

# Fair Observer

## Monthly





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# Fair Observer Monthly



December 2020

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

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Our education arm runs training programs on subjects such as digital media, writing and more. In particular, we inspire young people around the world to be more engaged citizens and to participate in a global discourse.

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## Why Do Latinos Vote for Trump?

Vinicius Bivar  
December 2, 2020

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### **Why did Latino communities vote for Donald Trump, a candidate who made anti-immigration policies a staple of his administration?**

**D**ebates about the role of the Latino vote have become somewhat of a tradition in the United States. As campaigns begin to trace their strategies for the upcoming elections, the topic is brought up by political strategists, scholars and pundits who attempt to project the electoral behavior of these communities.

Their concern is not unfounded. In the last two decades, populations broadly defined as “Latino” have claimed an increasing share of the US electorate, particularly in battleground states like Florida.

This trend is not equally celebrated by both sides of the aisle. As a group, Latino voters have traditionally leaned toward the Democratic Party, fueling hopes that the increasing share of Latinos among the US electorate would translate into growing support for Democratic presidential candidates even in states known for being Republican strongholds, such as Texas.

This narrative gained further momentum in the current electoral cycle as many expected Latinos to reject Donald Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric. However, the results of the 2020 presidential election suggest that changing demographics might not be enough to shield US politics against the next Donald Trump.

### **Who Are the Latino Voters?**

Understanding these voters in their complexity and diversity is no easy task. At times, even establishing who belongs in the Latino category is a matter of contention. For instance, most dictionary definitions of the term “Latino” would

encompass Brazilian Americans as they define Latino as “a person of Latin American origin living in the U.S.” However, the US Census Bureau (USCB) — and some Brazilians themselves — would disagree. The USCB establishes no clear distinction between the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic,” privileging the narrower definition that emphasizes the Spanish linguistic heritage rather than geopolitical criteria.

This conflict of definitions is a sample of the challenges facing scholars and analysts who attempt to predict how the Latino vote will shape US elections in the future. Rather than being a monolith, Latinos are a diverse group with distinctive priorities, interests and political views. In fact, only a quarter of Latinos use the term to describe themselves, with most preferring to be identified by the country of origin of their families. Among those who have Spanish as the dominant language in the countries of origin, almost 70% claim Hispanics in the US cannot be described as having a single shared culture.

Diversity is also a hallmark of these communities in the realm of politics. Although minoritarian, some Hispanics have a history of commitment to the Republican Party and were instrumental in securing Republican candidates around a third of the Hispanic vote at least since the reelection of Richard Nixon in 1972.

Again, in 2020, electoral results appear to have followed that trend, with 32% of Latinos voting for Donald Trump, an increase of 4% compared to 2016 results, while Joe Biden performed on par with Hillary Clinton, securing around 66% of the Latino vote.

Despite President Trump’s gains this year, most Latinos still vote Democrat and, as they become a greater share of the US electorate, this should benefit Democratic candidates in the future. Nonetheless, given the peculiarities of the US electoral system, projecting the influence of Latino voters on the outcome of an election based solely on national voting trends can be misleading.

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Beyond convincing voters of their ideas, candidates must also persuade them to actually cast their ballots as voting in the US is not mandatory and turnout is usually low. Furthermore, as elections are decided by a few battleground states, the candidates' performance in these is more critical to the outcome of an election than the nationwide popular vote, as we have seen in 2000 with George W. Bush and in 2016 with Donald Trump.

If we account for these two variables, turnout and performance in key states, Latinos have sent a mixed message during the 2020 electoral cycle. In the state of Georgia, turnout among Latinos doubled when compared to 2016, with many of those votes going for Joe Biden. In Gwinnett County, a precinct with a high concentration of Latinos, Biden widened the Democratic margin by 46%, earning 75% of the votes in the county. Young Latinos also helped flip the state of Arizona, which hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential nominee since Bill Clinton in 1996; Biden won here by a tight margin of little more than 10,000 votes.

However, Trump made significant inroads among Latino voters in important Democrat strongholds in southern Florida and in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, two of the states which account for the highest number of electoral votes in the country.

### **Latinos for Trump**

The surge in support for Donald Trump among Latinos in Florida and Texas was received with surprise by many observers of US politics. Prior to the election, expectations were that the Latino turnout would actually increase Democratic margins in those states and potentially flip them in favor of Joe Biden.

Yet precisely the opposite occurred. But why did Latino communities in these states vote for Donald Trump, a candidate who made anti-immigration policies a staple of his administration?

As one would expect, the reasons are manifold, and among them, partisanship is one

that is often overlooked. Voters in the United States are historically polarized along party lines, and the gap between Democrats and Republicans has grown even wider in recent years. Latinos are no exception. As the data from the University of Texas at Austin shows, Latinos in Texas who identify as Republican are almost twice more likely to forego concerns about Trump's immigration policies than non-Republican Latinos.

Data from Florida also shows strong partisan identification, in particular among Cuban Americans, who make up the largest share of Latino voters in southern Florida. According to the Pew Research Center, 58% of Cuban American registered voters identify as Republicans. In Miami-Dade, the most populous county in Florida, approximately 55% of Cuban Americans voted for Donald Trump in 2020.

In addition to partisanship, Trump's performance among Latino voters in Florida and Texas can be attributed to effective signaling strategies on issues that resonated with specific groups of voters in these communities. In Miami-Dade, for instance, Trump's tougher stance against "socialism" was a major driver of engagement and one the president exploited well.

Since taking office in 2017, Trump courted Cuban Americans unhappy with the normalization of diplomatic relations with Havana under the Obama administration. He announced the reversal of President Barack Obama's Cuba policy at a rally in the neighborhood of Little Havana in 2017, in a clear bid to increase his support among Cuban American voters.

During his presidency, Trump also wooed Venezuelan Americans by posting pictures on Twitter with Lillian Tintori, the wife of Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, and recognizing the shadow government of Juan Guaidó. In the days leading up to the 2020 election, disinformation campaigns in Spanish circulated widely on social platforms like WhatsApp, portraying Joe Biden as a socialist and associating the Democratic candidate with

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the autocratic regimes of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

In Texas, home of the country's second-largest Mexican American community, Trump's message also resonated with Latinos who embraced the state's conservative ethos. Tejanos, as some prefer to be called, traditionally lean more Republican than their counterparts in other states and seem very much in tune with the attitudes of their fellow Texans when it comes to religion, abortion, support for law enforcement and gun rights.

However, it was in the Democratic stronghold of the Rio Grande Valley, along the border with Mexico, that Trump registered his largest gains. In Zapata, a county dependent on the jobs created by the oil and gas industry, claims that Biden would ban fracking helped Trump flip the county red for the first time in almost a century.

Trump benefited greatly from a strong engagement of local Republicans who tailored his message to the issues most affecting these communities. Caravans of pickup trucks, the so-called "Trump Trains," drove around the region praising Trump's "pro-business" views and warning against "liberals" who want to "defund the police."

Those were powerful messages in a region where 14% of local residents, most of them Latinos, are self-employed and many others work in law enforcement, including border patrol and immigration enforcement. The result was an astounding loss of 16% on average in the regions' four counties, reducing the Democratic margin from Hillary Clinton's 44% to only 11% for Joe Biden.

This time, Donald Trump's inroads among Latino voters did not win him reelection. However, his performance showed yet again that the increasingly diverse make-up of the US electorate, when combined with the peculiarities of the US electoral system, is no antidote against far-right trends.

For those concerned with the state of US democracy, Democrats and Republicans alike, the 2020 presidential election should sound the

alarm against essentializing narratives that take groups as diverse as Latino voters for granted.

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## **Agriculture Is India's Ray of Hope in Time of Crisis**

Devinder Sharma  
December 3, 2020

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**The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that agriculture could be the unlikely sector that spurs economic growth in India.**

**A**s India completes 73 years of independence, agriculture has emerged as a mainstay of the economy. Despite the COVID-19 crisis, Indian agriculture is poised to grow by an estimated 3% in 2020-21. Shaktikanta Das, the governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), has acknowledged that agriculture remains a "beacon of hope" at a time the economy is shrinking.

The government has announced a new agricultural policy that has drawn both supporters and detractors. Farmer protests have broken out in parts of the country. About 50,000 have marched to New Delhi from the agrarian state of Punjab, objecting to the loosening of price, storage and sales regulations that have traditionally shielded India's farmers from the free market forces.

As of August 25, the International Monetary Fund projected India's real GDP growth to be 4.5% in 2020. This shrinking of the economy in a country with a growing population could lead to a major crisis. Already, jobs are scarce, industrial production has declined, services have suffered and demand has plummeted. Even after decades of independence, agriculture remains "the largest

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source of livelihoods in India.” As India gears up to celebrate Mahatma Gandhi’s 151st birthday, there is no better time than now to achieve the Gandhian vision of rural self-reliance.

### **Blessing in Disguise**

COVID-19 has made rural areas more important than ever. On March 25, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown. It took the country by surprise. Millions of urban migrant workers were left with little choice but to walk home to their villages. Carrying their meager household possessions and with their small children in tow, many walked hundreds of kilometers, suffering thirst, hunger and pain. Some died en route.

India’s Economic Survey 2016-17 estimated the “annual inter-state migration [to be] about 5-6.5 million between 2001 and 2011.” In 2020, this migration has been reversed. People who fled rural areas for urban jobs have returned home. Chinmay Tumble, a professor of economics at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad and an expert on migration, estimates that 30 million migrants might have returned to their villages since the lockdown began. The number could be as high as 70-80 million if reverse intrastate migration is accounted for.

The reverse migration from urban to rural areas might be a blessing in disguise. Over the last few decades, urban migration has led to overcrowding of cities, the proliferation of slums and much misery for poor migrants. In cities, they have lacked community, cultural moorings and social safety nets. The massive migration to India’s cities was a result of failed economic policies that focused on megacities while neglecting villages. Several studies have found that at least 60% to 70% of the migrant workers who returned to their native places are unlikely to return back to the cities, at least not in the near future. The millions of migrant workers, whom I refer to as agricultural refugees, flocked to cities because the government’s economic policies kept them impoverished.

A recent study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in collaboration with ICRIER, a New Delhi-based think tank, concluded that Indian farmers suffered a cumulative loss of Rs. 45 lakh crore (over \$600 billion) between 2000 and 2016-17 because of such policies. Subsequently, the NITI Aayog, a policy think tank of the government of India, admitted that, between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the growth in real farm incomes was less than 0.5% every year. It was 0.44% to be exact.

Since then, the growth in real farm incomes has been near zero. With farm incomes growing painfully slowly and then stagnating, what else could be expected from the rural workforce but migration to cities where menial jobs as daily wage workers give many the only shot at survival?

### **Hardships**

Despite these hardships, Indian farmers have toiled hard to produce a bumper harvest year after year. This has led to overflowing food stocks. Reports show that this abundance of food grains has come in handy. The government has been able to provide subsidized rations to over 720 million people during the four months of the post-COVID-19 lockdown. In addition, the government has been able to provide free rations to the needy.

A buoyant agricultural output has hidden a severe agrarian crisis. Farmers get little money for their produce. With less money available in their hands, rural demand has dipped. This had led to a slowdown in the Indian economy even prior to the lockdown. In a country where the agricultural workforce accounts for nearly 50% of the population, the surest way to bolster the economy is to create more rural demand. This involves providing farmers with decent incomes.

The lockdown has increased downward pressure on farm incomes. It coincided with the rabi (winter crop) harvest season and resulted in a crash in demand for winter produce. Farmers suffered huge losses in the case of perishables such as vegetables, fruits, flowers, poultry, dairy

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and fish. Not all news is grim though. On May 15, the United States Department of Agriculture estimated that India is on course to produce “a record 295.7 million metric tons, with estimated record rice, wheat and corn production.”

For the next kharif (monsoon crop) season, the sowing area coverage of summer crops has increased by 13.92% as compared to last year. With rains expected to be normal, and with a much higher area under cultivation, the kharif harvest will be bountiful just like the rabi one. It seems that in these times of crisis, agriculture alone provides a ray of hope in India.

### **Aim for an Economic New Normal**

The coronavirus pandemic has come as a timely reminder of the limitations of dominant economic thinking. Its inherent bias and blind spots stand exposed. For the last two centuries and more, economics has sacrificed agriculture on the altar of industry. The dominant assumption is that industry drives productivity and growth.

India has never quite managed to industrialize like, for example, the US or China. Still, it has kept farm incomes low and neglected public investment in agriculture for many decades. As per the RBI, this investment hovered around 0.4% of the GDP between 2011-12 and 2017-18. It is little surprise that agriculture has floundered in India.

The time has come to change outdated economic thinking. Agriculture matters to India because it employs a majority of the country’s population. It provides food security to 1.3 billion people whose ancestors suffered repeated famines until a few decades ago. COVID-19 gives the country the opportunity to return not to normal, but to a new normal.

The return of migrant labor to villages gives India the opportunity to reinvigorate its rural economy. The country must tap the socioeconomic wealth of rural enterprise, its diversity, and the traditional knowledge base. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat — a self-reliant India — can only be achieved through a focus on agriculture.

A sharp focus, sensible policies and public investment can unleash growth not only in the sector but also in the country.

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**\*Devinder Sharma** is an award-winning Indian journalist, writer, thinker and researcher.

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## **Iran’s Revenge Against Israel Will Be a Long Game**

Ian McCredie  
December 4, 2020

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**Tehran will not jeopardize its strategic goals for the short-term satisfaction of a revenge attack for Israel’s assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.**

**M**ohsen Fakhrizadeh, shot dead by a remote-controlled weapon on November 27 in Iran’s capital Tehran, was the fifth nuclear scientist that the Mossad, Israel’s intelligence agency, has assassinated over the past 13 years. He joins a list of dozens killed by Israeli special forces over the last five decades in the occupied territories and abroad. For many years, most of the targets were Palestinian activists or “terrorists,” but also included others deemed “enemies.” Now, the Mossad is focused on killing the leaders of the Iranian nuclear industry.

As a general rule, the Mossad clears its lines with Washington before conducting such operations to avoid accidentally assassinating CIA penetration agents. Israel would of course have considered the imminent departure of President Donald Trump in the timing of the killing of Fakhrizadeh. The Mossad could guarantee that Trump would not veto the operation, so there was a strong incentive to do it before January 20, when Joe Biden’s inauguration takes place. Biden is going to

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attempt the complicated task of trying to revive the Iran nuclear deal and would have prevented the operation from going ahead to avoid even more difficulty with Tehran.

However, the chance to kill Fakhrizadeh was undoubtedly fleeting, the result of a chain of coincidences — just as the opportunity for the US to assassinate General Qassem Soleimani back in January suddenly materialized. For this reason, still having Trump in the White House was fortuitous.

Israel conducts its extra-territorial executions with total impunity. No retaliatory action, such as the expulsion of Mossad officers for example, ever follows. One notorious Mossad operation was the 1990 killing of Gerald Bull, the Canadian scientist who was shot in his apartment in Belgium. Bull had been engaged, at a price of \$25 million, by Saddam Hussein to help build the Big Babylon “supergun” Baghdad had hoped would be capable of firing satellites into orbit or “blinding” spy satellites, as well as having the potential to fire projectiles from Iraq into Israel. After the assassination, Belgium took no action.

Only Vladimir Putin’s Russia comes close to Israel — and only then a very distant second — in terms of the number of political assassinations it conducts. By contrast, Russia is heavily sanctioned for its actions.

The leading scientists and engineers working in the Iranian nuclear industry or ballistic missile program will all be on the Mossad’s death list. Also on the list will be the leaders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Iranian intelligence services and the leaders of Iranian military operations in Iraq and Syria. The Mossad launches highly complex and detailed operations to identify such individuals and to track every detail of their personal lives — where they live and work, what their interests are, which restaurants they like, where they go hiking, who their friends are — anything that might provide an opportunity for a strike.

The Mossad uses human sources, communications intercepts and social engineering on social media to gather this information.

Anyone on its list foolish enough to have a GPS tracker in their phone should not be surprised if a drone appears and fires at them.

Iran knows that Israel is not going to stop its murderous campaign. Tehran may anticipate that the Biden administration will at least try to slow down this strategy of targeted attacks while he tries some sort of rapprochement with the Iranian regime. But Iranians are chess players, and have been for thousands of years; they think strategically and several moves ahead. Iran’s rulers will not jeopardize their strategic goals for the short-term satisfaction of a revenge attack. That can wait.

First Iran wants to consolidate its positions in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and remove some, if not all, of the US sanctions. Iran also wants to hurry the remaining US forces in Iraq out of the country. There is also a larger strategic dimension. Iran and the Gulf are well aware the US is in retreat from the region. Moreover, the Gulf monarchies are bleeding money as a result of profligate spending and what appears to be a permanent downward shift in the demand and price for oil. They can no longer afford the monstrously wasteful spending on US arms nor rely on the US defense shield that goes with it.

The alternative is an accommodation with Iran, perhaps even a security dialogue. That is the carrot. The stick that Iran also wields is that if the Gulf chooses to continue or escalate confrontation, then Iran can wipe out their oil processing refineries and loading terminals — and the vital desalination plants — in an afternoon. The devastating but deliberately restricted missile attack on the Abqaiq oil processing facility in September 2019 was a clear signal of what might be expected if Iran is cornered. This realization following the Abqaiq attack prompted the immediate opening of backchannel communications between UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Those lines will surely be humming with excuses and special pleading in the aftermath of the Fakhrizadeh assassination. This moment could be the high-water mark of the failed US

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campaign of “maximum pressure” and the Trump administration’s disastrous Middle Eastern policy.

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**\*Ian McCredie** is a former senior British foreign service official and was the head of corporate security for Shell International.

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## **Brazil Rejects Bolsonaro’s Anti-Politics**

Karin Schmalz  
December 9, 2020

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**There is a long road before Brazil’s 2022 presidential race, but local election results suggest poor prospects for Jair Bolsonaro’s destructive politics.**

**M**unicipal elections in Brazil were rarely the subject of international media attention before 2016. That year, growing political unrest culminated in President Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in August, and the October elections brought in a wave of far-right politicians aligned to the rising power of Jair Bolsonaro. Rio de Janeiro elected an evangelical bishop, Marcelo Crivella, and Jair Bolsonaro’s son, Carlos Bolsonaro, won the city councilor run-off by over 100,000 votes, a record for Rio.

The world watched in awe as the “Tropical Trump,” as Jair Bolsonaro is often referred to, went from strength to strength and took power democratically in Latin America’s largest economy. This was the impact of local elections in Brazil.

### **Local Power**

If only interesting to the world because of the global surge in far-right politics that contaminated Brazil (arguably aided by social

media) in the 2010s, the country’s municipal elections are extremely important because most social policies are enacted within municipalities, which are guaranteed ample managerial autonomy. Consequently, it is also at the municipal level that most resources are embezzled by corrupt officials who understand that perfect oversight by the federal government is nearly impossible in such vast territory.

Voter turnout is generally over 80%, and cities witness months of electoral campaigns on radio, TV and in print media. Mayoral candidates in the country’s largest cities end up being recognized state and nationwide, and many will go on to resign their office and run in state and presidential elections.

Brazil just held its largest elections ever to choose mayors, vice mayors and city councilors in 5,567 municipalities. Over half a million candidates ran for 67,840 political offices. On November 15, in the first round of elections, 113 million of the nearly 148 million eligible voters went to polling stations, with 34 million claiming one of the exemptions to abstain from mandatory voting.

High abstention rates were expected due to the novel coronavirus pandemic and were the highest in 20 years. There were fewer blank and null ballots than in the last municipal elections in 2016, but these surpassed the number of votes for the winner in 483 municipalities, including state capitals.

On November 29, 57 municipalities with over 200,000 inhabitants, including 18 state capitals and the two largest cities in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, picked their winners in the second round. These municipal elections were the first since Bolsonaro — not representing any party — took power in January 2019. Some observers expected that the elections could push the country definitively into the hands of the far right as polls showed a 40% approval rate of Bolsonaro’s government. Others saw how important these elections were for Bolsonaro’s hold on power — and how uncertain his victory.

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## Blood on the Campaign Trail

Three political fields were vying for power in municipalities all over the country: the far-right, headed by the president and his supporters; the left, including center-left parties, which have been facing a crisis since Rousseff's impeachment; and the traditional right, including center-right parties, which have lost some power with the arrival of the far-right wave. With 33 official political parties, alliances are crucial to winning office, and parties with apparently conflicting ideologies often join forces in municipalities all over the country.

The Brazilian political spectrum is so complex that a 2017 report by the BBC tried to fit the country's parties onto a political map by analyzing how their members voted in the national congress. The report confirmed that most left-wing parties vote for progressive ideas, that the majority of right-wing parties adopt more conservative views, but that centrist parties change between progressive and conservative positions depending on the state of (power) play.

The 2020 campaign season saw a record number of candidates representing Bolsonaro's anti-political ideology, posing with guns for campaign photos and advocating violence. There was a 34% increase in evangelical candidates, usually representing the far right, and a more visible presence of priests of Afro-Brazilian religions with more progressive ideas, who faced aggressive resistance from evangelicals. On the other hand, there were record numbers of women, LGBTQI+ as well as black and Indigenous candidates, with the number of black and mixed-race candidates surpassing the number of white candidates for the first time.

Analysts explain these numbers as an effect of Bolsonaro's rule: While far-right candidates feel empowered to expose their extreme ideology, oppressed groups form social movements to fight back from a position of power.

Violence in municipal elections has always been a common occurrence on the campaign trail in Brazil, and a record was reached in 2016 with the surge of the far right. This year again

witnessed unprecedented political violence, with 25 candidates assassinated during the campaign season, in a phenomenon caused, according to researchers, by the current administration's normalization of political violence. In Guarulhos, in Greater Sao Paulo, a shooter fired several bullets into a city council candidate while he was live streaming on social media. If one counts militants also killed during the campaign, the number of casualties rises to 82, with militias allegedly involved in a number of cases.

Violence has been used by conservatives against women to limit their political participation. This has come as a reaction by the religious right to the implementation of the law that mandates that a minimum of 30% of all candidates must be women. Political violence continued past the first round and plagued run-off disputes, with some murders happening after the polls closed. The increase in violence was particularly pronounced in states where rich landowners are involved in politics as well as in the poorer states of the north and northeast regions.

Disinformation was broadly used as a campaign tool, a trend that started with the 2013 protests. With over 140 million internet users, Brazil suffered an epidemic of fake news before the elections, with progressive politicians being the target of misleading information being spread on social media. In 2018, a congressional commission uncovered a large operation headed by Carlos Bolsonaro to spread disinformation, the so-called "Cabinet of Hate," responsible for organizing demonstrations against the federal supreme court.

The security chief of the president's office and former head of the infamous UN peacekeeping forces in Haiti, General Augusto Heleno, floated the idea that Indigenous peoples, with the help of foreign powers, were sabotaging the elections in a plot to topple the president. To add to the problem, Bolsonaro himself raised doubts about the electoral system — without citing any evidence — the day following the first round of voting. He also pushed for printed voting

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receipts, a move that many suspect would make it easier for corrupt politicians to bribe voters who would photograph printed receipts as proof of loyalty.

### **Pendulum Swing**

Despite these issues, elections ran in relative order even though the results were delayed due to incidents provoked by militant Bolsonaro supporters all over Brazil. The results of the first round already pointed to a defeat of Bolsonaro's political allies. From his ex-wife and his cousin, who were both not elected, to the slim margin of victory for his son Carlos, who was elected with a small percentage of his record win in 2016, Bolsonaro's picks lost major positions in key cities. At the same time, traditional parties regained power, with progressive candidates winning seats all over Brazil and the wife of murdered councilor and activist Marielle Franco securing a seat on Rio's city council.

Left-wing parties advanced in many of the 100 largest cities across Brazil and went on to dispute the second round in many capitals, notably in Sao Paulo. In two state capitals, Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro, a candidate supported by Bolsonaro reached the second round, while the traditional right won seven capitals in the first round.

The Workers' Party (PT) lost in bigger cities despite reaching the second round in some capitals, but managed to get 183 mayors elected across Brazil, down from 630 in 2012. Losses were expected for the PT since the rise of antipetismo, the political resentment fed by an intense right-wing media effort that led to the poor performance by the party's presidential candidate Fernando Haddad in 2018. At the height of antipetismo, voters rejected candidates from traditional parties in favor of electing unknown faces not yet involved in public corruption scandals.

The second round of elections confirmed the loss of PT's strength, with the centrists winning in the biggest cities and a growth in other left-wing parties, such as Socialism and Liberty Party and the traditional Democratic Labour Party.

Center and center-right parties that were strong since Brazil's return to democracy, like the Brazilian Democratic Movement and Brazilian Socialist Democratic Party (PSDB), took the place of far-right ones such as the far-right Social Liberal Party (to which the president was affiliated when elected) and Patriotas. On the other hand, PT lost 11 of the 15 state capitals in the second round.

Special attention was given for the second round in the two largest cities of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. In Rio, Marcelo Crivella suffered a "humiliating loss" against the Democrats' party candidate Eduardo Paes, although the evangelical pastor, an ally of Bolsonaro, launched a barrage of fake news against Paes, connecting the centrist politician with "pedophiles in schools." Crivella's defeat was a severe blow to Bolsonaro, whose political career began in Rio.

In Sao Paulo, "old politics" won again, with incumbent mayor Bruno Covas securing his position. His victory was not that surprising. Traditionally conservative, the richest city in Brazil has kept the PSDB in power for decades, with the exception of two left-wing mayors in 30 years, both from the Worker's Party at a time when Luis Inácio Lula da Silva was president with an 85% approval rate. Surprising was the presence of the former leader of the Homeless Workers' Movement, Guilherme Boulos, in the second round, showing that the grip of conservatism is not working, at least in Sao Paulo's suburbs.

Bolsonaro is in open conflict with Sao Paulo's state governor, Joao Doria of the PSDB, a former ally-turned-political-enemy, especially in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Doria is one of the presumptive candidates against Bolsonaro in 2022, and his management of the wealthiest state in the country during the pandemic can give him a chance at victory.

### **Catastrophic Loss**

There are many reasons for the catastrophe suffered by Bolsonaro and his supporters in the

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2020 elections. Bolsonaro's anti-political rhetoric, anti-democratic displays and illogical obsession with a mythical left bound to destroy the country's youth did not sit well with voters. The far-right wave was a reflection of antipetismo, not of connivance with extremist ideology or lack of decorum. With a more progressive population becoming politically active this year, attitudes changed, and people were able to display their discontent with the current administration by wearing anti-Bolsonaro slogans on their shirts to go to the polls, something that would have been impossible in 2018.

Bolsonaro's loss of support also involves the spiral of corruption he and his family descended into in recent months, including the involvement of his eldest son, Flavio Bolsonaro, in an embezzlement scheme using his employees' government salaries. The president's response to the coverage of these scandals was a threat to beat a journalist and indirectly censor news agencies.

Mismanagement seems to be the trend in the administration, bringing with it serial economic, social and environmental crises. The state of Amapa, on the border with French Guyana, has had a power outage for almost a month. Elections were postponed to December 6, and the capital city, Macapa, will decide the second round between center-right or center-left candidates on December 20.

Bolsonaro's catastrophic incompetence to address the COVID-19 pandemic may well have been the most crucial factor in his defeat. The president dismissed scientists' warnings and condemned the country to a disaster of unparalleled proportions. State governors rebelled and took their own emergency measures, and the people sided with them. The federal government continues to ignore the pandemic and did not secure a national vaccine, with Bolsonaro announcing that he will not get vaccinated. Governor Doria is in a race to bring vaccines to the state of Sao Paulo in January and, if

successful, will increase his chances in the presidential bid.

Political defeat seems to follow those governments that are mismanaging the pandemic and may have been a factor in the November US election. Bolsonaro's political power was voluntarily tied to Donald Trump, whose defeat was predicted to affect Brazilian politics. After Joe Biden's victory, Bolsonaro displayed his loyalty to Trump by not recognizing the election results, at least for a while.

European far-right parties openly sided with Donald Trump but are losing power in Germany, Austria and Italy, perhaps indicating a global return to traditional political attitudes and a rejection of the chaotic, violent and bigoted ways of proto-authoritarian governments. The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of progressive politicians and, even if a new progressive era does not dawn in the wake of the largest public health crisis in a century, the conservative anti-scientific stance is not up for consideration either.

Personal views also influence people's perception of the pandemic and how they respond to it. For example, there is a clear political divide in Brazil, as elsewhere, when it comes to protective measures such as mask-wearing, with conservatives less likely to follow public health guidelines.

There is a long road before the 2022 presidential elections in Brazil, but the trend is not favorable to Bolsonaro's destructive politics. With all the political agitation in Brazil and around the globe, and with the end of the pandemic still out of sight, there is hope that Eliane Cantanhede's analysis of "Bolsonarismo" is right in stating that this era of political incompetence is just a "hiatus" in Brazil's young democracy and that the country will move forward toward a less chaotic political future.

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## **Amidst the Pandemic, Central and Eastern Europe Witnesses an Erosion of Democracy**

Katherine Kondor  
December 10, 2020

**Is the COVID-19 pandemic emboldening the rise of illiberal politics in certain parts of the region?**

**N**early a year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, its effects on people's lives, countries' economies and health care around the world are becoming clearer. In some Central and Eastern European countries, however, this pandemic has had repercussions in another crucial area: democracy. This begs the question of whether the COVID-19 pandemic is emboldening the rise of illiberal politics in certain parts of the region. Indeed, the US-based Freedom House concluded earlier this year that Hungary and Serbia are no longer democracies but are "in a 'grey zone' between democracies and pure autocracies."

One democratic process affected by the COVID-19 pandemic around the world was elections. Indeed, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, elections have been canceled or postponed in at least 67 nations around the globe. Central and Eastern Europe was no exception. Serbia's parliamentary election, originally set for April 26, was postponed by two months even though it was boycotted by much of the opposition due to the steady decline of democracy and media freedom in the country, resulting in a turnout of less than 50%.

The controversial election secured another term for President Aleksandar Vucic with over 60% of the vote, granting his Serbian Progressive Party 190 seats in the country's 250-seat parliament. As a result of the election and in-person voting, while the rest of Europe is now in

its second wave of the pandemic, Serbia is now in its third.

Leading up to the elections in Poland, the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party proposed a change to the constitution to postpone the election for two years due to the pandemic, automatically extending President Andrzej Duda's term in office. In the end, elections were held in June and July, with Duda narrowly beating the opposition Civic Platform's candidate.

Beyond elections, the pandemic has been used to mask legal and constitutional changes in the region. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's government first passed the Authorization Act during the first wave of the pandemic, effectively giving the prime minister the power to rule by decree. The government's first action was to pass a law mandating that transgender people only be recognized by their sex at birth. The government also announced that disseminating "fake news" about the pandemic or the government's response to it was a crime punishable by up to five years in prison.

As a result, although no one has yet been charged under the new laws, several people were arrested and detained after criticizing the government on social media, which some commentators likened to being picked up by the notorious black cars driven by the secret police during the communist era.

In November, as the country entered its second wave of the pandemic, the Orbán government announced the Second Authorization Act for a period of 90 days. The following day, proposed amendments to the constitution were announced that would make it mandatory for children to be raised amid "Christian cultural values," defining the mother as female and the father as male, as well as prohibiting changing gender after birth. These amendments bar same-sex couples from adopting, but single parents can request an exemption through special ministerial permission.

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Additionally, one minute before midnight on the day before new curfew measures went into effect, the government proposed a change to the election law, making it impossible for coalitions to contest elections, effectively wiping out the opposition.

At the same time that Hungary adopted its first Authorization Act, Poland adopted the Act on Special Solutions Related to the Prevention, Counteracting and Combating of COVID-19, which was ultimately used by the Polish government and PiS to limit social dialogue. A few weeks later, the “Stop Abortion” bill was enacted by the Polish parliament. Already among the strictest abortion laws in Europe, the high court’s October ruling that it was unconstitutional to abort a fetus with congenital defects effectively banned all abortions, bar in the case of incest, rape or a danger to the mother’s health.

This new ruling was met with mass protests around the country, even spreading to church services in the devoutly Catholic Poland and seeing as many as 100,000 people on the streets of the capital Warsaw. This attack on women’s health was also met by a push to leave the European treaty on violence against women, known as the Istanbul Convention, citing that it is “harmful” for children to be taught about gender in schools. Hungary refused to ratify the treaty in May, stating that it promotes “destructive gender ideologies” and “illegal migration.”

It is likely that what the world is seeing in these countries is what Ozan Varol calls “stealth authoritarianism” that “serves as a way to protect and entrench power when direct repression is not a viable option,” with the ultimate goal of creating a one-party state. The pandemic seems to be helping authoritarian leaders to secure their grip on power. In Serbia, Vucic gained popularity during the first wave and, even after criticism from the opposition and supporters alike, Orban maintained his popularity in Hungary, as shown in a recent Závecz Research poll.

Findings from interviews carried out as part of a project, Illiberal Turn, funded by the Economic & Social Research Council, suggest that while people were predominantly supportive of

democracy in the months before the pandemic, some of those interviewed in Hungary, Poland and Serbia during the first wave in the spring seemed to have a change of heart, expressing more sympathies toward authoritarian forms of government. This trend is worrying, as it shows the potential effects that crisis can have on democratic values. These abuses of power in Central and Eastern Europe cannot be ignored. It is crucial to pay attention to how these times of crisis can further exacerbate the already existing illiberal tendencies across the region.

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## What Makes Women Such Easy Targets for Violence?

Ihsan Cetin  
December 11, 2020

**Femicide is a distinct social problem that requires a unique approach and understanding.**

**L**ast year, a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that of the 87,000 women who were intentionally killed in 2017 around the world, more than half — 50,000 — were murdered by intimate partners or family members, mostly in their homes. According to official and unofficial records, an average of seven women are killed every day in the Republic of South Africa, six in Mexico, three in Brazil, while in Turkey, Germany and France, a woman is murdered every three days by an intimate partner and every six days in Spain. Unfortunately, global domestic violence and femicide rates have gone

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significantly up since the introduction of the COVID-19 lockdown measures.

It is astonishing that every day that goes by, women are killed the world over in the ordinariness of daily life — not in times of war, internal conflicts or gang violence, but by the people closest to them. These women are not mere statistical data: When you know their names, once you have seen their photographs, watched their videos or read their stories, the individual tragedies become haunting nightmares.

### **Drivers of Violence**

To put matters in context, it is important to point out that violence is widespread around the world, especially in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. For example, in Mexico, with a population of 130 million, 3,752 women were killed in 2018 compared to 32,765 men. There is a similar picture in Brazil, with a population of 210 million. A total of 41,634 murders were committed in 2019, of which 1,314 were women and nearly 40,000 were men. In South Africa, with a population of 60 million, another country where violence is common, 20,336 murders were committed in 2017; of these, 2,930 of the victims were women and 16,421 were adult males.

It should be noted that the countries with the highest total number of murders are also the ones with the highest rates of income inequality in the world. According to the Gini coefficient that measures income inequality, South Africa is in first place, with a score of 63.1, while Brazil is at high at the top with 54.7 and Mexico with 47.2. These can well be understood as meaningless, technical statistics. However, they describe the current social inequalities that translate into unemployment, poverty, hunger, homelessness — drivers of crime and, inevitably, of violence.

Due to social inequality, almost all buildings in rich districts in Brazil are fenced up and equipped with cameras. Because of this distorted social structure, the number of private security guards employed in the wealthy districts of South Africa far exceeds the number of police in the country. Again, due to social inequality, the drug

trade has been one of Mexico's main problems for decades and is one of the main causes of violence.

Violence is an inequality-driven social problem and must inevitably be addressed together with other social phenomena. However, the experiences of women who continue to be killed every day should be described as a distinct social problem that requires a unique approach and understanding. First, femicide is global in scale. Some countries see lower rates of femicide, others higher, but, ultimately, it happens in every country in the world. The main factor that distinguishes femicide from other types of murders is that it is the murder of women by their husbands, ex-boyfriends, fiancées, lovers — those with whom they shared their lives together and even had children.

According to UN statistics, women are killed mostly because they wanted a divorce or to break up the relationship, or because they did not accept the man's proposal. Even if they manage to get a divorce, their lives are often taken by the ex-husbands. If a woman is married, she shares the same house with the murderer. If she wants to escape, she is obliged to find another place to shelter. If she lives separately, she has interactions with the father of the children. If there are no children, her home or workplace addresses are known to the potential perpetrator.

### **I Love You to Death**

All this makes women easy targets. The limited number of measures that women can take to protect themselves, such as taking shelter with relatives or getting a restraining order, don't always work. Women can be stabbed or shot on the street, in front of their homes or offices, in cafes, in broad daylight. Headlines such as "He Killed His Wife After Meeting Her to Make Peace" that frequently appear in the back pages of local newspapers reflect how easily women are killed like sacrificial sheep.

This precarious situation women find themselves in is related to their status in the patriarchal structure and the cultural values of the

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societies in which they live. Factors such as women's education, participation in the labor force, participation in the public sphere and in politics determine their levels of safety. Some cultures allow the man to see his wife as a piece of property rather than as an individual with whom he has a marriage contract. Such values imply that the woman's desire to end the relationship or divorce constitutes a sufficient reason for her death or that the man has the right to kill the woman because she does not return his "love."

These values are rooted in tradition and history and are often reproduced in everyday life. Pop music provides a perfect example. Lyrics like "You are either mine or nobody's," "I love you to death," "I will sacrifice myself for you," "I will die but I will not leave you, my dear" settle into the collective consciousness of a society and gain legitimacy in a latent way. Such nuances point to the motives behind the human actions expressed by Wilhelm Dilthey and are critical for understanding social actions.

This patriarchal social structure, which allows men to have power over women, also oppresses the man. It expects him to behave like a "real man," demands of him to "avenge his honor" and stigmatizes him for not being able to "control his woman." This structural pressure, either directly or indirectly, pushes men toward violence.

### **Looking at Turkey**

However, femicide cannot be blamed on the patriarchal social structure alone. There is a need to analyze the social change in society on the basis of gender. In other words, it is necessary to look at the changing status and roles of men and women over time.

Turkey provides a good case study. Over the past three decades, the status of Turkish women has changed significantly. First of all, due to the urbanization of the country that exceeds 90%, social pressure on women has decreased. Of course, this does not mean that Turkish women are completely emancipated. However, the communal social structures specific to the

countryside have been broken as a result of migration to the cities, and this has provided women with a limited amount of freedom. Part of it is the increase in the schooling rate. Non-governmental organizations established in the 1990s that fight against violations of women's rights have also played a role.

Perhaps the most emblematic development in relation to the changing status of women in Turkey is the 2011 Istanbul Convention. It is the most current internationally recognized legal text for combating discrimination against women and granting protection from violence. Turkey was the first to ratify the convention, which has since been signed by 45 countries and the European Union.

On the other hand, the disadvantaged situation of women in society still continues. According to the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, Turkey ranks 130 among 153 countries. (This index should not be used as a sole indicator of the social status of women. For example, Mexico, one of the countries with the highest femicide rate and where female labor force participation is 47%, is ranked 25, while Japan, where female labor force participation reaches 70%, is 121.) Again, women are far behind men in terms of participation in the labor force. According to TURKSTAT data, the female labor force participation rate in Turkey was 29.4% as of 2019. In addition, women's participation and representation in politics are low. As of 2019, the rate of female deputies remained at 17.3%.

Due to these and other factors, the status of women in Turkey is still fraught with disadvantages. It is such disadvantages that make women vulnerable to violence. This summer, the country was rocked by protests following a brutal murder of a 27-year-old student by an ex-boyfriend, just one of the hundreds of others; in 2019, at least 474 were killed, a grim record of the decade. But, ultimately, a woman in Turkey today is not a woman of 30 years ago. Social change, in which globalization, urbanization, communication technologies, women's social

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movements and many other factors can be included, has also changed the status of women. This situation, of course, brought about a psychological transformation. For example, the weakening of social pressures allows women to develop a new awareness about divorce. The idea that being divorced is not shameful for a woman constitutes one of these mental shifts. This change in perceptions has led more women to seek divorces, and more women found the strength to say no to the violence they experienced.

All this means that Turkish women are challenging the established structures more often. This situation, of course, has taken shape as an attitude that challenges the traditional status of men as holders of power. From this point of view, the increasing number of murders of women committed by an intimate partner — up nearly six times since 2008 — can be explained, in part, by the conflict between this changing status and mentality of women and men. Amendments to criminal law that increase penalties for violence against women even if applied without compromise will alone not solve the problem.

Prevention of femicide, the scope of which exceeds this article, can be achieved with long-term and multidimensional reforms, programs and projects. We can start by developing an approach based on understanding this problem in its sociological, anthropological and psychological dimensions. Ultimately, we need to understand both men and women, and what drives the dynamics of the relationships between them.

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## Live Free or Die: America vs. Science

Hans-Georg Betz  
December 11, 2020

### Are climate change denial and the refusal to take COVID-19 seriously two sides of the same coin?

A few days ago, the testimony of a nurse from South Dakota made international headlines. In a tweet, Jodi Doering recounted the harrowing experience of having to deal with patients dying from COVID-19 complications while denying that the virus is real: “The ones who scream at you for a magic medicine and that Joe Biden is (g)oining to ruin the USA. All while gasping for breath on 100% Vapotherm. They tell you there must be another reason they are sick. They call you names and ask why you have to wear all that ‘stuff’ because they don’t have COViD because it’s not real.”

By now, North and South Dakotas have earned the distinction of being among the states hit hardest by the second wave of the pandemic — and least prepared for its impact. As in so many of America’s red states dominated by the Republican Party, the good citizens of the Dakotas largely ignored reality, and this is putting it graciously. As a recent article in The New York Times put it, “Deep into the coronavirus pandemic, when there was no doubt about the damage that Covid-19 could do, the Dakotas scaled their morbid heights, propelled by denial and defiance.” Public officials did their part reinforcing the illusion, adamantly refusing to mandate basic safety measures, such as the wearing of masks and keeping social distancing rules.

### Live Free or Die

“Live Free or Die” — ironically enough, the motto of the blue state of New Hampshire in New England — assumed an entirely new meaning in the Dakotas. At the end of November, the

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Bismarck Tribune reported that a quarter of North Dakotans had known somebody who had died of COVID-19. At the start of this month, just three weeks after reporting the highest mortality rate in the world, North Dakota hit a new record: One in 800 residents here has died of COVID-19.

In South Dakota, where the governor refused to mandate safety measures, things were equally bad. Intensive care units in small towns were quickly getting overwhelmed as the pandemic ravaged the very fabric of civil society, which observers such as Alex de Tocqueville have considered essential to the health of American democracy. And yet, as Annie Gowan writes in *The Washington Post*, “anti-maskers” have continued to agitate, “alleging that masks don’t work and that the measure was an overreach that would violate their civil rights.” Given the fact that wearing a mask is above all a means to protect others against infection, this is a rather specious argument.

There has been widespread resistance to following the most basic safety precautions. Clinging on to a false sense of liberty is one reason, but arguably not the most important one. Instead, what infuses the refusal to take COVID-19 seriously among a substantial part of the American public is a profound suspicion toward health care experts, the scientific community and science-based evidence in general.

This is part of a larger populist syndrome, which has suffused significant parts of the United States over the past several years and which was instrumental in propelling Donald Trump into the White House four years ago. Populism represents above all a revolt against the established elite — economic, political, social, cultural — in the name of ordinary citizens and their allegedly superior “common sense.” Populists promote the virtue of personal experience and observation — Trump famously asked how global warming could be real if it was so cold outside — and the rule of thumb.

Add to that the impact of right-wing influencers and opinion leaders like Rush

Limbaugh, who in early spring claimed that COVID-19 was nothing more than the flu and who has insisted that masks are a symbol of fear and therefore “un-American.” No wonder that in the land of the free, that vast landmass between the two coasts, disparaged by the “coastal elites” as “flyover country,” they rather believe in the wisdom of Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and the Great Man himself than the “disaster” Anthony Fauci and his “idiots” in the scientific community.

As a result, according to a recent Pew survey, in the United States, public opinion about COVID-19 has been far more divided than in comparable advanced liberal democracies. In October, more than 80% of Biden supporters said that COVID-19 was “very important” for their vote; among Trump supporters, less than a quarter. At the same time, there was a large partisan divide on trust in scientists. In September, more than two-thirds of liberal Democrats expressed trust in scientists; among conservative Republicans, less than 20%.

Under the circumstances, the health care catastrophe that has invested the Dakotas and other parts of the American Midwest should come as no surprise. It is part of the disastrous legacy four years of President Trump have left, a legacy that has poisoned the political climate to an extent never before seen in the United States.

### **Human, All Too Human**

Over the past several months, COVID-19 — what it is, what it means and how to respond to it — has become part of the polarization that has consumed American politics way before the onset of the pandemic. Polarization means that almost everything political is defined in partisan terms. Extended to its most extreme, it means that the other side is no longer seen as legitimate, but as the enemy that needs to be destroyed since it poses a fundamental threat to the common good.

This, of course, is the fundamental dictum of Carl Schmitt, the brilliant 19th-century German legal and political theorist whose posthumous influence has significantly grown over the past

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few decades, both on the left and on the right. Schmitt was a great supporter of the Nazis, infamous for his defense of Hitler's order in 1934 to eliminate his adversaries (the Röhm Purge) in an article with the cynical title, "The Führer Protects the Law." Central to Schmitt's thinking was the notion that democracy meant both to treat equals as equals and to treat not-equals as not-equals. For Schmitt, democracy required homogeneity as well as the exclusion, even "destruction of the heterogeneous." No wonder Carl Schmitt has found enthusiastic acolytes among China's patriotic intelligentsia.

It is within this context that the dismissal of the threat posed by COVID-19 as, at best, negligible and, at worst, as a hoax designed to undermine the Trump administration becomes understandable.

Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump has been obsessed with China. Trump's pet project of making America great again only makes sense in the face of the challenge that the fulminant rise of China has posed to America's claim to be the greatest country in the world. The way the slogan is phrased already reveals its weakness. Making America great "again" implies a recognition that it no longer is. There are numerous reasons why this might be the case. Most of them — such as decrepit infrastructure or the opioid crisis — have nothing to do with China.

But, as Friedrich Nietzsche once put it, it is human, all too human to blame others for one's own shortcomings. This might explain why Trump has insisted on referring to COVID-19 as the "China virus," most recently in a tweet acknowledging that Rudy Giuliani, his personal lawyer who had "been working tirelessly exposing the most corrupt election (by far!) in the history of the USA" had been tested positive for the "China Virus." Giuliani has done no such thing, i.e., exposing massive election fraud. Giuliani once was a respectable politician, arguably one of the best mayors New York City has ever had. By now, he is reminiscent of Wormtail, Voldemort's pathetic factotum.

Trump's obsession with China not only explains his nonchalance toward COVID-19 but also his take on climate change and global warming. It deserves remembering that at one time, Trump was adamant about his concern regarding the climate. In 2009, Trump, together with his three oldest children, signed an open letter to the Obama administration that stated, "If we fail to act now, it is scientifically irrefutable that there will be catastrophic and irreversible consequences for humanity and our planet." Among other things, the letter called for "U.S. climate legislation, investment in the clean energy economy, and leadership to inspire the rest of the world to join the fight against climate change."

### **I Don't Believe It**

A couple of years later, all was forgotten. By 2012, the focus was on China's rapid ascent. In this context, global warming assumed a new meaning in Trump's narrative. As he put it in a tweet at the time, the "concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive." Three years later, he referred to climate change as a hoax, and, once in office, he dismissed the warnings of his own government's scientists with a simple "I don't believe it."

Trump's denial of climate change had a significant impact among his support base. In 2018, more than two-thirds of Republicans considered concerns about global warming to be exaggerated; among Democrats, less than 5% thought so. Around a third of Republicans thought global warming was caused by human activities; among Democrats, some 90%. And when asked whether they thought global warming would pose a serious threat in their lifetime, a mere 18% of Republicans voiced concern among Democrats, about two-thirds.

A month before the November election, an article in *Nature* sounded the alarm bell. As the election approached, the author warned, "Trump's actions in the face of COVID-19 are just one example of the damage he has inflicted

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on science and its institutions over the past four years, with repercussions for lives and livelihoods.” In the process, his administration, across many federal agencies, had “undermined scientific integrity by suppressing or distorting evidence to support political decisions.”

In November, Trump spectacularly lost his bid for a second term. At the end of January, Joe Biden will be inaugurated as the new president. There is great hope that this will be the beginning of a “new dawn for America.” Don’t bet on it. Trump’s legacy is likely to linger on, some of the harm his administration has caused potentially exerting its impact for years to come. One of the most deleterious legacies is that by now, belief in science — at least with respect to certain issues — has become overridden by partisanship.

Climate change is a prominent example, so is COVID-19, and so is likely to be the question of vaccination as anti-coronavirus jabs become available over the next few months. In late November, among Democrats, 75% said they would get vaccinated; among Republicans, only half. Under the circumstances, it is probably prudent to be wary.

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## **Joe Biden Will Face a Much-Changed and Skeptical World**

Gary Grappo  
December 14, 2020

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**One of the first jobs the Biden administration must tackle is America’s badly damaged reputation around the world.**

**J**oe Biden was not elected for his positions on foreign policy and national security. Few US presidential candidates are. In his debates

with outgoing President Donald Trump prior to the election, those issues were hardly discussed. So, the success or failure of the Biden presidency will not be determined by foreign policy.

For President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, domestic policy will dominate their time and efforts. Overcoming the coronavirus pandemic, ensuring that newly released vaccines are quickly and effectively administered, and righting a still stressed US economy will be their top priorities in the first year. It is what the American people want and expect. Furthermore, there is America’s worsening and more pernicious longer-term problems: increasing economic inequality, continuing racial injustice and growing political polarization.

These will be profoundly difficult problems to address successfully, especially as President Biden could face a US Senate controlled by the Republican Party and a thinner Democratic Party majority in the House of Representatives.

### **First, Image Repair**

Nevertheless, after four years of an unprecedentedly destructive foreign policy and simply by virtue of the fact he will still lead the world’s most powerful and wealthiest nation, Joe Biden cannot ignore foreign policy. In fact, amidst his formidable domestic challenges, he must confront serious foreign policy challenges vital to America’s interests and to those of its many friends and allies around the world.

We may already have caught a glimpse of how different Joe Biden’s foreign policy will be from Donald Trump’s, considering the first officials named to his senior foreign policy team: Antony Blinken as secretary of state, Linda Thomas-Greenfield as US ambassador to the UN with cabinet rank, Jake Sullivan as national security adviser, Avril Haines as director of National Intelligence and Katherine Tai as the US trade representative. They are all highly experienced, proven, knowledgeable, principled and committed public servants. Under President Trump, we saw few of those and many more self-

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interested, self-promoting political hacks and ideologues.

One of the first jobs Biden must tackle is America's badly damaged reputation around the world. Donald Trump undermined critical alliances, pointlessly insulted and demeaned allies, abandoned international agreements and institutions, embraced autocrats and dictators from Russia to North Korea, discarded traditional free trade principles and turned America's back on core values of human rights, democracy and rule of law. In short, it was a side of America no one had ever seen, certainly not in the history of the modern presidency. Most profoundly, it raised the question: Who is America?

Joe Biden must try to answer that question, and not just with the eloquent prose of President Barack Obama, under whom he served as vice president. The world expects and will demand to see concrete action, preferably guided by some overarching policy that can show to the world that the United States can still play — and indeed, must play — a leadership role again on the global stage.

There are some decisions that Joe Biden has indicated he will make right out of the starting block when he takes office on January 20. He will rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization. Those are relatively easy and straightforward but also very necessary. He is also likely to make clear in his inauguration address that America will return to be the leading voice for democracy, human rights and rule of law in the world, starting first at home but also unafraid to speak in their defense abroad.

Then begins the hard part. One priority he has made clear that his administration will take on immediately is reaffirming American membership in and commitment to its alliances and critical partnerships. These constitute America's competitive advantage in global affairs and remain the heart of its still formidable soft power in the world. After Trump's destructive practices, Biden will have to appeal to America's allies in Europe, e.g., NATO and the EU, and in Asia and the Pacific, like Japan, South

Korea, Australia and others. And he'll have to do it with humility, understanding that under his predecessor, America seemingly abandoned principles that had previously united them all.

### **China: Work With Allies, Pursue Hard-nosed Diplomacy**

China will be Joe Biden's biggest challenge. On trade, defense, the South China Sea, Taiwan, cybersecurity, human rights and global leadership, China presents a daunting challenge. We should expect his administration to drive a hard bargain with Beijing but to use a very different approach than his predecessor. Pursued smartly, however, he may be surprised by the inherent advantages America still holds. For example, fortifying the alliances and partnerships as previously mentioned will aid his administration in addressing the China challenge. In fact, if he is to succeed on this account, he will need those allies and partners with him at the negotiating table. Another advantage: He will likely have bipartisan support in an otherwise partisan Congress for taking a strong position on China.

Trade is the clearest area where the US can capitalize on its extensive network of allies. China's most important trading relationships — those with the EU and the East Asian nations — also happen to be America's closest allies. The most effective approach will be one that joins their efforts with the administration to address China's aggressive and predatory trade practices. Those range from intellectual property theft to intimidation and threats against foreign businesses to coopting confidential and proprietary techniques, practices and technology. But this approach works only if the new administration can establish that it can be trusted again, and not only on trade. If the US can succeed in its trade negotiations with China, it opens opportunities on other fronts.

The objective must be clear: The US isn't interested in standing in China's way as it progresses to superpower status. However, China must understand that it must do so within an

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international community governed by collaboratively set rules.

### **Renewed US Global Leadership: Climate and Global Health**

Climate and global health are two other priority issues for Biden. He has indicated he will want not only to reestablish America's commitment to them but also to take the lead. Rejoining the Paris accords won't be enough. The US must marshal a critical mass of other nations in joining a reinvigorated effort to go beyond the mandates of Paris. In that, he's likely to garner support from the EU and other developed nations. Appointing former Secretary of State John Kerry as his special envoy on climate change demonstrates Biden's seriousness about the issue and the intention to take a much-needed lead role on this global existential challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic raging at home makes it imperative that President-elect Biden make global health security a clear foreign policy priority. If there is one thing Americans have learned from the novel coronavirus, it's that there is no greater threat to America's national security and economic prosperity than another pandemic, especially one perhaps more catastrophic than COVID-19. If America is to be better prepared for the next pandemic, so must be the rest of the world.

As he did for climate, Biden may even wish to name a special envoy for global health to begin galvanizing America's efforts and those of the rest of the world to prepare and coordinate global initiatives for preventing, containing and treating the next pandemic.

Climate and global health present the Biden administration with just the sort of challenge-cum-opportunity to which America was known to rise in the past. They are issues on which it is uniquely positioned to lead by virtue of its power, size, wealth and technological prowess. To reassume the mantle of global leadership, President-elect Biden must lead the global effort to combat climate change and strengthen the

international community's capacity to address pandemics.

### **In the Middle East, Iran and Then Everything Else**

Unlike for the US administrations dating back to Jimmy Carter, the Middle East will not be a top-five priority in 2021. Americans have lost their appetite for inserting themselves into problems that the region's residents cannot or will not work to resolve themselves. Biden and his foreign policy team recognize this, even as they know they can't turn their backs on this dangerously volatile region.

But there remains one exception. Iran is a grave problem, perhaps less for the US than for Washington's allies in the Middle East, most especially Israel and Saudi Arabia. It also constitutes a major challenge to America's traditionally unflinching support for the Nonproliferation Treaty. Nothing could be more destabilizing in that region than the introduction of nuclear weapons. It will require almost immediate attention from President Biden.

The Trump administration's policy of "maximum pressure" via its punishing sanctions has indeed inflicted enormous economic pain on Iran and its people. But it hasn't changed Tehran's behavior. Iran today has begun to reconstitute the nuclear program that had been effectively contained under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), negotiated under President Obama in 2015 and then abandoned by Trump in 2018.

The purpose of the sanctions cannot be inflicting pain on the Iranian people, who are not responsible for their government's policies. The objective of sanctions and an overall policy toward Iran must be to change its behavior. By that measurement, the Trump administration's pressure campaign has not worked. Iran continues to: develop and build longer-range missiles; support malign behavior through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its Shia proxies throughout the region, from Iraq and Yemen to Syria and Lebanon; senselessly

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threaten Israel; and deny the most basic human rights to its own citizens, most especially women, journalists, perceived political opponents and religious minorities.

Whatever trust President Obama and then-Secretary of State Kerry may have been able to build with the Iranians in reaching the JCPOA has been largely destroyed now. So, short of immediately rejoining that agreement, which would be unwise, face-to-face negotiations between Washington and Tehran will not be in the offing for at least one year.

In fact, to tackle the Iran question, Biden and Blinken must address the failures of the Obama approach. That will mean: (a) turning to America's P5+1 partners — the UK, France and Germany — to work out a modus operandi for rejoining the JCPOA while simultaneously securing a commitment to negotiate a stronger JCPOA version 2.0; (b) consulting regularly and frequently with key regional allies to ensure their concerns and interests are addressed in any follow-on agreement with Tehran; and, most important, (c) including key congressional members in the negotiation process, at least on the Washington end.

The last is most vital because the absence of Congressional support was ultimately Barack Obama and the agreement's downfall. Any new accord negotiated must have the support of a majority of the Congress if it is to avoid the fate of the JCPOA, even if it isn't submitted for formal approval to the Congress. All of these are sine qua non for successfully addressing the Iranian challenge and securing a durable solution.

While the Iran portfolio remains an urgent priority for Joe Biden, it won't be one resolved in his first year and perhaps not until well into his second. His administration and the Congress must understand that the US cannot not sanction, bomb, assassinate or otherwise forcibly compel Iran into complying with its norms for behavior. It will take patient, deliberate and determined diplomacy.

## **Can't Ignore the Rest**

These are likely to be President Biden's top priorities. But they won't be his only ones. His administration and the US also face serious challenges from a menacing and malign Russia, an arms control agreement with whom due to expire within weeks of his taking office; still extant terrorism and cybersecurity threats; a wave of autocrats with a full head of steam, from Turkey and Hungary to Venezuela and the Philippines; ill-behaved and irrationally aggressive regional actors vying for preeminence in the Middle East; continuing conflict and humanitarian crises in the Middle East, Africa and the Caucasus and elsewhere.

Joe Biden will be the most experienced and knowledgeable president on foreign policy since George H.W. Bush. As such, he surely knows that it is issues like these that can suddenly rise to crisis proportions and take over his foreign policy or even his presidency.

So, they won't be far from his attention. But a clear-eyed view of what is most important will drive Biden toward those highlighted above.

However, there is likely to be a critically important domestic component of the Biden foreign policy agenda. This gets to the Achilles heel of previous administrations' foreign policies that Donald Trump cleverly exploited. Biden and his administration must be able to convincingly articulate to the American people a foreign policy that they will see as in their interests.

That will mean a policy that protects American jobs, addresses threats to climate and the environment, ensures security and offers a promise of a better future.

Crafting a policy that meets these criteria may be Joe Biden's biggest challenge, especially in view of the historic disconnect between foreign policy and the American people and polarization of the American public exacerbated by four years of Donald Trump.

But if this administration is to be successful in confronting and capitalizing on America's many challenges abroad, it must be able to show that it

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holds the interests of Americans uppermost — and that they stand behind this policy.

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\***Gary Grappo** is a former US ambassador and the chairman of Fair Observer.

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## **The Winners and Losers of Israel's Normalization Deal With Morocco**

Ralph Nurnberger  
December 15, 2020

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**In the English language, “normalization” is a nice-sounding word but, like most international agreements, it produces winners and losers.**

**O**n December 10, Israel and Morocco agreed to normalize relations. Israel has been trying to normalize relations with Arab-majority countries for decades. The process began in 1979 with Egypt. In 1994, Jordan followed. In recent months, Israel has normalized ties with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan.

In the English language, “normalization” is a nice-sounding word but, like most international agreements, it produces winners and losers. The Israel-Morocco agreement can best be seen as a win-lose-win-lose-win arrangement. This framework is helpful to understand the new pact.

### **Why Israel Wins**

The first winner of the normalization agreement is obviously Israel. Another Arab-majority Muslim country has recognized its legitimacy. This will lead to increased trade and enhance Israel's security. The deal includes the reopening of liaison offices in Tel Aviv and Rabat. They were closed in 2000 when low-level relations broke down after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising. The deal also includes the eventual

opening of embassies and the commencing of flights between the two countries.

In a televised address, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu waxed lyrical about the “warm relationship” between “the people of Morocco and the Jewish people.” He also thanked Morocco's King Mohammed VI “for taking this historic decision to bring a historic peace between us.” Jews have a historical presence in Morocco, home to the largest Jewish community in the Arab world.

There are approximately 3,000 Jews in the country, down from the 200,000 who lived there before Israel's establishment. Andre Azoulay, a Moroccan Jew, is an adviser to the king. Morocco opened a Jewish culture center earlier this year in Essaouira. The country has also made efforts to preserve Jewish sites. It is important to note that hundreds of thousands of Jewish Israelis are of Moroccan descent. This includes Miri Regev, a senior minister and close ally of Netanyahu. She said that Israeli-Moroccans had “dreamed of peace with the country in which they were born, and from where our cultural roots are so greatly derived.”

Like the rest of the Arab world, Morocco opposed Israel's creation in 1948. Until now, Morocco did not recognize Israel. That said, the country maintained a clandestine relationship with Israel. For decades, Israeli Jews have been coming back to Morocco as tourists. In 1994, the country hosted Israeli delegates at the Middle East North Africa Economic Summit in Casablanca, the first time Israel attended a regional conference hosted by an Arab country.

Israel's agreement with Morocco fits Netanyahu's doctrine of “peace for peace” instead of “land for peace.” which had been the template for virtually all peace efforts until he came to power. Netanyahu is not opposed in principle to making peace with Israel's enemies but he does support any Israeli withdrawal from the territories the country captured in 1967. With the Morocco deal, Netanyahu has scored another win for Israel and himself.

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## Why Others Lose or Win?

While Israel has won, the Palestinians have lost yet again. Although King Mohammed has said that the “measures do not in any manner affect Morocco’s ongoing and sustained commitment to the just Palestinian cause,” Palestinian officials condemned the agreement. They have also objected to recent deals with the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan, saying these encourage Israel’s denial of Palestinian rights. Palestinians believe Arab states are renegeing on their historic promise not to embrace ties with Israel until Palestinians achieve statehood. The normalization of ties also undermines their ability to negotiate directly with Israel.

Morocco also wins from the normalization of ties with Israel. Trade and tourism will bring much-needed economic benefits. In addition, the US has proposed a \$1-billion arms sale to Morocco. In an apparent quid pro quo for Morocco’s deal with Israel, US President Donald Trump recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. He tweeted: “Morocco’s serious, credible, and realistic autonomy proposal is the ONLY basis for a just and lasting solution for enduring peace and prosperity!”

Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony largely controlled by Morocco. When Spain moved out in 1975, Morocco moved in. For many decades, an Algerian-backed pro-independence organization known as the Polisario Front has battled Moroccan troops. A 16-year-long insurgency led to a UN-brokered truce in 1991. It promised a referendum on self-determination that is yet to be held.

Self-determination could be achieved in a number of different ways, including a vote on the type of autonomy granted to the territory. Too many confuse self-determination with independence. It is one of many potential options and outcomes. It is important to remember that the people living in Western Sahara could easily vote to remain in Morocco.

Morocco has consistently maintained that Western Sahara is an integral part of its territory. The country has lobbied hard in Washington to

win favor for its 2006 autonomy plan. In 2016, the then-US Secretary of State John Kerry declared support for this initiative. This followed on from the support Morocco won from the US Congress. In April 2009, 233 members of the House of Representatives and, in March 2010, 54 senators sent letters of support for Morocco’s autonomy plan.

In 2016, Morocco successfully lobbied the US Congress to give assistance to Western Sahara. The \$1-million grant went to a civil society and local governance program, giving de facto recognition to Morocco’s claim on Western Sahara. Now, the US has become the first country to officially recognize that claim.

As Morocco has won, the Polisario Front has lost. The rebel movement was seeking to establish an independent state and “regrets highly” the US decision to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. Oubi Bchraya, the Polisario’s representative in Europe, has rallied the flag of revolt by saying the change in US policy “will not change an inch of the reality of the conflict and the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination.” Yet it is clear that prospects for self-determination and independence have receded. As a result, Algeria has also ended up on the losing side as the chief backer of the Polisario Front.

The Israel-Morocco deal is a win not only for the lame-duck Trump administration, but also for American foreign policy. Morocco was the first country to recognize US independence as early as 1777. It also became the first to sign a treaty with the young nation in 1786. The US and Israel have had close relations since Harry Truman’s administration recognized Israel on May 14, 1948, the very first day of its existence. Two American friends coming together has boosted US interests in the Middle East and North Africa region.

When Joe Biden moves into the White House, this deal will stick. He will move away from Trump’s “America First” foreign policy but he will not renege on deals with old allies. On the campaign trail, Biden welcomed the Abraham

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Accords signed by Israel, Bahrain and the UAE. He is likely to do the same with the Israel-Morocco deal.

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**\*Ralph Nurnberger** served as a professional staff member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was the first director of Builders for Peace and taught at Georgetown University.

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## Why Education Is Democracy's Best Bet

Randall L. Hull  
December 17, 2020

**Education is the single most important component of the common good for maintaining the long-term health of democracy.**

Joyce Appleby, a renowned historian of the Founding Fathers and republican ideology, wrote in her 2001 book "Inheriting the Revolution" that the first generation of Americans (1790-1830) believed a good education was a requirement for every responsible citizen. The majority of men, and notably a wide cross-section of women, in the early days of the republic viewed education as a "critical bridge to responsible citizenship," according to Appleby. They admired the intellect of our Founding Fathers and felt a patriotic duty to elevate their knowledge so they could better understand the leaders and politics of the day, and thus become better citizens.

In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville captured his enthusiasm for America and its enlightened citizens in his famous book, "Democracy in America," proclaiming that in the future, "all the world will be America." How times have changed.

Following Boris Yeltsin appointment of Vladimir Putin as his successor to the Russian

presidency in 1999, after the death of China's Deng Xiaoping in 1997 and, finally, at the end of the Arab Spring in 2012, the world has seen a reversal of democratic government and the rise of authoritarianism. More than a few Americans would say that had President Donald Trump been reelected to a second term, it is likely that many of our institutions and norms built to protect democracy would have suffered a similar fate. Many were already under assault in his first term, like the politicized Department of Justice.

For the first time in our history, we are witnessing something other than a peaceful, orderly transition of presidential power that was enshrined in our American memory beginning with Washington's "Farewell Address" in 1796. We have never seen anything like Trump's assault on the facts, the electoral process and the sacred nature of a free and fair vote for all Americans. How in the world can more than half of Republicans believe the election was rigged?

### Disinformation and Lies

The answer — a campaign of relentless disinformation and lies, spread by social media and irresponsible cable TV and talk radio journalists, believed to be true by a large swath of the population, who apparently received little or no instruction in civics and US history. If this debacle teaches us anything it is that civics and history deserve a much bigger role in our primary and secondary education curricula, even at the expense of a reduced STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) curricula that has been overemphasized for too long.

Look at the voting process. Several recent surveys of Republican voters indicate that anywhere from 50% to 80% of them believe the 2020 presidential election was not free and fair. This despite the fact that Christopher Krebs, the former head of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure and Security Agency and a former Microsoft cybersecurity expert, stated that the recent election was "the most secure in US history." Every state and every Republican and Democratic governor has certified their results

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with only negligible, immaterial changes in vote counts.

Yet we are witnessing a horrific display of threats against state officials — of both parties — who have certified the election results by those who do not trust the voting process. Why? Because they do not understand the voting process and how it is protected. Many do not understand the Electoral College either. This is unacceptable in America. We are looking a lot more like a banana republic than the beacon of democracy to the rest of the world. Clearly America's reputation has suffered terribly around the globe.

The vitriol and emotion, amplified and reinforced on cable TV and social media, builds continuously until it drowns out rational thought. These conditions — extreme ideologies, absence of compromise and bipartisanship and the threat of domestic terrorism created as a result — are a major threat to our republic. Left unchecked, the situation will worsen and could destroy us if we don't act immediately. Let's hope and pray that nobody gets hurt as a result of these mindless protests dangerously getting close to becoming violent.

There are some short-term political and economic solutions to mitigate our divisions. Not the focus of this essay, but initiatives like publicly-financed campaigns to take "dark money" out of politics will go a long way to bringing the parties together. Economic policies to rebuild the middle class and reverse the growth of inequality will foster a shared prosperity to reduce fear and anxiety amongst a large portion of our population.

However, these political and economic solutions will not take hold unless we begin to restore the health of our underlying culture and start to remember who we were as Americans, and who we need to be going forward. It starts and ends with an informed electorate. In times of crisis, we look to history — and those who made it into history books for all the right reasons — to instruct us in a time of need.

## **A Time of Need**

The 19th-century thinker Horace Mann often called the founding father of public education in America called out the importance of an educated public to the health of a democratic government: "A republican form of government, without intelligence in the people, must be, on a vast scale, what a mad-house, without superintendent or keepers, would be on a small one." Even before Mann, Thomas Jefferson offered similar wisdom: "Ignorance and despotism seem made for each other, [but if the new nation could] enlighten the people generally ... tyranny and the oppressions of mind and body will vanish, like evil spirits at the dawn of the day."

Regarding the importance of a strong civics curriculum in our schools, we have George Washington stating, on the one bookend of US history: "A primary object should be the education of our youth in the science of government. In a republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important? And what duty more pressing than communicating it to those who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of the country?"

Echoing similar opinions some 244 years later as the world's longest-enduring democratic, self-governing republic, is Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts: "But in the ensuing years [following the ratification of the Constitution], we have come to take democracy for granted, and civic education has fallen by the wayside. In our age, when social media can instantly spread rumor and false information on a grand scale, the public's need to understand our government, and the protections it provides, is ever more vital."

This is quite a commentary on the importance of education generally, and civics specifically, to the health and continued survival of "American exceptionalism." Beyond the voting process and the Electoral College, how well does the public understand how government is structured, how it works? The Annenberg Public Policy Center reported the results of a broad survey of Americans and found that only one in four Americans could name all three branches of the

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federal government. This is an astounding discovery. The same survey found that fewer than 15% of the same cohort could name more than one First Amendment right, with only 37% of respondents able to name a single First Amendment right — their response, by and large, was freedom of speech.

How beneficial would it be to society if everyone knew that our federal government does not sanction any religion, nor prevent anyone from practicing their own beliefs, or not? Freedom of the press, the right to peaceably assemble and the right to petition the government round out all the First Amendment rights.

How are we doing in terms of education outcomes in this age of information overload, hyper-partisanship and emotion crowding out reason and thoughtful reflection? Not so great. According to DoSomething.org — a youth nonprofit whose corporate sponsors include 3M, Ford Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Google and General Motors among many others — in 1985, the quantity and quality of high school graduates in the US as a group was ranked number one in the world. But by 2015, our high school population was ranked 36 in the world.

Michael Porter at the Harvard Business School has been conducting expansive and thorough surveys since 2011 of more than 2,000 senior-level business leaders, across a wide spectrum of industries in the US, regarding the competitiveness of the US economy. The conclusions of the study team strongly align with the findings of DoSomething.org noted above. Porter has concluded that shared prosperity is a key component of an economy's competitiveness and that the US economy is failing to deliver shared prosperity to an ever-shrinking middle class.

More importantly, Porter has tied this economic failure to political and cultural failures. To find solutions to our political failures — climate change, inequality, health care and immigration — we must focus on revising election and campaign financing laws. To find answers to our cultural failures — systemic

racism, increased polarization, domestic terrorism and crime — we must improve outcomes in K-12 public education as the most critical solution.

### **Restoring Trust**

There is nothing more important to the long-term survival of our democracy than a large investment in education as well as in our defense and military capability. Turns out, that as a nation, we invest about the same amount annually in each, which is surprising to most people. The 2020 defense budget is projected to be about \$750 billion, and total spending on public education — elementary plus secondary — in 2015 across the country, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, was \$706 billion. The problem is that education is funded and administered locally and, as a result, there is a wide variation in the quality of its delivery as the DoSomething.org and the Harvard studies both demonstrate.

The current noise and disinformation around election fraud — a president asking state legislators to overturn a popular vote in choosing electors to the Electoral College and how presidents can lose the popular vote of the nation and still be elected — threaten our democracy. How? In short, even more people begin to lose trust in our government to be fair, and “for the People.” Trust in Congress is already at an historical low point according to Pew Research.

How do we restore this trust? A strong civics education is a good start. Why is this so important? Here's the deal: The 2016 presidential election came down to fewer than 80,000 voters in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Even though Trump lost the popular vote among over 125 million total voters, his narrow wins in these three battleground states gave him an Electoral College majority of 306 over Hillary Clinton's 232.

This means that just 0.06% of all the voters in America determined the outcome of the 2016 election. In the 2000 presidential election, it came down to 537 votes in Florida. It is frightening to consider that so few voters could make such a

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difference, and how easily it might be to corrupt such a small number of voters. If that doesn't argue for a strong civics curriculum in our schools, what does?

Education is the single most important component of the common good for maintaining the long-term health of our democracy. Why? Because we will not meaningfully transform our political and economic models until we begin to transform our culture. And you do not transform culture by screaming at people. You transform culture by educating people and celebrating rational discourse among all citizens.

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**\*Randall L. Hull** is a retired executive who worked in the global energy and chemicals industries for over 40 years.

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