Letter From the Editors

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.

We would like to extend special thanks to Avram 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

Table of Contents

Who Won? Who Lost? The 2020 Census and Redistricting Cycle
Eshan Mehere
Justice? Accountability? Punishment? The Derek Chauvin Trial
Zahra Motwani
Republicans’ Automatic Assault on Biden’s Gun Safety Agenda
Ariela Shuchman
The NCAAs Day in Court: How It Went, and What Will Likely Happen Next
Leo Giorgini
COVID-19’s Impact on Global Warming
Rachel Baez
Knight v. Trump and Digital Free Speech
Gavin Song
Should We Pack the Supreme Court?
Simon Schackner
Allison Markman
Why Washington D.C. Needs to Become a State
Samantha Strasser
The Verdict Is In, But Are We Truly Done?
Krish Gandhi
America’s Jobs Plan: Reconceptualizing Infrastructure for a New Century
Isabel Marviles-Calderón

Why Putin is Scared
Ari Rao
China’s Fishing Fleet
Myra Malik
Biden’s Promise to Withdraw US Troops from Afghanistan: Long Overdue or Unwise Grandstanding?
Sophia Liu
QAnon’s Comeback: The Rise of Conspiracy Theory Across European Countries
Maya Westra
Investigating the Johnson & Johnson Vaccine Pause
Sophie Dauer
The COVID-19 Crisis In India
Karam Malhotra
The Unfolding Humanitarian Crisis in Venezuela and Its Effects on Women
Alexa Turteltaub
Comparing Governmental Responses to COVID-19 in India and Australia
Owen Heidings
Benefits of Investing in Bitcoin
Jacob Silverstein
The $15 Minimum Wage: A Help or Hindrance?
Will Bramwell
Millions of Americans Missing Second Vaccine Doses
Ria Chowdhry
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.

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 Carolina. 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.

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. 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. 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.

“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.”

Restrictions on gerrymandering will hurt Republicans, who have relied on the process for decades. 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. Through 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 diverse voters—and recent electoral history, indicate that they will probably move towards the Democrats in the future.

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
Domestic

JUSTICE? ACCOUNTABILITY? PUNISHMENT?

THE DEREK CHAUVIN TRIAL

Zahra Motwani

June 2021

The Derek Chauvin trial

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. In his final moments, Floyd pleaded, "I can't breathe." Floyd's murder sparked another episode in the long history of police brutality against Black Americans. Throughout the video of Floyd's murder, Chauvin appeared indifferent, expressing no remorse as he stole away the life of a fellow American. Though the Minneapolis Police Department had investigated Chauvin for misconduct seventimes before Floyd's death, he was still allowed to wield lethal weapons on May 25th. 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 failed to carry their oath to protect their communities will be held accountable. The trial began on May 25, 2020, four days after Floyd's death, and the verdict wasn't delivered until 11 months after Floyd was killed, following multiple court hearings. 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. 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. 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. 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.

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 jury took ten hours to decide the verdict. While most felt a sense of justice, providing some hope that, after murder 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, the verdict was released. 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.

Activists and prominent individuals from the trial had a variety of perspectives on the verdict. While most felt a sense of justice, 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." 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..."

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." Ben Crump, the attorney 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 bursting 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." 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 acknowledgement and apology of the perpetrator. Without Chauvin's remorse, the verdict is simply punishment. Chauvin may be 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. Society has accepted that punishment is the highest form of consequence, not accountability, because of the lack of responsibility or apologies made by...
Domestic

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.  

Ben Feist, an attorney 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.” 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. And although Chauvin was given consequences for his actions, he did not take personal responsibility, leaving much to be desired. Justice 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 awareness 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
Republican’s 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.

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.” A ghost gun is a kit that contains all of the materials and instructions necessary to function as a firearm in under thirty minutes. 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, as the head of the executive branch renowned for its limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious

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 tar- get 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. 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.

Flag laws are a huge priority for Biden, who has both included them in his executive orders and hopes 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. 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 this can happen soon. 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 in a difficult situation because the most ambitious

Republicans conveniently ignore the flaws in their agenda an originalist 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. Republicans conveniently ignore the flaws in their agenda an originalist 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. Republicans conveniently ignore the flaws in their agenda an originalist 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. Republicans conveniently ignore the flaws in their agenda an originalist 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. Republicans conveniently ignore the flaws in their agenda an originalist 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.

Biden 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.” A ghost gun is a kit that contains all of the materials and instructions necessary to function as a firearm in under thirty minutes. 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, as the head of the executive branch renowned for its limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious

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. 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.

Flag laws are a huge priority for Biden, who has both included them in his executive orders and hopes 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. 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 this can happen soon. 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 in a difficult situation because the most ambitious gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious

Biden 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.” A ghost gun is a kit that contains all of the materials and instructions necessary to function as a firearm in under thirty minutes. 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, as the head of the executive branch renowned for its limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious

Biden 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.” A ghost gun is a kit that contains all of the materials and instructions necessary to function as a firearm in under thirty minutes. 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, as the head of the executive branch renowned for its limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious

Biden 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.” A ghost gun is a kit that contains all of the materials and instructions necessary to function as a firearm in under thirty minutes. 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, as the head of the executive branch renowned for its limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious gun buyback program. Biden’s moves have underscored his limited power to act alone in a difficult situation because the most ambitious
Domestic

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 the argument room is in use or when the justices are in conference.1 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 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 that students must follow is to contract with or make arrangements with agents until they graduate from college.2 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 professional 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 athletics 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 doing them a disservice. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense.

In March 2014, Shawne Alston, a former Virginia varsity football team, filed suit against the NCAA’s legal justifications was an effort to award athletic scholarships which were granted to student-athletes, including his own, in restraint of trade or commerce. “For this reason it is necessary to look at the specific provisions of the Antitrust Act of 1890. The question is whether the NCAA’s practices, as here described, are in restraint of trade or commerce.” 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 the argument room is in use or when the justices are in conference.1 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 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 that students must follow is to contract with or make arrangements with agents until they graduate from college.2 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 professional 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 athletics 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 doing them a disservice. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense.

In March 2014, Shawne Alston, a former Virginia varsity football team, filed suit against the NCAA’s legal justifications was an effort to award athletic scholarships which were granted to student-athletes, including his own, in restraint of trade or commerce. “For this reason it is necessary to look at the specific provisions of the Antitrust Act of 1890. The question is whether the NCAA’s practices, as here described, are in restraint of trade or commerce.” 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 the argument room is in use or when the justices are in conference.1 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 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 that students must follow is to contract with or make arrangements with agents until they graduate from college.2 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 professional 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 athletics 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 doing them a disservice. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense.

In March 2014, Shawne Alston, a former Virginia varsity football team, filed suit against the NCAA’s legal justifications was an effort to award athletic scholarships which were granted to student-athletes, including his own, in restraint of trade or commerce. “For this reason it is necessary to look at the specific provisions of the Antitrust Act of 1890. The question is whether the NCAA’s practices, as here described, are in restraint of trade or commerce.” 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 the argument room is in use or when the justices are in conference.1 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 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 that students must follow is to contract with or make arrangements with agents until they graduate from college.2 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 professional 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 athletics 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 doing them a disservice. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense. As such, this reasoning for their athletic talents, rather than academic credentials, makes more sense.
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. 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 worldwide 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%.

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. Oil and natural gases are essential in manufacturing plastic. 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 raised 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. Other countries went a step further and prohibited residents who carried the virus from sorting their waste. In general, the lack of recycling management increased the landfilling and environmental pollutants worldwide.

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.
Domestic

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 public discourse.

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. 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. That’s not to say that all of Twitter’s users can engage with the public discourse on the platform for digital discourse. In particular, Twitter’s re- ply feature allows any user’s account (provided that it’s public) to act as an interactive public forum.

The answer is yes. Twitter’s reply feature allows any user’s account (provided that it’s public) to act as an interactive public forum. In other words, 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. 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.

Social media companies and their platforms play an increasingly important role in public discourse. There is a tension between increasing access and regulatory powers. That’s not to say that the Knight Institute’s argument has made it easier for us to embrace the incredible ease of access. 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.

The Supreme Court has noted that even the First Amendment does not ordinarily functioning as a 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 public forum. In particular, Trump’s Twitter account is accessible to the public from distorted political discussion.

That fact raises a major question about the role of the judiciary, 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. 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.

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. 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.

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 governor: “Congress shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech.” Twitter, a private company, isn’t legally obligated to follow the First Amendment. There can be some limitations on access to tweeting. It’s the platform itself 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 judgment (declared the previous Circuit Court ruling as no longer legally binding). Associate Justice Clarence Thomas published a concurrence with that ruling—when dismissing a case as moot, a concurrence effectively functions as a sort of up-ed from the judiciary, with no legal standing. 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. 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 and the reality of our reliance on social media for public discourse.

A public official’s account is such a distinct place for exchanging ideas that the Constitution should apply to the account itself but not to 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.

That’s not to say that Trump’s blocking was unconstitutional. While the First Amendment doesn’t apply to Twitter, it’s the Knight Institute’s view that it does apply to public officials’ accounts. A public official’s account is such a distinct place for exchanging ideas that the Constitution should apply to the account itself but not to 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.

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 public discourse?

In the case moot (the case name became Knight v. Trump). 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. That’s not to say that all of Twitter’s users can engage with the public discourse on the platform for digital discourse. In particular, Twitter’s reply feature allows any user’s account (provided that it’s public) to act as an interactive public forum. In other words, 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. 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.

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.” Twitter, a private company, isn’t legally obligated to follow the First Amendment. There can be some limitations on access to tweeting. It’s the platform itself 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 Circuit Court ruling as no longer legally binding). Associate Justice Clarence Thomas published a concurrence with that ruling—when dismissing a case as moot, a concurrence effectively functions as a sort of up-ed from the judiciary, with no legal standing. 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. 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 and the reality of our reliance on social media for public discourse.

A public official’s account is such a distinct place for exchanging ideas that the Constitution should apply to the account itself but not to 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.

That’s not to say that Trump’s blocking was unconstitutional. While the First Amendment doesn’t apply to Twitter, it’s the Knight Institute’s view that it does apply to public officials’ accounts. A public official’s account is such a distinct place for exchanging ideas that the Constitution should apply to the account itself but not to 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.

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 public discourse?

In the case moot (the case name became Knight v. Trump). 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. That’s not to say that all of Twitter’s users can engage with the public discourse on the platform for digital discourse. In particular, Twitter’s reply feature allows any user’s account (provided that it’s public) to act as an interactive public forum. In other words, 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. 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.
Domestic

HOW IS BIDEN DOING SO FAR?

Simon Schackner

W hen 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 made by Vice President Kamala Harris much of the credit Biden deserves here. 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. 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. 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. 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 15,000 active duty service members to aid the effort.

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 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 outside of 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. 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 refugee 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 189 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. 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. 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.
Should We Pack the Supreme Court?

Allison Markman

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

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. Implementing term limits to the position would require a constitutional 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 lifetime, and to change this rule, we would have to change the Constitution. Amend- ing 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. 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 vote of the House and Senate, and three-quarters of the states. This explains why Demo- crats 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 attempted to add more justices to the court to help in passing his New Deal legislation. 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.
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.
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 eyes of witnesses. 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 manslaughter. The country rejoiced and impartially over two days to arrive at a moment of equality inched closer to justice in one of the largest courtrooms to White House to other degree manslaughter. The country rejoiced.

But Are We Truly Done?
The notion of defunding transpired out reorganizing the law enforcement agencies. "Defunding" can be compared meticulous discourses by 38 a Black life, and therefore, is worth an effort. President Joe Biden has proposed 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. Safe Summer NY launched by Mayor de Blasio that will launch safe parks and gang-free zones in 31 sites across the North. The 1990s once again saw police enforcing racial segregation, sometimes with the help of Ku 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. Interestingly enough, approximately 1000 people are killed every year by the police. 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, 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 before reaching the courts, and therefore, may entail extended delays. Besides the collaboration challenges, 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.

Besides the collaboration challenges, the mission 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 defunding, they do not fully agree on issues such as qualified immunity. The bill stalled in the Senate, President Joe Biden is urging Congress to resolve the stalemate before the first death anniversary of the man who lent his name to it. Whether Karen Bass, Democratic Representative from California 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 added fuel to the fire of collaboration, accountability and training, 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 other community-organized efforts, will clearly create room for inclusivity and diverse voices. At the same time, achieving consistency in the enforcement of a Black life will be a challenging work, and other coordination hurdles when many organizations are involved. For instance, each case may pass through several hands and 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 insulated 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. The police force itself and the history of an uneven justice system 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 evolved from 1800s slave patrols in the South and colonial watch programs in the North. Interestingly enough, “I can’t breathe” to a police officer who forced his knee on this handcuffed man’s neck, this reform can revolutionize the way the 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

The Horace Mann Review  Vol. XXX  JUNE 2021

Domestic

23

22

"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."
THE HORBRE ANN Review | VOL. XXX

24

June 2021

25

Domestic

Domestic

America’s Jobs Plan: Recommitment Infrastructure for a New Century

Isabel Mavrides-Calderón

The pandemic has had a devastating economic and human impact across the United States, high-lighting 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. In the aftermath of America’s Rescue Plan, President Joe Biden recently proposed an ambitious two-trillion-dollar infrastructure plan to further his vision for America.1 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.2 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.3 For example, the Hill, reported that “Biden’s proposal includes repairing 20,000 miles of roads and 10,000 bridges, expand-
O n 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 protests earlier that year, which Russia de­clared void, and it became clear that Russia’s military buildup was solely for purposes of intimida­tion, Putin was scared. He’s scared about his record-low polling for the upcoming election; 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 pulled 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 legacy he had with Trump. 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. However, Russia’s most telling response to US sanctions was his 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 railed anti-West sentiment by condemning Biden’s comment that Putin is a “killer.”

By attacking Biden’s mental health and ra­llying anti-West sentiment by accusing the US of interference in neighboring coun­tries, 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. 147 By going back to his familiar tactics for stressful situations, Putin has shown that he is scared and that the US 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 1%, 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. 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. 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 Russian 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 fraudulently destroyed evidence of KGB espionage activities while his commanders refused his requests for contact amidst the chaos. Years later, in 2004, Putin found himself again powerless to respond to the anti-Russian Orange Rev­olution in Ukraine. Putin’s experience with these revolutions led him to vow “never again.”148 He responded swiftly with mili­tary force to the 2005 Georgian Revolution and the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution, and in 2016 he created the 350,000-man-strong Russian National Guard as a response to growing international instability. Following un­di­rected by him and led by his former per­sonal bodyguard. The creation of this per­sonal army shows that beneath his facade, Putin is truly scared of revolution.149 And now, he has more to be scared of than ever, as Russia has experienced unprecedented social unrest caused by the actions of the 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 international­al 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.150 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.151 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.152 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, of that 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.
n 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.195 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.196 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.197 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.198 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 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.199 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.200 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.201 Chinese fishing off the Argentinian coast has similarly hurt the food chain in that area—Greenpeace concluded in 2019, this type of fishing has “devastated” the Argentinian coast’s seabed.202

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. Aixin, a fishing town in Ghana, has suffered greatly from the loss of income and resources to Chinese fishing.203 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 fisherman. 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.204 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 countries’ 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.205 China has also invested billions of dollars into Ghana’s infrastructure, in exchange for access to the same value of natural resources.206 At surface-level it may seem generous, but the power dynamic built by a very rich country and a much poorer one—as is 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.207 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.208 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 self-sufficiency.

China’s fishing practices in the neighboring countries have become more approachable than the U.S., which has been known to use intimidation and ‘strings-attached’ policies in the way of aid.209 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.210 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 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.208 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
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 $11.5 billion of that money was wasted in part to fraud and abuse.193 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.194 One such example of the United States aligning with shady figures was their relationship with Mohammad Qasim Fahim Khan, a Tajik military commander well known for his brutality.195 Despite his violent history, the United States invited him to the Pentagon and even greeted him with the ceremonial guard.196

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. 197 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 the war between the Taliban and government forces.198 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 2001.199 The drop in numbers has largely been due to the Trump administration, which was also planning on fully withdrawing soldiers from Afghanistan.200 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 definitive 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 successful-ly. 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 counter narcotics in the past.201 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 similar level of self-sufficiency.202 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.203 Education for females is also extremely low, with most girls receiving barely any schooling.204 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.205 If these prerequisites are met, Biden’s plan to bring soldiers back home is a neces-sary 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. 

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.” Since Biden’s speech, Republicans and Democrats alike have attacked his remarks for their risks to the American people. Although former President George W. Bush and Barack Obama both vocally support his decision, their endorse-ments have not swayed everyone’s opin-ion.206 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.”207 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.208 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.209 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”210 is simply untrue, as the President is only changing the status of the U.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.211 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.”212 Instead of Afghanistan, countries like Somalia, Mali, and Yemen, where terrorist groups like al-Shabab and other affiliates with ISIS and Al-Qaeda are growing in power and prominence, making them the real threats.213 If troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan, the United States will have more soldiers and resources to stop real threats internally and externally. 

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.214 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 the war between the Taliban and government forces.215 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 2001.216 The drop in numbers has largely been due to the Trump administration, which was also planning on fully withdrawing soldiers from Afghanistan.217 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 definitive 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 counter narcotics in the past.218 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 similar level of self-sufficiency.219 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.220 Education for females is also extremely low, with most girls receiving barely any schooling.221 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.222 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.
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. 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. 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. 

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. 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. The riot came as a result of QAnon’s theories about Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany. QAnon took notice of the 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. 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 QAnon 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. Many European countries and South Africa followed similar paths to the U.S., temporarily halting the vaccine and then implementing a warning with its distribution. As the United States and other parts of the world begin to enter a new phase in vaccination, 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 blood clots. 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. Although the risk of death 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. 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 public 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. 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. 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.

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. Not only was April 13th the height of vaccinations, but it was also the date that health officials 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. 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 definitively 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. Given that only around 150 million people have been vaccinated in the U.S., according to Anthony 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. 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 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. 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 safety 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 doses administered globally, while the United States, accounting for about 4% of the world’s population, accounts for almost 30% of doses. Another perspective is that the rejection of the J&J vaccine by rich countries like the U.S. could make developing 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.

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

The Horace Mann Review | Vol. XXX

June 2021
THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN INDIA

Karam Malhotra

Regular travelers to India, who are used to the government's inertiadeadlines, 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 unhouse, is almost impossible to effectively quarantine everyone in India. 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. In tandem with the lack of health infrastructure, COVID has become so devastating that India cannot accurately quantify the death count. While with a population of over 31 million, and a high infection rate, Delhi has become a very difficult place to avoid the virus. But 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. 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 18% of the world's population, has saved the world from disaster by bringing the situation under control.” 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 Institute of Medical Sciences, having stated that he was concerned that there was no downward trend in the coronavirus data. These lifted restrictions brought the arrival of 3,900 reported cases in just 24 hours. Ab- surdly, 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.” 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 af- fected, other cities reacted strongly and re- duced transmission. So, everywhere else, the doubling time got longer, but in some Indian cities it is short.” 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. 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 ev- ery corner of the country”. He further states that India is completely self-reliant and is actually helping other countries with vac- cines. 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. The prime minister’s plan was in shambles as the sec- ond wave of COVID approached, and Indi- an 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 rush to procure as many vaccines as possible. The craze to procure vaccines from a dwindling supply led to more conflict. 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 vac- cines 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.

If you are unlucky enough to get a seri- ous 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 Chuanzhong Logistics. 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 any- one. 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. Supriya Sharma and her colleagues, Arunabh Saikia and Vijayta Lalwani, called for help by dismissing them as false griev- ances. They have exacerbated the situa- tion by stating that the state governments were pandering to the public by spending more on Muslim graveyards than Hindu cremation grounds, further dividing the population. Uniting the popula- tion against COVID the Prime Minister is pitting the Hindus against the Muslims. The apathy displayed by the Indian gov- ernment during and before the surge of COVID in India exhibits the ineptitude of the government. While the task of quar- antining a country with over 1.3 billion citizens is certainly very difficult especial- ly with a large homeless population, the insufficient effort from the government made it clear that the fault of the crisis lies with the government.
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.1 Let that statistic sink in, because that is more than twenty-five million people.2

Nicolás Maduro claimed to be 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 Venezuelans, 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 2015.3

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.

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 sank 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.4 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.5 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.6 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.

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. It is 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 relationships between morals and international relations.
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. India is being hit harder by the virus for multiple 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. 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. Subsequently, COVID-19 restrictions began to lessen. Prime Minister Narendra Modi stayed silent on the situation until April 20, launching “a number of emergency measures to relieve the burden on states and hospitals.” 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.” 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. 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.” 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. 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. Second, it led 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 required most businesses to shut down. Police checkpoints were imposed on highways to ensure residents were not traveling more than 25 kilometers from their homes, and offenders faced a fine of up to $1,300. 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.” 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. 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

“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.”
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.

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.

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, 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 gold 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). 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 decide to 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 fiat currency, the price of Bitcoin rose 51%. 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.

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.

Another benefit of Bitcoin is lack of government intervention. Each year, the US government prints some amount and can be traded for a commodity. 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 decide to 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 fiat currency, the price of Bitcoin rose 51%.

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.
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. 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.”119

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. Bernice Sanders, an ardent supporter of the $15 minimum wage who had boasted of having unionized workers on his campaign trail, learned this reality when he was forced to cut the hours of his employees in his presidential campaign as funds dried up.120

The minimum wage would also prevent employers 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.121 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.122 By raising the minimum wage, the unemployed should be able to train in the circumstances I support the rate [minimum wage] for the job as the second best way of protecting our white artisans.”123

This is not to say that advocates of a higher minimum wage are ergonomics experts 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 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.”123

The $15 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.124

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 low wage earners from doing so and immediately alleviating economic hardship and disparity? In 2013, 2% of all full time workers were considered to be living in poverty.125 The solution to alleviating poverty is 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 direct cash transfers (a universal basic income or negative income tax for example), eliminating the pervasive 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 of judges is to judge policies by their intentions rather than their results.”126 In other words, judges might determine that it is not the employers’ intent to be 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

After almost six months since the first American, Sandra Linday, 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. Americans can choose between Moderna and Pfizer, both of which require two doses in order to be considered completely vaccinated. As such, it is clear that there are many logistical factors that influence a person’s ability to receive the second dose. To ensure that the United States’ population is protected from COVID-19, addressing each of these causes will aid in reducing the number of Americans 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%. Many more Americans fall into the “wait 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. 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. The science shows that both doses of the vaccine are what protects an individual.

...