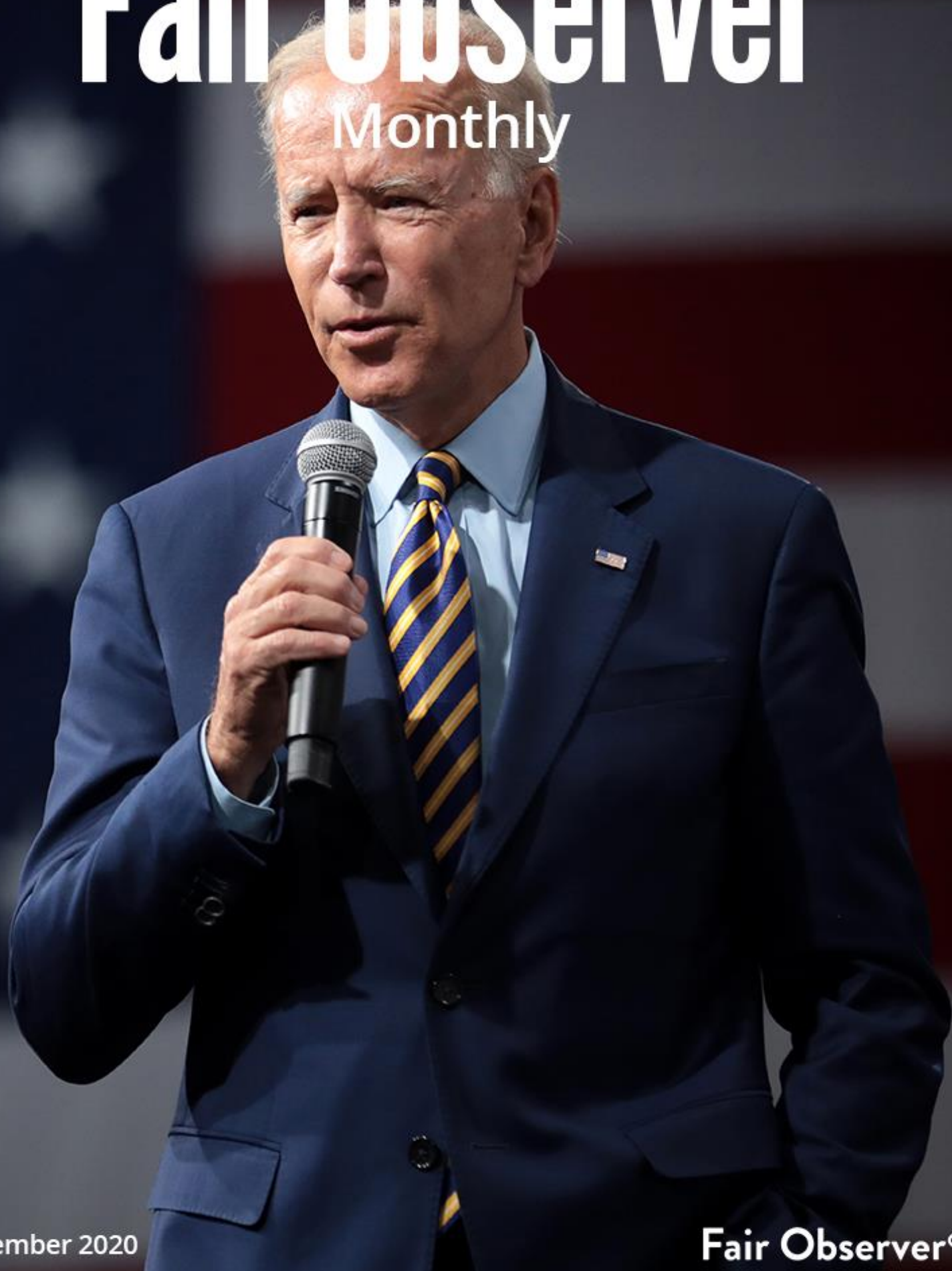


# Fair Observer

Monthly



November 2020

Fair Observer<sup>®</sup>



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# Fair Observer Monthly



November 2020

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# CONTENTS

<b>About Fair Observer</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Share Your Perspective</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Held Together With String, Can America Hold?</b> Atul Singh	<b>8</b>
<b>Joe Biden and America's Second Reconstruction</b> Gary Grappo	<b>13</b>
<b>Where Do We Stand With the Pfizer Vaccine?</b> Mohammad Farhan	<b>17</b>
<b>Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Must Include Microfinance Reform</b> Dai Wei Tsang	<b>18</b>
<b>The Rise of the Digital Émigré</b> Samantha North	<b>20</b>
<b>25 Years On, The Dayton Peace Agreement Is a Ticking Time Bomb</b> Emir Hadzikedunic	<b>21</b>
<b>12 Years After Mumbai, the Fight Against Terrorism Continues</b> Kanwal Sibal	<b>27</b>
<b>Diego Maradona, the Perfect Celebrity Athlete</b> Ellis Cashmore	<b>30</b>
<b>Sex Abuse Is the Moral Downfall of the Catholic Church</b> Hans-Georg Betz	<b>32</b>
<b>Inequality Is a Barrier to Peace in Colombia</b> Pierrepont Johnson III	<b>35</b>

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# ABOUT FAIR OBSERVER

Fair Observer is a nonprofit media organization that engages in citizen journalism and civic education.

Our digital media platform has more than 2,500 contributors from 90 countries, cutting across borders, backgrounds and beliefs. With fact-checking and a rigorous editorial process, we provide diversity and quality in an era of echo chambers and fake news.

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.

As a nonprofit, we are free from owners and advertisers. When there are six jobs in public relations for every job in journalism, we rely on your donations to achieve our mission.

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## Held Together With String, Can America Hold?

Atul Singh  
November 2, 2020

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**With many loose tribes pulling in different directions, America faces a protracted war for the soul of the nation.**

In December 2007, Mwai Kibaki beat Raila Odinga in the Kenyan general election and all hell broke loose. Odinga's supporters took to the streets, alleging Kibaki had "stolen" the election. Police fired on demonstrators and some died. In retaliation, the targeted ethnic cleansing of Kikuyus, Kibaki's community, began.

The Kikuyus themselves responded by targeting other communities. A bloodbath ensued. The New York Times observed that "ethnic violence, fueled by political passions" was threatening to ruin the reputation of a country regarded as one of the most promising in Africa. It turns out that this promise was illusory. Rival ethnic groups within arbitrary colonial borders were held loosely together by self-interest and little national identity. The country was held together with string.

About 20 years ago, Stephen Heiniger, then a British policeman, visited a dear friend in New York. Like my view of Kenya, he observed that New York was held together with string. The Guatemalan who worked in a restaurant's kitchen had little in common with the owner. He did not really identify with New York or even the US. The immigrant was slaving away to make money to send back to his family, socializing largely with people from his part of the world.

What Heiniger observed about New York 20 years ago is increasingly true for America today. The country is full of such loose groups held together by self-interest. This is largely defined in terms of success, which in turn is mainly measured by money. A strong social, regional or

national identity and common purpose in a large, diverse and unequal land is increasingly lacking.

In the 2020 presidential election, America might be about to emulate Kenya. Political passions run so strong that the threat of violence looms high. Not since the Civil War ended in 1865 has America been so divided. The reputation of a country long considered the most promising in the world faces damage, if not ruin.

### The Mother of All Elections

Michael Hirsh, the deputy news editor of Foreign Policy, thinks this is the most important election ever. It is more important than the seminal elections of 1800, 1860 and 1932. These led to the triumphs of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt respectively, changing the course of history. In each of these elections, America was divided but managed to hold together and move forward.

Hirsh argues that the 2020 election is the most significant because President Donald Trump has damaged institutions of American democracy to such a degree that the future of "the 244-year-old American experiment of a republic of laws" is at stake." He blames Trump for openly encouraging racial violence, stoking division and failing to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hirsh reflects the unease of many members of the American elite. For a long time, they have self-consciously thought of themselves as a modern-day Rome. Now, they fear that America could end up "as just another abject discard on the ash heap of failed republics going back to ancient Rome and Greece."

As during the times of the Cold War, Americans fear an enemy. This time it is another communist country, a former ally named the People's Republic of China. Hirsh believes the US is stumbling precisely at "a moment when [it] has lost its material preponderance" to China. Its "central place in stabilizing the global system" is on the ballot.

The Economist shares Hirsh's view. It makes a case for Democratic nominee Joe Biden in a breezy editorial that seems to have been penned



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in the Oxford Union. It declares Biden not to be the miracle cure for what is ailing America but a good man needed to “restore steadiness and civility to the White House.”

Media organizations from The New York Times to The Times of India agree upon the importance of the 2020 election. They have published millions of words on the subject and sought out pollsters to predict the election outcome.

As the day of reckoning draws nigh, campaigning has reached fever pitch. Candidates for the House of Representatives, the Senate and the White House are all summing up their final arguments to Americans who have not voted yet. Even as citizens go to the polls on November 3, the Senate has confirmed Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, giving conservatives a 6-3 majority over liberals. Everything is on the ballot in 2020, including and especially the courts.

To understand the presidential election, it might be useful to cast our eyes to an event 30 years ago. In August 1990, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein “invaded and annexed Kuwait.” The US swung into action to liberate an oil-rich country that its cash-poor neighbor had gobbled. Hussein threatened “the mother of all battles” but suffered abject defeat. This was a heady time for the US. The Berlin Wall had fallen. George H.W. Bush had come to the White House promising “a kinder and gentler nation” and “no new taxes.” Ronald Reagan’s revolution of getting the government off people’s backs and bringing the Soviet Union to its knees seemed to have succeeded. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union had collapsed.

President Bush had presided over the ultimate triumph of America. The dreaded Cold War with its specter of nuclear destruction was finally over. America’s liberal democracy and free market economy were deemed the only way forward. Francis Fukuyama waxed lyrical about the end of history and humanity was supposed to enter the gates of paradise, with all earthlings securing unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

After a spectacular victory in the Gulf and the glorious subjugation of the Soviet Union, Bush should have romped to victory in the 1992 election. Instead, he lost. The economy had been slowing and deficits had been growing, forcing Bush to raise taxes. Many Americans went apoplectic. They could not forgive the president for breaking his promise. There was unease even then with the new era of globalization that Bush kicked off.

In that election, Texan billionaire Ross Perot made a dash for the White House campaigning against this brave new world. He warned against “shipping millions of jobs overseas” because of “one-way trade agreements.” Perot argued that countries with lower wages, lesser health care or retirement benefits and laxer environmental laws would attract factories away from American shores. With the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the cards, Perot famously predicted “there will be a giant sucking sound going south.” Perot did not win, but he took enough votes away from Bush to pave Bill Clinton’s primrose path to the White House.

In 2020, Trump is running for a second term as Perot’s angry child. He has jettisoned “bad” trade deals like NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Biden is the successor to Bush and Clinton. He was vice president when the US negotiated the TPP. The die is cast for a clash between two radically different visions for the future.

### **Who Will Win?**

In 2016, I had an uncanny feeling that both Brexit and Trump’s triumph were not only possible but probable. In February that year, I examined the UK’s troubled marriage with Europe and argued that British Prime Minister David Cameron had promised more than he delivered, which would cause him problems later. In July, I posited that we could soon be living in the age of Trump because of increasing inequality and rising rage against entrenched elites.

I followed the two articles with a talk at Google in August on the global rise of the far

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right. Aggrieved by the superciliousness of journalists based in New York and Washington, I resonated deeply with the “left-behind” voters. They believed that American elites had turned rapaciously parasitic and sanctimoniously hypocritical. It seemed inevitable that some Pied Piper would lead a populist reaction.

In 2020, I do not have my finger on the pulse in the same way as in 2016. Social distancing and limited travel in the era of COVID-19 has made it difficult to estimate what really is going on. Besides, Americans say radically different things depending on which candidate they support. Often, they are very guarded or say little, making it hard to judge what is truly happening.

Democrats seem convinced that the nation is horrified by four years of a Trump presidency. They see him as crass, racist, misogynist, dishonest and deeply dangerous. Democrats believe that Americans will punish Trump for damaging institutions, spreading hatred and lowering the dignity of his office. Opinion polls give the Democratic Party a handsome lead even in some key battleground swing states. Pollsters were wrong in 2016, but they might have improved their methods since. Therefore, Democrats believe that they could retain their majority in the House of Representatives, flip the Senate and win back the White House.

Republicans do not seem to have much faith in these polls. Many are confident of another close victory. They predict losing the popular vote but winning the Electoral College. Republican strategists are banking on the silent white vote to turn out in their favor. Many voters are uncomfortable with the Black Lives Matter movement, calls to “defund the police” and prospects of higher taxes. They fear Biden to be a Trojan horse for the culture warriors of the far left led by Kamala Harris, his running mate. They worry about identity politics and the strains it places on the social fabric. Republicans also hope to pick up minority support from Hispanics who oppose abortion, Indians who back Trump’s good friend Narendra Modi, Taiwanese who hate China and others.

## **Making Sense of Donald Trump**

When I speak to Americans, one thing is clear. This election is a referendum on President Trump. His manifest flaws have been chronicled by numerous publications and innumerable late-night comedy shows. Yet Trump still retains the trust of many Americans. Why?

The best answer came from some militia members I spoke to in West Virginia. They conceded that Trump lies but gave him credit for telling one big truth: Things had turned much too ugly for far too many people like them.

Some of these militia members were veterans who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. They were filled with a burning sense of injustice. These gentlemen had withering contempt for the likes of Paul Bremer, Paul Wolfowitz and John Bolton who served President George W. Bush. They viewed wars abroad as a criminal waste of American blood and treasure. These war veterans pointed out that Bremer, Wolfowitz and Bolton had been courtiers who climbed up the Washington greasy pole without ever serving in uniform. They remarked that Bush himself was a draft dodger who wriggled out of serving in Vietnam because of his father but sent others to die on foreign shores.

These West Virginians went on to say that their children had few prospects. Since 1991, working-class jobs have left for China. So, their children need a good education to compete for the few decent jobs in the services sector. However, they study in schools with few resources and overstretched teachers.

The militia members’ argument is simple but powerful. Only children who study in private schools or state schools in districts where houses cost a million dollars or more get into top universities, which cost a mere \$300,000 or so for an undergraduate degree. Affluent foreign students also make a beeline for America after high school. Such is the competition that most parents hire expensive admissions consultants for their children. So, those who come from hardworking ordinary American families are simply outgunned.

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The celebrated entrepreneurs of the US might be dropouts, but top corporates hire largely, if not exclusively, from top universities. The West Virginians pointed out that, before Barrett's nomination, "all nine justices of the nation's highest court would have attended law school at either Yale or Harvard universities."

Those who go to posh schools and top universities effortlessly enter the cushy salaried class. They can walk in and buy a million-dollar home with a tiny down payment. All they need apart from their job is a good credit score. In contrast, ordinary Americans live paycheck to paycheck.

One militia member went on to discuss the bailout in some detail. He told me he had voted for change twice but got more of the same instead. This gentleman blamed President Barack Obama for caving in to Wall Street. He said veterans struggled to get by while bankers got big bonuses from taxpayer money. For him, this showed that Democrats had sold out to Wall Street. He declared that fortunes of the new feudal superclass have been made through the serfdom of an ever-increasing underclass. In his memorable words, the system has "f\*\*ked us over. Now, we will f\*\*k it up."

The West Virginians brought to life many arguments I have made over the last decade. In July 2013, I argued that increasing inequality, lack of access to quality education and an erosion of liberty were chipping away at the very basis of the American dream. Over the years, I have cited many studies that chronicled how America was becoming more unequal.

In fact, inequality of both income and wealth has worsened even more during the COVID-19 pandemic. Note the economy has tanked but stock markets have stayed high. Social mobility continues to plummet. Poverty is shooting up dramatically. So is hunger. Surviving the terrible American nightmare has become more of a reality than achieving the great American dream.

Such developments have led to much anger. In an eloquent interview, Trump supporter-turned-opponent Anthony Scaramucci explained why the

president won the support of the white working class in places like West Virginia, Wisconsin and Michigan in 2016. For this class, the television celebrity was "an avatar to express their anger." In rural and suburban areas, blighted factory towns and rundown neighborhoods, Trump was the "orange wrecking ball" to "disrupt and change the system."

Another interview by Trump's former strategist, Steve Bannon, is equally instructive. He rightly says that the American economy is no longer based on capitalism but on neo-feudalism. This former Goldman Sachs highflier argues that the underclass and the superclass don't pay for anything. The working and middle class are left taking the tab. Quantitative easing (QE) might have saved the economy from collapse but has largely benefited the wealthy.

In a clever turn of phrase, Bannon calls QE the bailing out of the guilty who had crashed the system itself. Trump is a "very imperfect instrument" for this populist revolt.

### **Likable Uncle Joe and Dancing Kamala**

Many Republicans tell me that they like Biden. They think he is a good and likable man. These folks have reservations about his son Hunter but admire his late son Beau who served in the US Army.

However, Republicans fear Biden could be turning senile and Harris would be the real power behind the throne. They reserve their special ire for Harris who they damn for practicing identity politics. Even many Democrats are uncomfortable about her cozy relationships with the Silicon Valley mafia who Americans feel care more about India than Indiana.

For many Republicans, Harris is a disingenuous elitist who plays the race card to win votes and sympathy. She had no compunctions putting young black men into jail for minor crimes as a prosecutor to further her political career. They detest the fact that Harris played the race card against Biden during the Democratic presidential primaries. She made a big deal about his opposition to mandatory

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busing of colored children to largely white schools. Now, Harris is merrily dancing her way to the White House on a presidential ticket with the same man she excoriated not too long ago. Politics is a bloodsport, but some find Harris a bit too canny and bloodthirsty.

Biden's supporters take a different view. They think he is still in good health and has good judgment. As per *The Economist*, the former vice president is "a centrist, an institutionalist, a consensus-builder."

He is exactly what the doctor ordered for a deeply-traumatized nation. Biden will not only steer the Democratic Party forward but also get rid of the scourge of Trump for the Republicans. Decency and civility will return to public life and the White House. Many point to Biden's impassioned 1986 speech against the Reagan administration's support for the South African apartheid regime as evidence of his deep commitment to equality and justice.

Democrats see reservations against Harris as evidence of America's deep-seated sexism and racism. With Indian and Jamaican parents, Harris is multiracial like Obama. For many, she is the future of America. She could be the first woman vice president, breaking the key glass ceiling. Immigrants like her parents provide America the talent to stay top dog. As long as Sundar Pichai, Elon Musk and John Oliver make a beeline for America, Uncle Sam will triumph over the Middle Kingdom.

Democrats make good arguments for the Biden-Harris ticket, but they lack the passion Trump supporters displayed. The fervor of the 2008 Barack Obama or the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaigns is distinctly missing.

Democrats are not offering a clear vision or a program for the future. They are running on kicking out Trump and restoring American democracy. It remains to be seen if this will enthrone working-class voters to switch their support to the party of Roosevelt.

### **Another Battle in a Long War**

Both Biden and Trump have declared they are fighting for America's soul. It is the mother of all battles in what could prove to be a protracted war. The country is now economically, educationally, socially, culturally and virtually divided. The division that cable news networks exacerbated a few decades ago is now on steroids thanks to social media. Algorithms have created filter bubbles and echo chambers. People see more and more of the same. In the post-truth world of fake news, people cannot even agree upon basic facts.

In this unequal and polarized world, institutions are falling short. Congressmen who face reelection every two years are constantly fundraising. They have little time to write laws or hold the executive accountable. Senators often stick around forever, some until they die. Partisanship is so intense that little gets done. Judges are increasingly appointed on partisan grounds and this is damaging their legitimacy.

At the heart of the matter is a simple question: What holds America together? Bannon has a point when he says that immigration and trade benefit the affluent by lowering costs and raising profits. If hedge funds in Greenwich, Connecticut and internet oligopolies in Silicon Valley, California invest globally and move money through complex legal structures in different countries, what do they have in common with a plumber in Hattiesburg, Mississippi or a carpenter in Great Falls, Montana?

After the ethnic cleansing in 2007-08, Kenyan leaders signed a power-sharing agreement and the country drifted back to normalcy. As Kenya gears up for elections in 2022, fear and loathing are in the air again. The dormant divisions in this former colony threaten to erupt.

The same is true for America. Young black men suffer violent policing and mass incarceration in America's unjust criminal justice system. The white working class feels betrayed. The woke generation wants to upend the old social order. Feminists want to burn down the patriarchy. Catholics and evangelicals aim to outlaw abortion. With America's different tribes

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pulling in different directions, things are truly held together with string.

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\***Atul Singh** is the founder, CEO and editor-in-chief of Fair Observer.

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## **Joe Biden and America's Second Reconstruction**

Gary Grappo  
November 9, 2020

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**Biden will take on the world's oldest democracy's greatest challenge: healing a very divided nation.**

**A**fter four days of agonizing vote tabulations, interminable political commentary, overwrought election dissection and national public angst, Joe Biden has been declared the winner of the 2020 election as America's next president. Biden partisans are entitled to some celebration. It was a hard-fought win against what seemed like impossible odds at the beginning of the year. But the politician who began his public life 50 years ago as a Wilmington, Delaware, councilman will now take on the biggest challenge of his life and of the nation he will lead.

First, however, it's important to call attention to all the things that went well for America this last week. And they're vitally important for Americans — and non-Americans, too — to understand and appreciate as the nation and its new president invest themselves in this herculean challenge ahead.

For all the Sturm und Drang in the lead-up to the election, voting came off largely without a hitch. All voters who came to vote were able to do so. In most cases, waiting times were mercifully brief. Waiting tended to occur more frequently during the early voting. Those voters

deserve their country's respect and gratitude for their patience, persistence and commitment to the democratic process. Despite plenty of hiccups in primary voting that took place earlier in the year, national election day procedures and systems performed just as they were supposed to do. Early voting as well as mail-in and absentee voting, occurring in many states for the first time to minimize the dangers of COVID-19, also proceeded with few problems.

Delays in ballot tabulation occurred in states like Pennsylvania, Georgia, Nevada and elsewhere largely because Republican-controlled legislatures prohibited starting the counting process until November 3 — voting day. In the end, that may have redounded against them and President Donald Trump. Also, to minimize voters' exposure to COVID-19, many states were using mail-in voting and same-day voter registration for the first time, accounting for further delays.

### **Vox Populi**

The success of the process was bolstered throughout the nation by competent election administrators and effective election systems, manned by armies of conscientious volunteers, Republicans, Democrats and independents. Donald Trump's predictable, sore-loser accusations of fraud and manipulation are specious and groundless. His legal claims will likely go nowhere.

Furthermore, fears of violence or public unrest at polling places or in cities never really materialized, from either the left or the right. There were few, if any, reports of voter intimidation. The American people seemed to understand that this most sacred and honored element of their much-bruised democracy was off-limits. It was their chance to express their views, wishes and wants in the most forceful and effective way possible in a democracy.

The world may also take heart in the level of participation in this election. The voter participation rate — expected to reach nearly two-thirds of the population eligible to vote once

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all ballots are counted – will exceed the previous high of 65.7% set in the 1908 elections. In my home state of Colorado, voter turnout will reach an astounding 85%, the highest in the nation and the highest ever of any US state in modern election history.

It may be fair to credit Donald Trump for wresting American voters from their traditional election lethargy. He unquestionably stirred deep and strong sentiments among supporters and critics alike. They responded as they should in a democratic society — by going to the polls. For America, vox populi prevailed.

There is a related benefit to the increased voter turnout. It would be hard to find a period in recent US history when so many Americans took such a strong interest in public affairs. One could hardly go to the supermarket, walk through a parking garage, take a stroll through the neighborhood or sit in a classroom or office — at least those still functioning under COVID-19 restrictions — without hearing people talk about the political issues and the election. Political conversations — whether online, on social media, TV, radio, print or at the kitchen table — dominated like never before. Animated and even stressful at times, these are nevertheless heartening. It is essential that this communication take place in order to keep a democracy vibrant and innervated. An engaged citizenry makes for a stronger democracy.

Finally, the much-feared tampering by outside “influencers” also failed to materialize, though not from want of trying. Federal, state and local agencies and authorities did in fact come together to ensure that these elections were largely interference-free and that the results do indeed reflect the genuine will of the people. Intelligence agencies tipped off Facebook, Twitter and other tech companies about fake social media accounts and posts in order to restrict the reach of bots and prevent the spread of false information. That was in spite of a president who has insisted for four years that outside agents had no influence in the 2016 election, when all three US intelligence

agencies — the CIA, NSC and FBI — concluded otherwise.

The upshot of the 2020 election process is that the core component of America’s democracy — the expression of the people’s will — proved strong, healthy and resilient. It worked.

### **Now the Hard Part**

Despite that success, however, American democracy faces enormous pressures. The nation is plainly divided into two near-equal camps. Each seems unable and unwilling to listen or reach out to the opposite side, viewing the other as enemies rather than political adversaries. It is unhealthy and unsustainable. Democracy without compromise, almost a forbidden word in the rival camps, leads to stagnation and collapse. It will be President-elect Biden’s task to start the process to bridge this gaping chasm in American public life.

Just how is America divided? Some argue, rather eloquently and persuasively, that it’s a conflict of classes. In one corner is a wealthy, entitled, well-educated and aloof stratum of elites divorced from and insensitive to the needs of what is essentially a working class. This working class, in the opposite corner, provides for the elite’s essential services, contributes the manual labor to build and maintain their glass-encased office complexes and luxury homes, grows and processes their food, makes and maintains the cars and machines they depend on, cleans their cities, operates and maintains the transportation networks, and fights and dies in their wars.

The latter point bears elaboration because it is particularly illustrative of an apparent divide. Since 2001, America has been at war in Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which continue today. US forces remain present, though in fewer numbers today than five or 10 years ago, in both countries as well in other countries around the world. A recent study by the Council on Foreign Relations showed that 83% of American military recruits come from families or neighborhoods whose median incomes fall below \$85, 850. Only 17% came from income levels above that.

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The median household income in the US was \$68,703 in 2019. People of color are disproportionately represented in the enlisted ranks of the Army, Navy and Air Force (African Americans) and the Marine Corps (Hispanics). In fact, black Americans are far more likely to serve their country in uniform than their white counterparts.

The United States turns to its middle and lower classes to defend itself and fight its wars pretty much like every civilization throughout history dating back to the Roman Empire. But none of those were democracies. So-called elites, who benefit substantially more than their lower-income fellow citizens in terms of legal protections, opportunity, privilege and rights, bear fewer of the burdens of defending and sustaining that system of rights than those who arguably profit less from it. One does not go to Harvard, Stanford or MIT in order to enlist or even seek an officer's commission in America's armed forces.

### **Class or Geography?**

However, it is another statistical nugget in the CFR study that may allow one to argue that, in fact, it isn't class that divides America. It's geography. Data of state-by-state contributions to the enlisted ranks of the military indicate that states of the southeast, which are less affluent, are overly represented. The more well-off states of the northeast are underrepresented.

With that in mind, consider the state-by-state electoral map. With the exception of Georgia, whose growing metropolis of Atlanta belatedly delivered the Southern state to Biden, the Southeast was Donald Trump territory. The Southeast and the Midwest, which also went for Trump, are disproportionately rural and host fewer large cities than the states along America's two coasts, which gave their electoral votes to Joe Biden.

America's electoral map has changed little since the end of the Civil War. The electoral maps of 1880, just 15 years after the war, and 1908, over 40 years afterward, are illustrative.

(Note: In the 1880 map, the colors used to designate the parties is reversed from what it is today — Republicans were blue and Democrat states red.) There is one important consideration that dramatically altered the party alignment in the South. With the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Southern Democrats switched to Republican. Richard Nixon cleverly played the race card in 1968 at the height of the civil rights movement and again in 1973, cementing Southern loyalty for the Republican Party for the first time. It isn't class that is at the heart of what divides America today. For one thing, Americans never bought into the old Marxist-Leninist argument of class warfare. It was an outmoded and unrelatable Old World argument. It didn't apply to them.

Classes most certainly exist in the US, and Americans know it. Except for the Native Americans, all US citizens find their roots among immigrants who came overwhelmingly from lower classes. Most immigrants who came to this country through the 1970s were poor and seeking the kind of opportunities not available to them in their countries of origin. What they sought, later defined as upward mobility, was an America where class may have existed but wouldn't matter. Most Americans, with the exception of blacks, Native Americans and other people of color, believed that class warfare could not exist in their country. Their problems, like everything else about America, were different.

The real division in America is urban versus rural, supplemented with a healthy dose of race. Two recent books make persuasive cases for class versus the urban-rural arguments. Michael Lind, in his well-researched "The New Class War," makes the case for social class divisions in America. Ezra Klein's "Why We're Polarized" makes the case for what I would describe as American tribalism, an almost political Hatfields against the McCoys. Only it's Republicans versus Democrats. In her review and comparison of these two excellent publications, Professor Amy Chua writes that Klein's categorization embraces religion, race and geography.

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But electoral politics suggest that geography, and not just on a national scale, may be the culprit and what really defines America's current challenges. Even within predominantly Democratic states, rural counties typically were drawn to Donald Trump. Overwhelmingly Democrat California and New York — and Texas on the Republican side — illustrate the point. America's differences on just about every public issue today — race, gender, abortion, guns, big government, religion, taxes ... you name it — can almost always be sorted by the urban versus rural criteria.

### **America's Second Reconstruction**

How does Joe Biden begin to fix that? Judging from his 50 years in politics, he may be fairly well suited. He's not an ideological iconoclast. Nor is he vindictive. He won't launch a campaign to vanquish his opponents in the fashion of Donald Trump. His campaign rhetoric and post-election commentary all suggest that he'll follow a moderate political course and look for compromise. And Biden comes from America's working classes.

That is all necessary. But it's far from sufficient. Biden needs a second Reconstruction. The ideological brainchild of Abraham Lincoln following the American Civil War, reconstruction sought to bring the South back into the American fold, promote economic reintegration and development, eradicate the vestiges of slavery, and incorporate the freed slaves into American society. It was generally considered to be successful despite Andrew Johnson's, Lincoln's successor, efforts to weaken it. A pro-Reconstruction, Republican-controlled Congress and President Ulysses Grant ensured steady progress. Nevertheless, it was tragically cut short, sacrificed in the political horse-trading to win Southern Democrats' support for Republican Rutherford B. Hayes following the disputed 1876 election.

With it went a united nation, with black Americans finally getting a taste of the forbidden American fruit of opportunity and upward

mobility. Jim Crow, segregation and lynching became the order of the day, effectively slavery without the formal system. Also lost were the South's opportunity to capitalize on what would soon explode in the North and elsewhere — the Industrial Revolution. Like the Great Emancipator, his noble dream of Reconstruction followed Lincoln to an early grave.

Reconstruction remains unfinished business in America. And not just in the South. Rural areas throughout America need reconstruction. They need capital, infrastructure, better health care, improved schools and opportunities, especially jobs. This must especially include areas of concentrations of black, brown and Indigenous Americans. To capitalize fully on its great bounty, America's rural communities need to connect to their urban counterparts.

Donald Trump may have correctly read the frustrations and anxieties of rural America. But he manipulated those earnest feelings to advance the Trump brand. He offered no solutions. Instead, Americans heard verbal palliatives that made rural Americans feel that someone in Washington was finally listening. But the frustrations of being outside America's prosperity are still with rural citizens and people of color.

Biden will have to find a way to earn their trust and then begin a new reconstruction. His Build Back Better program, starting with coming to grips with the pandemic and getting it under control, may offer the broad outlines for a new Reconstruction. To earn that trust and start the healing process of his country, Biden may wish to refer to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. With a large dose of humility, grace and forgiveness, President-elect Biden must listen to rural Americans, especially to those of color, all of whom want not only to share in America's bounty but also to preserve what is important to their cherished lifestyles. America's diversity is an unquestionable strength of its democracy. That must include its urban-rural diversity, too.

It may be historical irony that to heal a deeply divided nation, the newly elected president must look back to another president who sought to heal



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the much deeper divisions of a broken nation. This time, it must be made to work. The country's future may depend on it.

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

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## Where Do We Stand With the Pfizer Vaccine?

Mohammad Farhan  
November 17, 2020

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**The preliminary but potentially conclusive results of the trial of the mRNA vaccine against the COVID-19 have led to flickers of hope around the world.**

**O**n Monday, November 9, BioNTech, a biotech company owned by a Turkish-German couple, Dr. Ugur Sahin and Ozlem Tureci, together with pharmaceutical giant Pfizer shared some promising news in the wake of the intense race toward eradicating COVID-19. The preliminary but potentially conclusive results of the trial of the mRNA vaccine against the novel coronavirus have sparked flickers of hope around the world. If successful, this will be the world's first-ever mRNA vaccine. Out of 11 vaccines currently in late-stage trials, only one other company, Moderna, is developing mRNA vaccines against COVID-19, announcing on November 16 that its vaccine also comes with a 94.5% efficacy rate.

Pfizer and BioNTech in a short press release announced that they have conducted a trial on 43,500 volunteers across the US, Argentina, Brazil and Germany, injecting them with two doses of the candidate vaccine at three-week intervals. They presented an analysis of data collected from 94 volunteers who posed as confirmed COVID-19 cases. The ensuing trial,

administered just seven days after the second dose, found that the vaccination was effective in more than 90% of volunteers in preventing COVID-19 symptoms and transmission.

### Will It Work?

This small group of vaccinated volunteers did not develop any serious side effects. Although almost half of the volunteers in this study were elderly, no data was provided on the efficacy rate among older people, the seriously sick and the highly vulnerable. As of November 8, the trial had enrolled 42% global and 30% US volunteers with racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. It is not known if this vaccine will work in ethnically different populations that are not part of the trial, and no one can tell how long the immunity might last. More will be revealed about these issues once Pfizer and BioNTech have published their Phase 3 trial data in a scientific peer-reviewed journal.

For this vaccine to be authorized, in accordance with US Food and Drug Administration guidelines, companies need to wait for at least two more months to see if any safety or adverse issues are observed in at least half the trial subjects two months after the last injection. While this vaccine offers huge promise, experts caution that, similar to the flu jab, the first-generation COVID-19 vaccine may not be completely protective.

The biggest stumbling block in the success of mRNA vaccine is proper temperature storage, transport, delivery and continuous temperature monitoring as the vaccine needs to be consistently maintained at around -70°C or -80°C. Deviation from these storage requirements reduces both shelf life and efficacy. Such absolute requirements of maintaining a cold chain for the vaccine pose a real challenge in countries with intense heat or poor infrastructure.

Pfizer is currently working on the stability of this vaccine along with other storage and handling issues as well as developing packaging and innovative logistical solutions for various locations around the globe. For example, Pfizer

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has developed a dry-ice based container in which vaccines can be stored for up to 10-15 days. These containers can be used for transit purposes as well. Alternatively, countries are required to set separate centralized hubs or vaccination centers equipped with ultra-cold freezers where vaccinations can be performed. Success of protein-based vaccines from other ongoing trials will be beneficial to countries with large populations and poor infrastructure.

### **Who Will Get It?**

Pfizer and BioNtech have committed to manufacturing 50 million doses in 2020 and a further 1.3 billion in 2021. This may sound like a lot. However, demand is much higher and over 80% of this supply has been already booked by countries like the US, Canada and Japan as well as the European Union. Ultimately, the statistics suggest that the vaccine may not be available to many other countries before the end of next year.

Another challenge that may be faced by many developing and poorer countries is the cost. While the US and the EU have agreed to a cost of approximately \$20 per dose, poorer countries may not be able to afford this vaccine for their entire populations. The world remains hopeful that Pfizer will roll out pricing packages adjusted for different markets. The success of another vaccine out of 11 ongoing trials will not only reduce the cost but will also hasten the process of immunization of a large number of people around the globe.

The success of this or any of the other incoming vaccines is the result of unprecedented and intensified research. A timely and effective partnership between clinicians, scientists and biotech researchers has played a crucial role in its development. It is a proof point that countries will need more laboratories and uninterrupted research funding to have a better understanding of various diseases and become self-sufficient in tackling crises such as COVID-19, with defense mechanisms in place for the protection and survival of the human race.

While the emergence of infectious diseases is unpredictable, it is also important to realize that millions of people across the globe are in a pandemic of their own, affected by cancer, cardiovascular disease, mental health problems or a multitude of other afflictions. Now we have seen what global collaboration between the science, medical and biotech communities can achieve under pressure, there is hope for a similar drive and enthusiasm to come up with solutions that may eradicate many other diseases affecting billions of people worldwide.

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## **Cambodia's COVID-19 Recovery Must Include Microfinance Reform**

Dai Wei Tsang  
November 19, 2020

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**Cambodia's government must avoid treating microcredit as a miracle cure or a substitute for an adequate social safety net.**

**I**n Cambodia, more than 2 million of the country's 10-million-strong adult workforce hold a microcredit loan. Each of those loans comes to an average of \$3,320, or twice the per capita GDP of the country. While microcredit was once considered a useful tool, without a national social assistance program, improved financial literacy and more stringent consumer protections, Cambodia may strangle itself with a system that once lifted many out of poverty.

Modern microcredit deployed on a significant scale is generally attributed to Muhammad Yunus, who launched the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in 1976. The project began as an alternative for the poor, who often resorted to

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loan sharks when formal banks refused to extend credit to those judged unlikely to return the investment. The sharks, on the other hand, charged interest rates that ate up enough profits to permanently trap families in cycles of borrowing.

The lasting benefits of microcredit have been disputed by some economists, but no matter their actual effects, microcredit was never intended to be an emergency fund. It was designed to facilitate entrepreneurship and to enable a cycle out of poverty rather than simply making ends meet. But in Cambodia, more and more citizens are borrowing just to make it through the month or, worse, to pay off existing loans.

Most microloans in Cambodia are collateralized by land titles, and when the poor are unable to make payments on time, they are pressured to sell their land or flee their village. Cambodia has extremely low social assistance coverage and does not run a cash-transfer system for any demographic on a national scale. It offers no pensions and no national health insurance for most workers beyond the government and military sector, leaving a large majority of the population vulnerable to the ebb and flow of the economy. Stripped of land and out of work, the poor move in search of other opportunities. Today, this nomadic workforce creates massive complications for pandemic control.

With multiple industries hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn, the Cambodian government must avoid treating microcredit as a miracle cure or as a substitute for an adequate social safety net. It is also imperative that the government prevent micro debt from evolving into an even larger economic presence during this period. The largest lenders in Cambodia together already provide more than 90% of all microloans, and most are owned by external banks and Western development agencies. This foreign influence could increase the risk of political and economic destabilization in the future, long after COVID-19 is contained.

More than 135 civil society groups have called for a temporary halt of loan repayments, but so

far, the National Bank of Cambodia has only issued a non-binding circular on loan restructuring. More action is needed by the government of Cambodia to protect those most vulnerable to default under the current economic whiplash, whether in the form of a moratorium on new loans, an extended grace period for loan repayment or suspension of interest.

In the longer term, the Cambodian government should seriously consider improving the reach of the nation's social assistance program, financial literacy programs and consumer protection against unethical loan practices. Unemployment benefits and emergency funds would eliminate the need for many individuals to seek loans in the first place and prevent them from putting up their land titles as collateral. Financial literacy would deter borrowers from making purchases that are unlikely to yield enough profits for timely repayment as well as immunize them against any legal scare tactics. Consumer protection laws could also limit the interest rates to bar excessive profit and the measures used by salesmen, who themselves are under pressure to collect.

It is worth remembering that Bangladesh, home to the Grameen Bank, remains poor despite the bank's wide reach. Cambodia had sustained one of the world's highest economic growth rates, but the government has its work cut out if it wants to insulate its poorest from the COVID-19 economic shockwave under existing constraints.

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# The Rise of the Digital Émigré

Samantha North  
November 20, 2020

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**The digital émigré trend is gaining such momentum that governments are beginning to take notice.**

**T**he French word “émigré” specifically refers to people who leave their home country for political reasons, a self-exile of sorts. In that sense, it’s a very different term from “immigrant,” “expat” or “nomad.” In history, émigrés have fled abroad to escape from revolutions in France, the United States and Russia. Many aristocrats escaped war-torn European countries amid the chaos of the Second World War. In the early 1920s, cities such as Shanghai and Paris were havens for émigré communities. Now, a century later, political changes have created a new wave of émigrés. I call them digital émigrés.

For example, 2020 has brought an unprecedented rise in American citizens leaving the United States to seek new lives abroad. In fact, the number of Americans who gave up their US citizenship skyrocketed to 5,816 in the first half of 2020, compared with 2,072 in all of 2019, according to research from New York-based Bambridge Accountants.

This trend has been accelerated not only by America’s poor handling of the pandemic, but also the rise of Trumpism and more generalized far-right political attitudes, plus uncertainty about health care and worries about newly emboldened militia groups across the country. Those who leave may include parents looking for safer countries to bring up their children or members of marginalized groups worried about the rise in racist political ideologies.

Across the Atlantic, a similar dynamic is happening in the UK. Brexit has been a massive push factor for British digital émigrés. The

number of British citizens moving permanently to European Union countries rose by 30% since the 2016 referendum. According to research, half of this number decided to leave within three months of the original vote. By now, some will already be almost eligible for citizenship in their destination country, which in some cases takes a minimum of five years.

Other Brits fled at the last minute, during the transition period of 2020, while their EU rights were still valid. At the time of writing, some are still planning an escape before the end of 2020. There has also been a 500% increase in British citizens who have taken up citizenship of one of the 27 EU countries. This is a predictable response to the actions of a UK government forcibly removing people’s long-held rights.

These trends in both the UK and US indicate that people are no longer prepared to tolerate the consequences of damaging political decisions. In the past, it was harder to uproot one’s life and leave for another country. For starters, international moves require having a source of income, which can be challenging to find when you don’t speak the language, don’t have connections and aren’t familiar with the local culture.

Fortunately for 21st-century digital émigrés, the rise in remote working, and particularly in doing business online across borders, has provided the necessary freedom to make rapid international relocations. What’s more, the pandemic has boosted this trend by further legitimizing online working, compelling more employers to accept it as the norm. Countries needing immigration have seen the remote working trend as a golden opportunity to attract skilled professionals to their shores. A number of countries, including Estonia and Bermuda, have introduced digital-nomad visas. Others, such as Portugal and the Czech Republic, have special pathways to residency for foreigners who generate income from outside the country.

In the case of Portugal and, more recently, Greece, generous tax breaks are available for those who make money online. For those

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countries, the beauty of the setup is that the foreigners' money can help revitalize the local economy without taking jobs on the ground away from citizens.

Indeed, the digital émigré trend is gaining such momentum that governments are beginning to take notice. If a large number of educated and skilled citizens leave their country permanently, taking their tax money with them, it could have severe implications for that country's economy. Perhaps governments should keep this more firmly in mind when they decide to enact policies that deprive people of important rights, such as the freedom to live, work, study and retire across European Union countries.

Governments should tread carefully in this "digital first" world, where borderless working is rapidly becoming the norm. Remote working and online business empower digital émigrés to vote with their feet. These highly educated and skilled professionals can easily relocate their entire lives to destinations that more closely match their values, goals and lifestyle choices.

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**\*Samantha North** is the founder of Digital Émigré, helping people start online businesses for easier relocation abroad.

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## **25 Years On, The Dayton Peace Agreement Is a Ticking Time Bomb**

Emir Hadzikadunic  
November 20, 2020

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**If the perilous trajectory in Bosnia and Herzegovina is allowed to proceed unrestricted, the West needs to fasten its seatbelts and brace for impact.**

**T**hroughout Danis Tanovic's Oscar-winning film "No Man's Land," a viewer waits distressingly for the bouncing mine to

explode below the body of Cera, an injured Bosnian soldier lying in a trench. The last moments of this antiwar satire do not capture a real ending for the story — or the Bosnian war: Cera was left behind motionless by the departing UN blue helmets.

Tanovic's movie also depicts the disheartened departure of a curious TV crew, hungry for breaking news. Unlike the UN peacekeepers, reporters were oblivious to the fate of the soldier left behind in a ditch. In a non-fiction plot, Bosnia and Herzegovina is kept equally alive and motionless with the real ticking time bomb that can explode and blow everything in the vicinity.

### **Two Paths**

For a dozen years now, the Balkan state has been plodding along two gloomy paths, heading for a dangerous collision. On one hand, Russia's collusion with local proxies is destabilizing the liberal vision of collective security within the context of future Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia also continues to be the only state opposing the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its steering board's communiqués, including the last statement from June 3 this year.

On the other hand, the Bosnian Serb-majority entity, Republika Srpska, is reversing the peace process while simultaneously courting Russia as an ally. Its nationalism, kept away like a genie in a bottle due to pressure from the European Union and American unipolar dominance, has managed to free itself from captivity. Thus, the Serb member of the rotating Bosnian presidency, Milorad Dodik, once hailed as a "breath of fresh air" by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, has held at least 10 official consultations with Vladimir Putin over the last several years.

During his second consecutive meeting with the Russian president in the midst of the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Dodik shared his unequivocal affiliation with Moscow: "Naturally, there is no question that we support Russia. We may be a

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small and modest community, but our voice is loud.”

This trajectory with opposing power dyads within the Bosnian state is often lamented as a nightmare for the Dayton Peace Agreement that put an end to the bloody Yugoslav War in 1995 and kept the country in one piece. Dayton is dead; Bosnia and Herzegovina is “sleepwalking” into another Balkan crisis; it is on the brink of collapse; its president wants to break up his own country; goodbye Bosnia and Herzegovina, welcome Republika Srpska’s exit — these are just some grim headlines that suggest nightmare scenarios.

However, most experts on the subject rarely discuss wider security dilemmas of this critical geopolitical divergence, namely the Bosnian Serbs’ effective breakaway from both Bosnia and Herzegovina and the West. Unlike the two times Russia played a limited hand effectively — and, as some would argue, defensively — in Georgia and Ukraine, the Kremlin’s subversion of Europe’s soft underbelly is essentially an offensive posture that possibly inflicts fatal damage on the already shaken Euro-Atlantic pillars: liberal order, Euro-Atlantic integrity and European security.

Should the EU fail to protect its mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ensuing turmoil will eventually turn into a great-power rivalry. If the perilous trajectory in Bosnia and Herzegovina is allowed to proceed unrestricted, the West needs to fasten its seatbelts and brace for impact.

### **Slippery Slope**

The Bosnian Serbs’ secessionist direction is not a given, but the slope is a slippery one. A unilateral breakaway would effectively tear apart Bosnia’s postwar constitutional order of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, and other political and institutional arrangements that have gradually restored peace and security over the last 25 years. The Serb secession would also signal an existential threat to the survival of a multiethnic state and the Bosnian people in particular.

Similar past attempts to impose Serb hegemony over Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s had disastrous consequences and resulted in more than 100,000 deaths, 2.2 million refugees and displaced persons, culminating with genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995. Since pro-Bosnian authorities in Sarajevo want to protect the liberal multicultural order and see the EU and the US as preferred allies, it is only natural for them to expect appropriate reactions from the Euro-Atlantic community.

On the other hand, a secessionist party would also face a critical struggle. Its immediate insecurity stems from the NATO-trained Bosnian army across the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) that currently subdivides Bosnia and Herzegovina into two administrative units. As Republika Srpska’s political leadership largely opposes the liberal multicultural order and looks to Russia as a preferred ally, it would also rely on Moscow for political and military support.

Republika Srpska’s collision with a Bosnian-led government would probably escalate from threats and barricades along IEBL to larger-scale clashes that a small number of UN-mandated EUFOR troops will hardly deter. In a vicious cycle, Bosnia could eventually end up in pre-Dayton chaos that, in the early 1990s, also included the Bosnian Croat component and its own secessionist aspirations.

Serbia, which shares a long border with Bosnia and Herzegovina and nationalist sentiments with the secessionist movement, is probably the first contender to be caught in the Bosnian fire for both internal and external reasons. In its substance, patronizing Bosnian Serbs has continued since the time when Slobodan Milosevic was at the pinnacle of his power in the early 1990s. Patriarch Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church, for example, proclaims that borders between Serbia and Republika Srpska do not exist. Serbia’s academics also view Serbia’s national borders as temporary frontiers.

As Serbia’s confidence grew over time, emboldened by the return of Russia to the Balkan

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theater and by China's global rise, Belgrade became more assertive in its behavior. Within months of the joint Serbian-Russian Slavic Shield military display in October 2019, Serbia's defense minister, Alexander Vulin, announced, among other strategic objectives, the intent to defend the Serb entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia's new national defense strategy thus transcends national boundaries, marking a shift from defensive sovereignty to a more offensive approach.

At the same time, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic is the only politician from the region, if not the whole of Europe, who has held more bilateral consultations with President Putin than Dodik. The Kremlin's transcript from the last meeting between Vucic and Putin on June 23 exposes Russia's views that two countries were developing "pragmatic but still very special and very good allied relations."

### **Structural Realities**

What Serbia does in Bosnia and Herzegovina pales in comparison with a much larger geopolitical dilemma. For Belgrade, now is a turning point to choose a side between the liberal West and the authoritarian East. Its official policy of neutrality and simultaneous flirting with NATO on one hand, and Russia and China on the other, may no longer be sustainable. As the rationale goes, other powers besides the United States, primarily Russia and possibly China (to a lesser extent), will enlarge their soft-power or military footprints in the regional subsystem sooner rather than later.

Other structural realities also encourage a more aggressive trajectory from Belgrade. First, Serbia has accelerated its military build-up at a faster rate than its neighbors. According to Global Fire Power, its current defense budget is almost twice that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo combined.

Second, Serbia's reliance on the Russian and Chinese military to balance neighboring NATO members such as Croatia, Bulgaria or Romania

has also been reinforced. In 2019, Serbia received Russian donations of MIG-29 fighter jets, T-72 tanks and BRDM-2MS armored vehicles. A short deployment of the S-400 air defense system on Serbian soil also raised American eyebrows. This year, Serbia purchased, at Putin's suggestion, the Pantsir S-1 air defense system. It also bought CH92-A drones and FK-3 surface-to-air missiles from China and kept talking about new arms.

Third, Serbia can hardly benefit from the liberal European order in the Balkans except through EU membership, which seems to be a third-rate priority at the moment according to some academic voices in Belgrade. By siding with Russia and the Slavic Shield, however, Belgrade still aspires to redefine its borders, reclaim Kosovo (or at least part of it), possibly reestablish preponderance in Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, eventually, become a Balkan hegemon.

Turkey would also become entangled in the nightmare of a new Bosnian disorder. On one level, the foreign policy objectives of Turkey and other NATO allies are compatible with almost all critical issues in the western Balkans. Turkey maintains its policy that international borders of the newly independent states in the region, following declarations of independence by Montenegro in 2006 and Kosovo in 2008, have become definite. In Bosnia in particular, Turkey is among 20 contributing countries of EUFOR, providing deterrence and contributing to a safe and secure environment. Ankara is also on the same page with the US and EU members in the PIC and its steering board's communiqués that Russia usually opposes.

On another level, Turkey projects its soft power throughout the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, relying on historical, cultural and personal ties. This year, it allocated €30 million (\$36 million) to revamp and modernize the Bosnian armed forces. Turkey can also leverage its strategic partnership with Serbia to deter the latter from taking a more belligerent stance.

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However, in the event of a collision in Bosnia, having military spending 10 times that of Serbia, Turkey would probably oppose Serbian offensive behavior in the region. Ankara also represents an important geopolitical substitute for the Bosnian people should the EU, EUFOR and NATO decide to abandon their commitments to safeguarding peace, security and liberal order in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their immediate and complete withdrawal from Bosnia, which is less probable, would also invite other extra-regional actors to fill the vacuum, in which case power relations would inevitably become subject to reconfiguration and different visions for both Bosnia and Herzegovina and southeastern Europe would have to emerge.

This scenario could set Turkey and Russia on a collision course because Vladimir Putin perceives Republika Srpska and Serbia as natural, historic and strategic allies. At a minimum, the Turkish double track toward Russia would have to pass an additional test. At the same time, these two countries possess formidable mediation capacity with confronting parties in the Bosnian theater that some European powers would oppose on geopolitical — and the more liberal ones on ideological — grounds.

### **Our European Home**

As Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov tweeted this summer, "Our common European home needs serious reconstruction if we want all of its residents to live in prosperity." The Kremlin, so the perception goes, seeks to reshape the liberal Euro-Atlantic order in Russia's image and for its own benefit. Second, Moscow is also interested in replacing the US-mandated hierarchic order in Europe with an unknown, but certainly more anarchic, multipolar structure. But Bosnia and Herzegovina is not on the Russian border, and its inclusion in the NATO structure does not pose any meaningful threat to Moscow.

However, Republika Srpska's secession from a country that lacks NATO's Article 5 mutual defense guarantee presents yet another opportunity for Russia to become more

influential on the European stage at the cost of the Euro-Atlantic order.

At first sight, a local collision in Bosnia and Herzegovina would bear a striking resemblance to what transpired in Ukraine in 2013-14. Ukraine was forcefully divided along similar geopolitical and domestic lines between pro-European aspirations in Kyiv on one hand, and secessionist tendencies by the pro-Russian minority in the east on the other. However, Bosnia's instability is far more dangerous than the crisis in Ukraine for two structural reasons, largely ignored so far.

First, in Republika Srpska, Putin's prospects are of the highest geopolitical value, namely having a loyal proxy ready to do Moscow's bidding, not in Russia's near abroad like Ukraine, but deep within the EU's external borders.

Second, Russia's penetration within NATO's eastern borders also challenges Pax Americana and a 70-year-old alliance system in Europe. The latter represents a deep incursion into the system protected and deeply rooted in American and European liberal values. In that context, the nature of Russia's disruptive behavior in Bosnia no longer remains defensive but becomes an offensive act against the West.

Some may argue that Russia's aims are less relevant. What matters is Moscow's capability to project soft and hard power. In this regard, skeptical analysts largely question Russia's ability to challenge the United States in the Balkans. Their typical reference is domestic weakness and Russia's stagnating economy, with an annual GDP that is smaller than Italy's. However, other great power credentials such as its sheer size, nuclear weapons capability, vast natural resources and an impressive cyber weapons arsenal enable Russia to punch above its weight on the world arena, keeping Europe and NATO vigilant.

As Russia has shown with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it won't shy away from using its extraordinary military readiness for limited ends without fear of unintended consequences. Eventually, it was effective at projecting military



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power in areas where the Euro-Atlantic community was reluctant to do so. Bosnia and Herzegovina, vulnerable as it may be, provides an easy target for Russia, offering Moscow the best chance to keep the West in retreat.

### **Opposing Power Dyads**

This trajectory with opposing power dyads within the Bosnian state brings challenging dynamics for the European Union too. From the inside, the EU's multitasking operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina would have to pass their stress test. From the outside, likely incursions of other illiberal powers in Brussels' backyard would ostensibly place the two opposing sides on a collision course.

A major dilemma for the EU lies between a strong multilateral reaction to protect a collective peace-building legacy and unilateral moves by individual member states to pursue their national interests. The EU's first viable option would be to increase EUFOR's symbolic military mission to protect order and address the grievances of local communities. As Kurt Bassuener wrote in *Foreign Affairs* last year, the current mission can't defend itself against any growing uncertainty with "an institutional fig leaf of 600 troops," "much less fulfill the mandate of the Dayton accords."

Should the EUFOR contributing states strengthen their capacity and act decisively within NATO's interoperability mechanisms, the Bosnian crisis would probably not escalate. In this regard, EUFOR's annual military exercises — which airlift reserve forces and combine them with EUFOR's permanent troops, armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina and local law enforcement agencies — are of critical importance.

An alternative scenario with dire consequences would be to evacuate EUFOR troops from Bosnia altogether. This is what happened when the Dutch battalion, under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Protection Force, pulled out from Srebrenica in July 1995, mocking the UN resolutions on safe heavens and

allowing Serb extremists — today convicted war criminals — to proceed unabashedly with genocide. Such a reaction would deprive Bosnia of European military presence and set in motion a rapid geopolitical change, allowing regional and extra-regional actors to take advantage and fill the vacuum.

If that happens, the ability of Brussels to extend stability and project soft power in the region would be severely weakened, if not completely diminished. This prospect, before long, compels particular EU member states that simultaneously live in two parallel worlds — one liberal and one increasingly illiberal — to make their final ideational preference. It also provokes complex and dangerous dynamics given opposing threat perceptions between those member states that border Russia and a few others that explore interest-based partnerships with Moscow.

Undercurrents of this anxiety might have already surfaced when French President Emmanuel Macron spoke of the necessity to reopen "a strategic dialogue" with Russia, tweeting that Russia was a "threat" but "no longer an enemy" and "also a partner on certain topics." Things may get extremely complicated if populist EU leaders choose to decouple from the US and the transatlantic security umbrella. Hungary's decision to permit the transit of Russian military equipment to Serbia last year signaled an early warning that some member states are ready to circumvent common rules and jeopardize common security.

Hence, a powerful trigger such as a new Bosnian crisis would elevate Europe's threat perceptions to such proportions that the United States would have to rescue the alliance and its central position within it. This resonates with the poor historical record of the EU in conflict management in ex-Yugoslavia, despite much more favorable geopolitical realities in the early 1990s. With an exception of a short war in Slovenia, the EU demonstrated neither effectiveness nor capacity in preempting the bloodshed in 1991.

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Eventually, European leaders failed miserably in Bosnia, prompting a peace treaty to be negotiated and drafted in the US rather than Europe. Should this failure be repeated, the third consequential choice for the EU will be to pass the buck on to Washington, in which case this regional small-nation turmoil would transform into a great-power rivalry.

### **Most Dangerous of All Moods**

Addressing the US Senate on the American mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the end of 1995, then-Senator Joe Biden made a powerful statement: “Europe cannot stay united without United States. There is no moral center in Europe. When in the last two centuries had the French, or the British or the Germans ... moved in a way to unify that continent to stand up to this kind of genocide?” He went on: “I am not here to tell you if we do not act, it will spread tomorrow and cause a war in Europe or next year, but I am here to tell you within the decade, it will cause a spread of war and a cancer and the collapse of Western alliance.”

Human agency aside, structural forces would also be at play and would likely determine Washington’s preferred move. First, the US is still — by all realist and neorealist accounts, such as annual defense spending, global GDP share, population growth rate and geography — more powerful, wealthier and more influential relative to any potential competitor in the international system. Even by the logic of those who support a more restrained foreign policy, with US primacy still intact in Europe, American policymakers would continue to be attracted to liberal hegemony and more so to the existing grand strategy in the European subsystem where the US is not only unchallenged but is largely accepted as benevolent.

The US is also a rational actor that makes calculations regarding its position in a changing regional and international order. Washington understands well that Russia’s unchecked incursion so close to NATO’s eastern border would damage American-led liberal order and

alliance structure and, at the same time, change the regional — and possibly even the European — balance of power to the detriment of the United States.

This brings us to what the historian Michael Howard calls “the most dangerous of all moods,” in which the US would not accept a relegation “to the second rank” in the European subsystem. So far, no US administration has shown any intention to leave Europe as a vital area of America’s global footprint in which it had invested a vast amount of blood and money over the past century. In reality, US military presence has essentially increased in Europe in recent years, bringing in more troops, investment and exercises.

The US military also supports the peace-building process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On this 25th anniversary of the Dayton Accords, it conducted a bilateral air support exercise with Bosnian military forces using two F-16 fighter planes. So, locking, loading and bombing the party that disrupts American-led order in southeastern Europe on Russia’s behalf is not only possible, but could even become probable.

Great powers usually do not show much interest in fighting over the squabbles of small nations. However, history is full of exceptions, when minor disputes over isolated issues have dragged great powers into quagmires. Interestingly enough, such regrettable dynamics are best illustrated in the Balkans. A minor dispute in 435 BC between the city-state of Corinth, allied with Sparta, and the city-state Corcyra, allied with Athens, soon led to a larger conflict, eventually trapping the great powers of Athens and Sparta into the Peloponnesian Wars that devastated the Athenian empire, exhausted Sparta and shattered the cultural landscape of Ancient Greece.

What took place in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, was another striking incident that triggered a chain of adverse reactions that set the whole of Europe, and then the world, on fire. Bosnia and Herzegovina is again a danger zone on the European geopolitical map where competing

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opponents face the pressures of being bogged down in protracted rivalries due to rapidly shifting power dynamics. Such settings create a space for a modern-day Gavrilo Princip to fire his bullet and trigger a chain of regrettable events.

Hence, not stemming the Serb breakaway from the Dayton mandate, from both Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider Western liberal order, would be tantamount to allowing a ticking time bomb to go off. Paradoxically, this threat comes at a time when the Balkan region has a good chance to institute a viable order, secure lasting peace and fulfill its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The decision is there for the taking.

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\***Emir Hadzikadunic** served as the ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Islamic Republic of Iran (2010-13) and Malaysia (2016-2020).

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## **12 Years After Mumbai, the Fight Against Terrorism Continues**

Kanwal Sibal  
November 25, 2020

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**As we mark the 12th anniversary of the Mumbai tragedy, attacks in Europe and elsewhere demonstrate that India is not alone in facing the scourge of terrorism.**

**T**he 12th anniversary of the November 26, 2008, Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks in Mumbai is an apt occasion to evaluate not only India's struggle against terrorism but also how other major countries have dealt with this menace.

Nine gunmen traveled from Karachi to Mumbai by boat to unleash mayhem over the course of three days. They attacked multiple locations, killing 164 people and wounding more than 300. Iconic locations such as the Taj Mahal

Palace Hotel next to the Gateway of India, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (earlier known as Victoria Terminus) and the Leopold Cafe were hit. The attacks paralyzed the city, triggered mass panic and caused the collapse of India's booming stock market.

### **Cat-and-Mouse Game**

India absorbed the monstrous nature of the Mumbai attacks and resumed direct political dialogue with Pakistan in July 2009. India even agreed to make a major political concession: It delinked the dialogue from the issue of terrorism in the hope that the two countries could have a free, frank and uninterrupted conversation. Pakistan treated this as a political victory at India's expense. Instead of initiating a process of normalizing ties with India, Pakistan continued with its policy of supporting jihadi groups dedicated to launching terror attacks in neighboring countries.

India's policy was based on the assumption that Pakistan would realize the internal cost of nurturing jihadi groups on its soil. Like Frankenstein, terrorists have turned on Pakistan itself. In 2013, an explosion killed at least 45 people in a Shia district of Karachi, and the 2014 Peshawar school massacre led to 150 deaths, of which at least 134 were students. These are just two of the many such incidents that have been taking place in Pakistan over the past decade.

Yet Pakistani support for terror as an instrument of state policy has continued. India has thus reverted to its position of putting terrorism at the center of any India-Pakistan dialogue. Pakistan refuses to accept India's position. Instead, it wants dialogue on Kashmir and uses terror as a tactic to wage war against India for this territory.

Pakistan-sponsored attacks against India have continued unabated. Most recently, on November 20, four suspected terrorists belonging to Jaish-e-Mohammad, a jihadist group headquartered in Pakistan, waged a three-hour-long gun battle with the police on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway. They had entered India to disrupt local

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elections in Kashmir. Reportedly, they were planning a spectacular attack to commemorate the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

India-Pakistan relations continue to be in a stalemate on the issue of terrorism. In a cat-and-mouse game, Pakistan promotes terrorist attacks while India prevents them. Since 2019, one thing has changed. After the 2019 Pulwama attack that killed 40 paramilitary personnel, India conducted airstrikes on Pakistani territory. For the first time since the 1971 war, India crossed the line of control, the de facto India-Pakistan border in Jammu and Kashmir. The airstrikes demonstrated that India is no longer deterred by Pakistan's nuclear capability. If Pakistan instigates a major terrorist attack on Indian soil, New Delhi has shown to be willing to take limited military action in retaliation.

### **An Increasingly Extremist Society**

Even as Pakistan continues to promote terrorism across the border, its society has become increasingly extremist. In 2012, the German news agency Deutsche Welle analyzed the rise in extremism in Pakistani society. Many see cultural plurality as un-Islamic. Arabization is on the rise. Numerous jihadist and terrorist organizations operate freely in the country. This trend taking place in a nuclear state is and should be a matter of great international concern.

Pakistan now exports terror not only to India and Afghanistan, but also to other countries. As per the European Foundation for South Asian Studies, there is an “unholy alliance” between Pakistan's army and terrorism. Islamic extremists from Pakistan or of Pakistani origin have been involved in many terrorist attacks in other countries. In September, the main suspect for a knife attack outside the former Paris offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo was of Pakistani origin.

Most recently, street protests have erupted in Pakistan against French President Emmanuel Macron after he claimed that Islam is in crisis following the beheading of schoolteacher Samuel Paty, killed by a Chechen refugee disgruntled

over Paty's discussion of the controversial Charlie Hebdo cartoons during a civic education class. Protesters burned a defaced image of Macron and the French flag outside the French consulate in Karachi. Many sought the expulsion of the French ambassador and demanded that Pakistan break off diplomatic ties with France.

Pakistan has taken great umbrage at Macron's actions to curb Islamic extremism. Pakistani leaders object to France's insistence that Muslim leaders agree to a “charter of republican values,” reject political Islam and foreign interference. Shireen Mazari, Pakistan's human rights minister, tweeted: “Macron is doing to Muslims what the Nazis did to the Jews — Muslim children will get ID numbers (other children won't) just as Jews were forced to wear the yellow star on their clothing for identification.” After French protestations, she withdrew her comments, but the damage was done.

In October, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global terror financing watchdog, put Pakistan on its grey list for its failure to “effectively crackdown on means of financing terror activities.” The FATF found “strategic deficiencies in [Pakistan's] regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.”

To improve its international image, Pakistan has taken some judicial action against the masterminds of the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Hafiz Saeed, one of the founders of Lashkar-e-Taiba and the leader of Jamaat-ud-Dawa, two notorious jihadist organizations, has been convicted on charges of terror financing. As Pakistan's leading English newspaper Dawn observed, the conviction came “as Pakistan tries to avoid punitive blacklisting” by FATF. Given Pakistan's incestuous relationship with the likes of Saeed, he might get off lightly after an appeal once Pakistan has escaped censure from the FATF.

The big international concern is that the Pakistani establishment continues to aid and abet terrorism. There has been no fundamental change in either policy or actions. In fact, Islamabad's ratcheting up of its rhetoric on Macron is

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alarming because it is accompanied by “rising religious intolerance at home.”

### **Nelson’s Eye**

Despite the fact that six Americans were killed in the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the US has been relatively soft on Pakistan. For decades, Islamabad was a Cold War ally. The US and Saudi Arabia funded the Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviet Union through Pakistan. These led to close ties between the American and Pakistani establishments. Of late, these ties have been weakening and Washington has been inching closer to New Delhi.

In the most recent joint statement, India and the US have called “for concerted action against all terrorist networks, including al-Qaeda, ISIS/Daesh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen.” They have also asked “Pakistan to take immediate, sustained and irreversible action to ensure that no territory under its control is used for terrorist attacks, and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators and planners of all such attacks, including 26/11 Mumbai, Uri, and Pathankot.”

While this statement might give diplomatic satisfaction to India, it is important to remember that Saeed was able to freely address public rallies in Pakistan despite the US putting a bounty of \$10 million on his head. The US could not, or did not, put Pakistan on the mat for failure to act against the Haqqani Network, responsible for inflicting casualties on US soldiers in Afghanistan.

The US has imposed the most draconian sanctions on Iran and has not spared a powerful nuclear state like Russia. Yet it has hesitated to impose serious sanctions on Pakistan, giving, unconvincingly, its nuclear status as one of the excuses. The limited military and economic sanctions the US has imposed on Pakistan are neutralized by Islamabad’s ever-increasing economic and military links with China. In any case, despite the FATF proceedings against

Pakistan, the country has obtained yet another bailout from the International Monetary Fund.

The US has turned Nelson’s eye on Pakistan’s promotion of terror because it needs the country’s assistance to retreat from Afghanistan. The war on terror has not quite succeeded. Like the UK and the Soviet Union, the US is worn out after nearly two decades on the ground in Afghanistan. It needs to save face and avoid the impression of total defeat. It is willing to negotiate with the Taliban even as the armed group continues to commit horrific acts of terror against innocent Afghans. A report by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction showed a 50% increase in attacks over the past three months alone, with the UN estimating that some 6,000 civilians have died in the violence in the first nine months of 2020.

### **India’s Unique Vulnerability to Terror**

As the US makes peace with the Taliban, India’s problems with Pakistan-sponsored terror are likely to grow. Even Russia has opened a “channel to the Taliban,” a historic sworn enemy. The Taliban leadership is demonstrating diplomatic savvy by negotiating their way back to power. This leadership might appear relatively urbane, but the Taliban rank and file continue to be fanatics. They now believe they have defeated two superpowers thanks to their faith in Islam.

Once the Taliban win power, they will impose their obscurantist ideology. This will embolden extremists in Pakistan. Lest we forget, an Indian plane hijacked by terrorists landed in Kandahar in 1999. India released terrorists to bring back hostages. One of the terrorists was Masood Azhar. He went on to start Jaish-e-Muhammad, responsible for the deaths of hundreds over the years. Azhar is to India what Osama bin Laden was to the US. He got his initial training in Afghanistan, and many more like him are likely to receive similar training once the Taliban are firmly back in the saddle.

While the Taliban might not engage in direct terrorism against the US, India would be fair game. Pakistan would promote Taliban efforts,

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and China would ignore, if not abet, them. For a decade, China opposed resolutions in the United Nations Security Council to designate Azhar as an international terrorist, leading Michael Kugelman, a noted South Asia analyst, to call him “China’s favorite terrorist.” China has become a loyal ally of Pakistan and lauds Islamabad’s fight against international terrorism even as its junior ally stays deafeningly silent on the treatment of the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. As India and China clash, an increase in terror attacks on Indian soil would serve Chinese interests. Pakistan and the Taliban are likely to oblige.

Attacks across Europe and elsewhere demonstrate that India is not alone in facing the scourge of terrorism. As we mark the 12th anniversary of the Mumbai attacks, India’s 1996 proposal for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is more relevant than ever. The world needs to increase security, boost peace and safeguard the lives of innocents.

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## **Diego Maradona, the Perfect Celebrity Athlete**

Ellis Cashmore  
November 26, 2020

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**Maradona, who died on November 25 aged 60, personified a new age that saw football transform into globally televised entertainment.**

**D**iego Maradona was an imperfect athlete, but a perfect celebrity athlete. His faults, inconsistencies, contradictions and oddities were clear in his playing years but

became even clearer as he grew older. That’s why the media loved him and made him the most dazzling and fascinating footballer of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The Argentinian star, who died on November 25 aged 60, personified a new age in which football, like many other sports, was being transformed into globally televised entertainment.

He also embodied a new spirit in professional sport. Fair play was no longer sacrosanct — the new spirit was one of winning at all cost. But, most importantly, he was dangerous: Wherever Maradona strayed, there was risk and peril of some kind. Combined, they elevated from mere mortal to a stupendous emblem of a new age.

### **Unrepentant**

Maradona seethed with volatility, the anarchy of his nature frequently subordinating nurture, or at least augmenting it. No incident better illustrates this than his belief-beggaring “Hand of God” goal of 1986. In a vicious payback for Argentina’s humiliation in the Falklands conflict four years before, Maradona forced the ball into the net in a World Cup game against England using foul, rather than fair, means. It was a move that, today, would be instantly invalidated and punished after video review.

In the mid-1980s, as Maradona later shamelessly admitted, “It was a nice feeling, like some sort of symbolic revenge against the English.” And the goal stood. An accident? No. “I knew it was my hand,” revealed the player, not in confession but in celebration. He was unrepentant for the rest of his life.

His public image in England will always be compromised by the foul, but elsewhere, he is acknowledged as one of the best, if not the best, football players of all time. Maradona will always be compared with his near-contemporary Pelé, 20 years his elder (now 80), also South American (Brazilian, in his case) and a far, far less perplexing character, who avoided playing in the European leagues. Maradona, by contrast, earned his spurs in Italy’s Serie A and Spain’s La Liga,

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two of the most competitive environments in football.

The comparison of the two players brings into relief the global media: association football, more than any other sport, was enthusiastically broadcast around the world in 1982 when 21-year-old Maradona arrived in Barcelona. Pelé had retired five years before, having spent his final years in the relatively undemanding and largely unseen US league. He was beige to Maradona's explosion in a paint factory.

Football was beginning a transformation that would make it the world's most popular and valuable sport, a marketing vehicle for major corporations and a den of most iniquitous corruption.

Money was the common denominator, and Maradona was a (perhaps unwitting) emblem of this new age. Barcelona paid a then-world record \$9.81 million to his Argentinian club Boca Juniors in 1982. Napoli paid Barcelona a then-record \$12 million transfer fee for him in 1984 and, while in those days salaries were not disclosed, Maradona was almost certainly the world's highest-paid player. Perhaps justifiably: He inspired Napoli to Serie A successes in 1987 and 1990 as well as in 1989's UEFA Cup.

With Mike Tyson, Ben Johnson and Magic Johnson, Maradona became one of the preeminent athletes of the 1980s. Notice the similarities?

Boxer Tyson was convicted of rape in 1992. Sprinter Ben Johnson was stripped of his Olympic gold medal in 1988 after testing positive for drugs. Basketball player Magic Johnson, in 1991, announced he was HIV positive.

All were virtuosos in their chosen sports; all were arguably better known for matters either unrelated to sports or, in Ben Johnson's case, transgressions.

### **Transgressions**

Maradona had many of his own transgressive moments. Apart from the now-legendary "Hand of God," Maradona made no secret of his political leanings and supported leftist leaders

across Latin America, such as Cuba's Fidel Castro, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Bolivia's Evo Morales. He provocatively befriended the revolutionary Castro and even had his image tattooed on his leg.

Son of a factory worker raised in a shantytown on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Maradona, who was born in 1960, first met Castro in 1987 when basking in Argentina's World Cup triumph. He identified with the dispossessed and found, in Cuba, a political system he apparently found well-matched with his own convictions. Maradona spent four years living in Havana, reputedly battling against substance dependency.

Drugs were a feature of Maradona's life and, while they may ultimately have contributed to his downfall, they also ensured the media stayed on his case. He tested positive for cocaine in Italy in 1991 (resulting in a 15-month-long ban from football), was disqualified from the 1994 World Cup after another positive drug test and was rumored to use various illicit substances long after his playing days.

He retired in 1997 after another drug scandal, claiming he had been framed. After that, Maradona had long spells of poor health and struggled with dependencies. Prior to his death, he was due to receive treatment for alcohol addiction.

Some athletes are remembered for their sports prowess; others for their antics; still others for both. Maradona was one such being: prodigiously talented but possessed of a turbulent streak that was, perhaps, ultimately self-destructive.

A less celebrity-oriented media might have let him fade to obscurity, as they might any other serially-disgraced retired athlete. Not Maradona: He was far, far too newsworthy for a ravenous media that didn't need to search for scraps — he kept serving up sumptuous repast.

Stories of his demons and misdemeanors kept us on alert. We knew his wouldn't be a long and prosperous life. This is why we, as well as the media, loved him. Maradona was a flawless emblem of flawed celebrity: an athlete with all

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the gifts, yet without a clue how to conserve and nourish them.

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\***Ellis Cashmore** is the author of "Elizabeth Taylor," "Beyond Black" and "Celebrity Culture," and he is the co-editor of "Studying Football."

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## **Sex Abuse Is the Moral Downfall of the Catholic Church**

Hans-Georg Betz  
November 27, 2020

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**The avalanche of revelations about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church has severely undermined its authority, especially when it concerns matters of morality.**

**M**y mother passed away a few years ago. She spent the last years of her life in a home for the elderly in a small town in Bavaria, where she and my father had spent most of their lives. In their younger days, both my parents were devout Catholics, initially taking at face value what the church taught.

Later on, confronted with the daily hypocrisy and outright nastiness inherent in the institution, they gradually distanced themselves from the Catholic Church, disillusioned, disenchanted, if not worse. But that is a different story.

I myself spent eight years in a Catholic boarding school, initially with great enthusiasm, in later years increasingly disenchanted, seeking to get out. My parents would not hear of it, for good reasons which had nothing to do with the Catholic Church. I stuck it out until I was old enough to transfer to a different school.

A few months before my mother passed away, during one of my last visits with her, she suddenly, out of the blue, asked me a question that initially stunned me: "Why were you so

eager to leave the boarding school?" Her eyes were insistent, her voice sounded almost desperate, looking for an answer that would alleviate her concerns and anxieties. At the time, I did not understand. Only a few weeks later, when I recalled the incident, it dawned on me: My mother was afraid that I had experienced sexual abuse, that my asking for being allowed to leave the place was a plea for help, and that, by refusing to take me out, my parents had been accomplices in abetting abuse.

I had the opportunity to alleviate my mother's fears. I never experienced sexual abuse nor am I aware of any of my fellow students ever having been subjected to it. Yet this episode showed me to what degree the criminal behavior of legions of members of the Catholic clergy was causing mental anguish among ordinary believers like my mother.

### **Facing the Facts**

Over the past few decades, the Catholic Church has been forced to face the facts in the wake of investigations that revealed the full extent of the depravity and corruption endemic to some of its institutions. In the process, once-eminent icons such as Pope Benedict's brother, Georg Ratzinger, once the all-powerful director of the famous Regensburg Domspatzen (boys' choir), have fallen hard. In some cases, even members of the Catholic Church's gotha were convicted of crimes and sent to jail by worldly courts unimpressed by the status of the accused.

And yet, the McCarrick report recently released by the Vatican suggests that previous scandals have done little to bring about a fundamental change in the way parts of the Catholic hierarchy have been dealing with the question of sexual abuse that has fatally undermined the Catholic Church's claim to represent a moral authority.

For those unfamiliar with the case, until his forced resignation in 2018, Theodore McCarrick was the cardinal of the Archdiocese of Washington, which encompasses the District of Columbia and surrounding areas in Maryland.



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This is of particular significance given that Maryland has an extensive history of Catholic settlement in the United States, dating back all the way to the 17th century. McCarrick was appointed cardinal of Washington by Pope Paul II, despite allegations that McCarrick had engaged in questionable behavior involving young aspiring priests — he slept in the same bed as seminarians.

Paul II did not believe the allegations. They reminded him of allegations at priests in his native Poland, promoted by the “communists” to discredit Poland’s Catholic Church. It was only under Paul’s successor, Pope Benedict XVI, that the allegations were taken seriously. But by then, it was too late.

By now it is established — and the report makes it quite clear — that Cardinal McCarrick has a long track record of sexually-inspired coercion, largely ignored and hushed up by the Catholic hierarchy, including the entourage of Paul II. As a result, as *The New York Times* recently put it, Paul’s image has been severely tarnished, his canonization (the elevation to the status of a saint) put in question. Pope Francis, under whose aegis the report was assembled, has made it entirely clear that he “Intends to rid the Catholic Church of sexual abuse.”

I, for my part, believe in his sincerity. The reality is, however, that he is confronted with a hierarchical structure which, in the past, has gone out of its way to dismiss, downplay and cover up reports of abuses, if only to uphold the authority of the church.

### **Absurd Theater**

A recent prominent case is the absurd theater provoked by the Catholic Church of Cologne. Its cardinal, Rainer Maria Woelkli, had commissioned a law firm from Munich to investigate allegations of sexual abuse by priests in the archdiocese. The Cologne prosecutor’s office recently brought charges against one of them. He is accused of sexual abuse of his underage nieces in the 1990s.

Once the expertise was delivered to the Cologne archdiocese, it was kept under lock and key by the cardinal’s office, which charged that it was methodologically faulty and therefore useless. The real reason, critics suggest, is that the report implicates one of Woelkli’s closest aids, today archbishop of Hamburg, put in charge to make sure that the affair would be covered up.

The result has been a perfect example of mutual recriminations and mud-slinging. Those opposed to the way the diocese has handled the affair allege that Woelkli is more interested in protecting the perpetrators than the victims of abuse.

In the meantime, church authorities have gone out of their way to censure and silence critics. A few days ago, they turned off the webpage of the archdiocese’s Catholic University Community, in charge of looking after the wellbeing of Catholic students at various universities in the region. The reason was, according to a Cologne newspaper, the community’s continued criticism of the “backward and evasive” attitude of Church officials with regard to controversial issues, including sexual morals.

In the meantime, the recent start of an official investigation by the Vatican has put additional pressure on Cardinal Woelkli. The investigation concerns a priest active in three dioceses in the greater Cologne area. Tried and convicted of sexual abuse of children and dependents, the priest had been sent to jail in the early 1970s.

After his release a short time later, church officials reinstated him. In the late 1980s, he was once again convicted of sexual abuse. And, once again, he was allowed to continue his active service. It was not until 2019 that he was retired, most likely as a result of the expertise commissioned by the archdiocese.

In sharp contrast to the Cologne church authorities, the Diocese of Aachen, whose cathedral was the site of the coronation of German kings between 936 AD and 1531, recently announced it would no longer privilege the perpetrators of abuse — an independent report established numerous cases of abuse by

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priests in the diocese — over the rights of their victims. Unlike hushing up abuse, church authorities in Aachen launched a newspaper campaign asking victims of clerical abuse to contact church offices.

### **Not Draining the Swamp**

What all of this suggests is that a significant segment of the Catholic hierarchy has absolutely no interest in “draining the swamp,” to borrow a term from an entirely different source.

The reality is that the avalanche of revelations about sexual abuse rampant inside the Catholic Church has not only severely undermined its authority to speak on matters of morals, particularly when it comes to sexual mores, but its authority in general. In late 2019, a mere 14% of the German population said they trusted the Catholic Church; 29% said they trusted the pope. In contrast, 36% expressed trust in Germany’s Protestant Church.

You don’t have to be a prophet to suggest that the most recent revelations about sexual abuse and the way these have dealt with will further tarnish the church’s already dismal image and its moral authority.

And for good reasons. The Catholic Church’s position on homosexuality is a joke given the prevalence of homoerotic endeavors within the church itself. As Shakespeare put it so eloquently, the priest “doth protest too much, methinks.”

The Catholic Church’s position on birth control is also risible, given the fact we no longer live in an age where the survival of the tribe depended on replenishing its membership. Those who don’t know what this means might want to read the story of Onan, famous (wrongly so) for being the father of masturbation. Onan’s crime — in the eyes of the Lord — was not that he masturbated, but that he preferred to “spill his seed” outside of the vagina of his late brother’s betrothed rather than fathering an offspring that would be credited to his dead brother.

Today, we are no longer subject to archaic tribal rationale. Yet the Catholic Church still

pretends that we are. Unfortunately enough, President Donald Trump has managed to stuff the US Supreme Court with prominent legal minds stuck in a pre-Middle Age way of thinking. Most of them are Catholics, Amy Coney Barrett the most recent one.

In a world where the moral authority of the Catholic Church has been debased to a degree that even in Poland, the home of Pope John Paul II, a mere 10% of young people see the Catholic Church in a positive light, with 47% viewing it negatively, the Catholic Church and its representatives would do well to keep a low profile.

In reality, the opposite is the case. High-ranking Catholic officials continue to take the moral high ground while pretending that sexual abuse is negligible. As Arthur Serratelli, a retired bishop from New Jersey, put it last year, “Is the terrible crime of child abuse limited only to Catholics? Today’s media would even have people believe that abuse of minors is becoming more frequent within the Church. Patently false. But, too often facts do not matter when a villain is needed.”

Serratelli should know. During his time as an active bishop, the New Jersey dioceses were a hotbed of sexual abuse by priests. In 2019, New Jersey’s bishops listed some 200 priests “found credibly accused of sexually abusing a child.”

To be sure, sexual abuse of minors is hardly limited to the Catholic Church. Quite the contrary. But given its claim to be the ultimate yardstick of moral authority, it should be held to the highest standards. The notion that the Catholic Church is not any worse than any other institution, as Serratelli implies in his defense of his own institution, does not cut it.

Luckily for the Serratellis and Woelklis of this world, Jesus is no longer around. As he once said, “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Those concerned are

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advised to study Houdini. His tricks might come in handy.

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## **Inequality Is a Barrier to Peace in Colombia**

Pierrepont Johnson III  
November 30, 2020

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**Unequal land distribution was a key driver of the Colombian Civil War in the 1960s and remains a major contributing factor to inequality today.**

**C**artagena's city center is a vibrant and colorful area full of international visitors. However, the outskirts paint a different story. Here, the invasiones, the shanty towns that surround the main city, are ridden with poverty. The effects of inequality stem beyond economic concerns as demonstrated by the country's 56-year-long civil war, ignited by unequal conditions, particularly in land ownership. Recently, tensions have mounted as at least 13 people have died in clashes with law enforcement, with protests initially focusing on income inequality, corruption and fiscal austerity.

The most critical step the government can take during this unstable time is to address inequality in access to the formal economy, education and land ownership that has been the underlying cause of conflict in Colombia for decades.

### **Most Unequal**

While poverty fell from 49.7% in 2002 to 27% in 2018, Colombia remains one of the world's 15 most unequal counties. Those with fewer economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, are more likely to enlist in rebel outfits

since these armed groups offer clothes, food, money and accommodation. For example, Venezuelan refugees in Colombia make up 10% of rebel fighters despite having no real connection to the conflict. Economic opportunity has shown to be one of the best deterrents of violence: As the economy continues to grow, violence has gone down. In 2018, the number of homicides reported in Colombia was at its lowest since the start of the civil war in 1964.

A lack of opportunities in the formal economy has limited growth while contributing to inequality. Only 35% of those employed contribute to the pension system, and only 30% of the population above the age of 15 have a debit card, much lower than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 80%. Because of large regional discrepancies in development, the government should consider differentiating the minimum wage by region and age. This can create more job opportunities depending on the needs of Colombia's different regions, which are as diverse geographically as they are economically. Reducing non-wage labor costs can stimulate job creation by reducing the economic burden on employers. Simplifying the procedures for registering a business can further help new companies establish themselves and aid job creation.

Addressing educational inequities will also improve formal employment. Some 85% of workers with postgraduate education are employed formally, where only 9% of those without any education are employed. Colombia spends less than the OECD average per capita on education, and having a more equitable education system is paramount. According to Andrea Arevelo, a biotechnologist in Colombia, "Despite the fact that there is more space in private universities versus public ones, most people can only apply to public schools because they can't cover the high cost of tuition in private universities."

Increasing funding for lower-income regions should be a priority to help reduce educational

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inequality. The government should also add more incentive-based programs like Familias en Accion that provide financial rewards to parents who keep their kids in school.

### **Closing the Gender Gap**

However, overall educational advancements in Colombia have not completely benefited women. While women have higher tertiary educational attainment levels than men, they have lower levels of formal employment participation, higher levels of unemployment, lower wages and less access to quality jobs. Better training for women in the formal economy is a start: Women's unemployment is at 12% compared to 7% for men. Increasing women's political participation can further close the gender gap in Colombia.

While other South American nations like Brazil and Argentina have recently had female leaders, Colombia has yet to elect a female president. In 2000, the government implemented a law requiring a 30% female quota on electoral lists. However, this has yet to make a significant impact at the highest level, with just two female governors elected in 2019. Improving economic opportunities for women can help level the playing field by bettering access to campaign financing.

Lastly, implementing the land reforms discussed during the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia guerrillas is necessary to reduce inequality. "A lot of the inequality today in Colombia is a result of unequal land ownership. Currently, there is a massive concentration of land, especially in rural areas. That makes it difficult for people to develop their own small business or agricultural business," says Fabio Acero, a management consultant based in Bogota.

Progress has been made, but as of 2019, only a quarter of the 7 million hectares of land the government planned to formalize in accordance with the peace agreement have been titled. Unequal land distribution among a small elite was a key driver of the Colombian Civil War in

the 1960s and remains a major contributing factor to inequality today.

It is often a misconception that violence is the cause of poverty. It is true violence perpetuates poverty — conflict reduced economic growth in Colombia by a third in 2018. But economic inequality in Colombia, as in many countries, is the cause, not the result, of conflict. For example, the first two chapters of the 2016 peace agreement discussed land redistribution and equal political participation instead of focusing on diplomacy. Social and political reforms are the key to reducing economic inequality and achieving a more peaceful future — a key that the country's leaders have in their toolbox.

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