ultimately, the minimum wage is a bad policy because it targets employment, rather than poverty. If raising the minimum wage were truly a solution to poverty, what is stopping current developing countries from doing so and immediately alleviating economic hardship and disparity? In 2015, the Census Bureau found that out of the people considered in poverty in the United States, 11% worked full time, while 63% did not have jobs at all. Meanwhile, only 2% of all full time workers were considered in poverty.³³³ The solution to alleviating poverty and helping the needy is therefore to make job opportunities less scarce, rather than making them even more difficult to find through a higher minimum wage. A much better government policy would be to streamline welfare services into cash transfers (a universal basic income or negative income tax for example), eliminating the perverse unemployment incentives the current system encourages.

A high minimum wage sounds like it would protect low wage workers from the vicious greed of their employers. However, as Milton Friedman once quipped, “One of the great mistakes is to judge policies by their intentions rather than their results.”³³⁴ In the end, the results of this policy would be that those less productive, less privileged, and less educated workers are hurt most, while big corporations reap the benefits of the minimum wage over their small business competition. **HMR**

Millions of Americans Missing Second Vaccine Doses

RIA CHOWDHRY



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After almost six months since the first American, Sandra Lindsay, received her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, over 263 million Americans have received their first dose. Of those who have received first doses, 116 million are completely vaccinated, over a third of the United States' population.³³⁶ Americans can choose between Moderna and Pfizer, both of which require two doses in order to be considered completely vaccinated, as well as Johnson & Johnson, which only requires one dose. Moderna and Pfizer vaccines have an 95% efficacy rate, while Johnson & Johnson has a 72% overall efficacy. However, the two-dose vaccines only have a 95% efficacy rate with both doses. With only the first shot, the vaccines are not deemed as effective. According to the

Central for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than five million individuals - nearly 8% of Americans - received their first shot of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines and missed their second dose.³³⁷ While there is a portion of the country that is wary of even receiving the first dosage, another problem that health authorities are facing is the growing number of Americans missing the second dosage. Local authorities and the CDC are working on making sure that those who do get inoculated once are completely vaccinated. However, in order to do so, they must identify the root causes of vaccine hesitancy. Over the past few months, multiple reasons have reduced vaccinations. Sometimes individuals believe that they are protected with one dose or are scared of the side effects that

are common with the second dose. Other times, the specific brand of vaccine, Moderna or Pfizer, is unavailable at the location of the second dose or the appointment itself gets canceled. As such, it is clear that there are many logistical factors that influence a person's ability to receive the second dose.³³⁸ To ensure that the United States' population is protected from COVID-19, addressing each of these causes will aid in reducing the number of people missing their second dose.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor, a research project that gauges American adults' response to the vaccines, in December 2020, roughly 13-15% of the American population "definitely would not" get vaccinated and 9% would receive vaccinations only if it became mandated. In April 2020, the number of those who "definitely would not" get vaccinated has remained constant while the percentage of those getting vaccinations if mandated dropped to 6%.³³⁹ Many more Americans fall into the "waiting and seeing" category, indicating that a portion of the United States clearly remains hesitant in receiving the first dose of vaccine. With symptoms such as a fever and chills, the worry of getting sick after the second dose has deterred individuals from taking their next dose. Almost all vaccines have various side effects, some more painful than others. The common side effects after the second dose, chills and high fever, are side effects of almost every other vaccine that adults and children are required to receive.³⁴⁰ Despite this information, many are still worried that these side effects are worse than others.

To add to this problem, the misconception that one is protected after the first dose adds to the number of people who think it is acceptable to miss their second appointment. A single shot of the vaccine triggers a weaker immune response. Even though the first dose does provide protection, it still remains unclear as to how long the protection will last. The science shows that both doses of the vaccine are what protects an individual. Fearing side effects, most of which are common for all vaccines, and believing that one dose is enough is one aspect of the problem that the CDC and health authorities must counter.

A more common reason for missing second doses has been scheduling conflicts and errors on the part of vaccine distributors and providers. Many vaccination sites who ran out of supplies or did not have

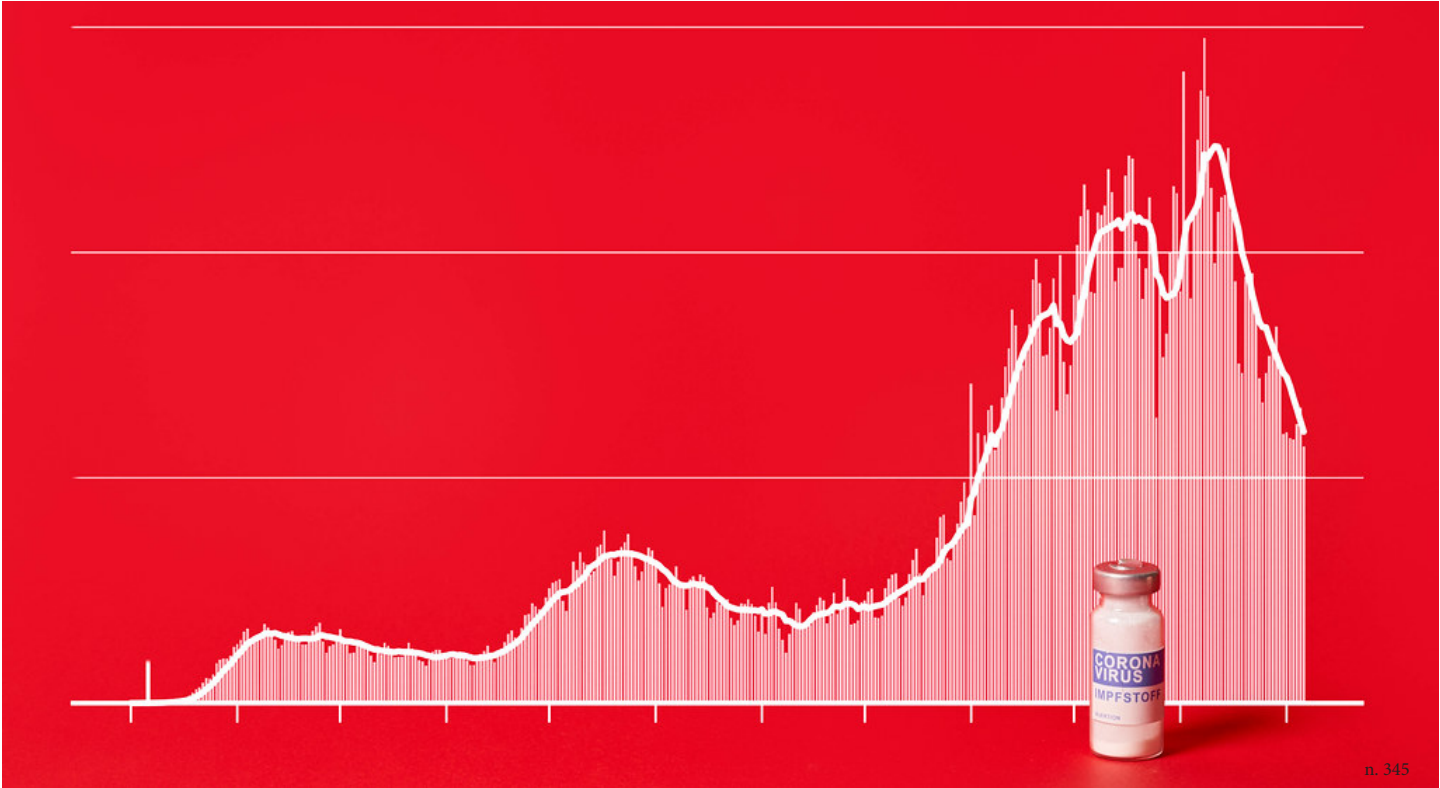
“The science shows that both doses of the vaccine are what protects an individual.”

the right brand in stock were forced to notify recipients that they would be unable to receive their next dose. Many of these individuals then scrambled to find a new location at which they could receive their vaccine, but those locations did not have the right brand or were in limited stock either. Walgreens, currently one of the biggest vaccine providers in the United States, has been under scrutiny as their pharmacies often don't have enough supply and vaccine brands on hand. In Chicago, anywhere from 10 to 20 people have been sent back because the pharmacies only stocked the Moderna vaccine, and they needed a second shot of Pfizer.³⁴¹ Especially since so many are receiving COVID vaccine doses through pharmacies like Walgreens, pharmacies need to be more organized when figuring out appointment schedules and

supplies. If a certain pharmacy online has Moderna, then the provider themselves should not book an appointment for someone who requires Pfizer. The millions of Americans missing vaccines demonstrates that our vaccine providers need to take more responsibility and initiative, especially since these providers signed up to provide millions of Americans with both of their COVID-19 vaccine doses.

All in all, despite millions missing their second dose, the overall percentage of individuals following through with the vaccination process sits at 92%, a record high by historical standards. Compared to shingles, against which only 75% of adults were fully vaccinated, the number of individuals completing their vaccination has been much stronger.³⁴² While the percentage of people missing second doses more than doubled

from 3.4% in February, the CDC said that this gap was to be expected as the eligibility requirements eased and access increased.³⁴³ Currently, many authorities are working on ways to increase access and improve logistics when distributing and providing vaccines, specifically encouraging vaccine providers to carefully look at which brands are being provided at those locations. Ensuring responsibility during this time is especially critical, and as the United States passes the one-third mark, there is much hope for a future of an almost entirely vaccinated population and a return to more normal circumstances.**HMR**



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