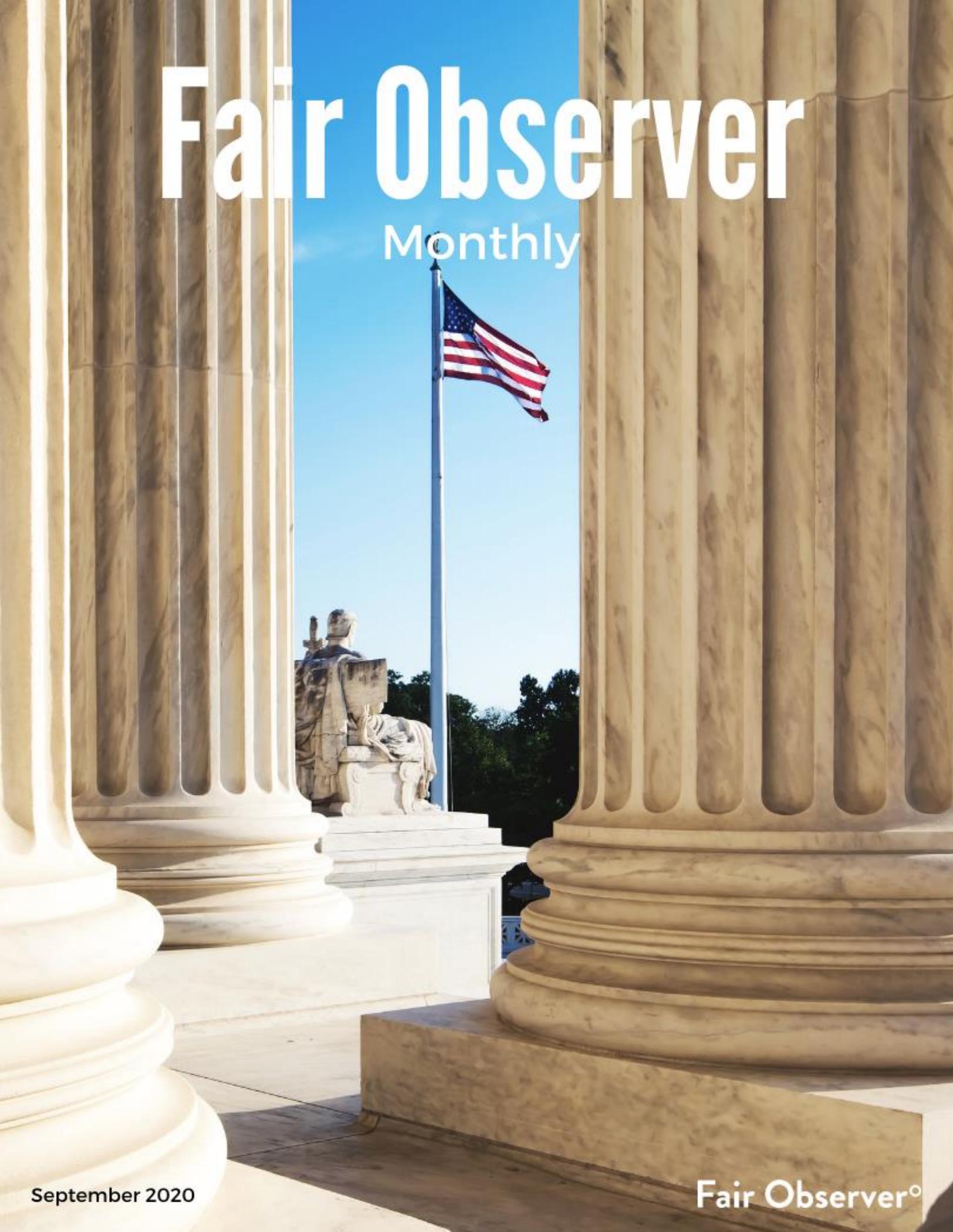


Fair Observer

Monthly



September 2020

Fair Observer[®]

Fair Observer Monthly



September 2020

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International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): 2372-9112

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Can Colombia's Former President Get a Fair Trial?

Glenn Ojeda Vega & Maria Perez
September 3, 2020

Since its inception, the process against Alvaro Uribe has been overly politicized and marred by irregularities.

On Tuesday, August 4, via a short and unassuming tweet, the former president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez, informed the world that he was placed under house arrest. The news sent shockwaves throughout South America's political circles and sparked protests across Colombia. Uribe's house arrest order, issued by the supreme court of justice as part of a case investigating witness tampering and false testimony, is surprising and problematic for several reasons.

For starters, it is the first time that a former president has been deprived of personal liberty in Colombia, a country where more than one recent head of state has questionable records, such as campaign financing by major drug cartels.

Secondly, since March, Colombia has been in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that individuals are for the most part already confined within their residences. Moreover, as former president and senator, Uribe doesn't go anywhere in Colombia without a substantial security apparatus.

Thirdly, the former president is well known both nationally and internationally, which translates to extremely low flight risk and one that could have been addressed by merely confiscating his passport. Adding to the controversy of the supreme court's order is the fact that, as recently as last year, individuals who pose actual security and flight risks, such as Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leaders Ivan Marquez and Jesus Santrich, were not preemptively detained despite

probable cause and ended up fleeing Colombia to set up a dissident guerrilla movement.

Lastly, Uribe should be presumed innocent until proven guilty, like any other citizen, as outlined in Article 29 of Colombia's Constitution. However, it seems that given his high profile and political history, the supreme court is treating the former president differently. This is problematic for the rule of law in Colombia.

Irregularities in the Process

Under Uribe's presidency, Colombia's security was largely restored, narco-terrorism was fought head-on by the national government, numerous FARC leaders were captured, over a thousand drug traffickers were extradited to the United States, and large paramilitary groups demobilized under the auspices of the Justice and Peace Law. Uribe's work and legacy, much of which was implemented in close coordination with the United States at the time, is also recognized internationally. One of the global voices against Colombia's former president's house arrest is US Vice President Mike Pence, who, on August 14, tweeted in solidarity, asking that Uribe be allowed to "defend himself as a free man."

Given his former status as senator, Uribe's case, which happens to be against left-wing Senator Ivan Cepeda, had Colombia's supreme court as its original jurisdiction, in accordance with Article 235 of the constitution. Specifically, this case began in 2012 when Uribe filed a legal complaint against Cepeda accusing him of paying bribes to imprisoned criminals in exchange for testimony that would incriminate the former president and his brother for paramilitary activities during Uribe's time as mayor of Medellin and governor of Antioquia. In 2018, an election year in Colombia, the supreme court flipped the accusation and charged Uribe with allegedly paying witnesses to testify in his favor and against Cepeda.

Since its inception, the process against Uribe has been overly politicized and marred by irregularities, including the admission of illegally

obtained wiretap recordings as evidence in the case. Over 20,000 illegal interceptions were made to Uribe's cellphone, under a judicial order that was supposed to tap Congressman Nilton Cordoba, not the former president. Making matters worse, as soon as the analyst from Colombia's attorney general's office in charge of the wiretap realized that the cellphone belonged to Uribe and not Cordoba, he notified his superiors. However, the illegal interceptions continued for nearly a month and were eventually submitted to the supreme court as evidence.

There is a history of animosity between the former president and members of Colombia's supreme court of justice due to alleged wiretapping of the court's premises as well as judges' phones by the security services during Uribe's presidency. Compounded by the evident lack of procedural guarantees for a fair trial, Uribe resigned his seat as senator shortly after he was placed under house arrest and triggered a jurisdictional change. His case has now been passed on to Colombia's attorney general and a lower court, in which Uribe expects a less politicized and more fair trial.

The Need for Judicial Reform

Although Uribe's house arrest remains in force until a new judge takes over the case and decides whether to revoke or maintain the preliminary detention, public outcry has been heard throughout the country. The most salient example of an institutional double standard is the recent case of FARC commanders like El Paisa, who were never placed under house arrest pending trial as part of the 2016 peace process and then escaped to take up arms again. Observing this precedent, the judicial measure against Uribe is disproportionate, particularly since the former president has attended all of his court hearings as scheduled and been responsive to judicial inquiries.

Finally, the controversy around the judiciary's handling of Uribe's case has rekindled the calls for constitutional reform in Colombia. Reforming the country's complex judicial branch seems for

many to be the only way to rescue the institutional mechanisms, which are currently failing within the Colombian justice system. In this time of uncertainty, the alternative of carrying out judicial reform would give a new direction to the presidency of Ivan Duque and would provide a unique opportunity for Colombia to emerge institutionally strengthened.

One of the main issues with Colombia's judicial system is that the country has not one but three top courts: the supreme court of justice, the council of state and the constitutional court. Another problem lies with the fact that the members of both the supreme court and the council of state select their membership themselves, without much executive or legislative oversight, albeit in accordance with Article 231 of the constitution. Having such a closed and endogamous nature has led to judicial malpractice and corruption in Colombia's judiciary, such as the infamous "Cartel of Robes" scandal that saw supreme court judges abuse their independence to derail cases and stifle investigations by the attorney general in exchange for hefty bribes.

While Alvaro Uribe's case is likely to drag on for months, there is a higher likelihood that the process will have a lower profile and a more balanced outcome now that it has left the supreme court's docket. Nevertheless, the judicial branch will now be increasingly seen as a politicized institution, and there are important voices in the country calling for both a consolidated supreme judiciary and a more transparent selection process for its members. Already in a bind due to the pandemic and its socioeconomic fallout, Colombia's government must now address growing calls for constitutional reform in an increasingly polarized political climate.

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Why Are the Indian and Chinese Economies Decoupling?

Atul Singh, Manu Sharma & Vikram Sood
September 3, 2020

India has strong geopolitical, historical and economic reasons to disentangle itself from China's arms.

Many experts argue India is the weaker power unable to take on China. In an article in *Foreign Policy*, James Crabtree argues that a trade war with China would be a bad idea for India. In his view, India's "military is inefficient, underequipped, and dogged by procurement corruption scandals." To develop its military strength, India needs a dynamic economy, and an "inward economic direction" would only benefit China in the long run. Therefore, an India–China decoupling is a terrible idea.

These analysts are wrong. Their argument against decoupling is based on three implicit assumptions. First, India is a deeply-divided country unable to act or respond decisively. Second, India is dependent on the Chinese economy for its growth. Third, China's rise is inexorable and India has no option but to come to terms with it. These assumptions are true, but it is an error of judgment to treat them as unqualified truths.

For Indians with longer historical memories than many of these experts, these arguments sound familiar. Anglo-Saxon publications have long hectored, advised and moralized on Indian issues. On July 5, 2014, the editorial board of *The New York Times* made a case against India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. To be admitted, India needed "to sign the treaty that prohibits nuclear testing, stop producing fissile material, and begin talks with its rivals on nuclear weapons containment."

In response, Gurmeet Kanwal, a retired Indian brigadier-turned-defense analyst, called the editorial "partisan and condescending." Some even saw it as neocolonial. He pointed to "the existential threat posed by two nuclear-armed states on India's borders" that led India to develop its nuclear weapons capability. Kanwal argued that India had been a "responsible nuclear power" with a "positive record on non-proliferation" and had "consistently supported total nuclear disarmament." In typical Sikh humor, he advised nuclear ayatollahs to focus on real proliferators and let go of the cap, roll-back and eliminate (CRE) stance they had adopted against India since the 1990s.

Just as India stood up to the US on the nuclear issue in the 1990s, it is capable of standing up to China in 2020. An India–China conflict is highly undesirable. Ideally, New Delhi and Beijing should be able to work something out over endless cups of tea. However, sanctimonious advice from foreign experts about dire consequences of an India–China decoupling has to be taken with a bucket, not a pinch, of salt.

In 1998, India went nuclear despite dire predictions for its economy. Many in Washington assumed that India depended on the West for its economy. Barely seven years prior, India had experienced a serious financial crisis. The Gulf War and slowing exports to the US crippled an economy by rising deficits and increasing debt. The precipitous decline of the Soviet Union meant India no longer had a godfather to bail it out. So severe was India's 1991 currency crisis that it had to pledge its gold reserves and liberalize its economy to get a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. In 1998, India was better off than in 1991 but certainly not in a strong position. Nuclear tests put it under immense pressure.

At the UN, the Conference on Disarmament condemned Indian nuclear tests. In the preceding years, India had watched the West ignore the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and fete China for its economic reforms. Condemnation for nuclear tests strengthened, not weakened,

India's response. It stood up to the West, ignored experts and upended nuclear apartheid. Today, India is again in a mood to defy experts and stand up to China.

Like Love, Trade Is Complicated

As troops amass on the India–China border, a full-scale economic war has broken out. It is leading to a structural break in the Indian economy. Both public opinion and political leadership is now committed to decoupling from China. In India, there is a ban on 59 Chinese apps by government authorities. Major trade bodies have formally announced boycotts of Chinese products. For instance, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has listed 3,000 such products. CAIT is a national umbrella organization with 40,000 smaller trade bodies and 70 million traders as members. The government has tightened country of origin rules for e-retailers and other sellers.

Demand for Chinese products is declining. Xiaomi is no longer India's top-selling phone. Samsung has replaced it. Increasingly, selling Chinese goods using Southeast Asian free trade agreements is becoming difficult. The existing business model of buying in China and selling in India is under pressure.

In an additional twist, Indian tax authorities have conducted raids on Chinese companies and individuals for money laundering. It led to the arrest of a Chinese national. Apparently, he was married to a woman from India's northeast border state of Mizoram, had spuriously obtained an Indian passport and been arrested earlier for espionage. It seems trade is not as simple as experts imagine it to be. Intelligence, influence and geopolitics are inextricably intertwined with trade, business and investment. In the India–China economic relationship, three largely forgotten factors are noteworthy.

First, India enhanced trade ties with China not only for economic reasons but also geopolitical ones. Becoming a key market and investment destination for China was supposed to reduce the risk of conflict and wean Beijing off Islamabad.

Aggressive Chinese actions have made India reconsider this strategy and change tack.

Second, India's manufacturing sector is reasonably well developed but has suffered from Chinese competition since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. A 2018 parliamentary report concluded that Chinese imports were playing "a negative role for [India's] domestic industry." The report warned about the loss of jobs, an increase in bad debts for banks, a decline in tax revenues and a worrying dependence on China for critical products. It concluded that China does not play by WTO rules and "the problem of Chinese dumping is a matter of concern across the globe."

India is not alone in having concerns about China's abuse of WTO rules. A 2018 report to the US Congress expressed concern at "China's continued embrace of a state-led, mercantilist approach to the economy and trade." It detailed "substantial costs borne by WTO members as a result of China's problematic trade regime" and the challenges presented by its "non-market economic system." Given China's track record, there is a case to be made for India taking a more protectionist path.

There is another tiny little matter. Protectionism has played a key role in industrialization for any latecomer. Furthermore, industrialization has been the key driver of economic growth. In a 2019 article, one of these authors observed that the first major act passed by Congress was the Tariff Act of July 4, 1789. Without protecting its infant industry, the US would not have emerged as an industrial power.

Since 1978, China has followed the American playbook on steroids. It has powered through the largest and fastest industrialization in history. Its companies enjoy the advantages of infrastructure, cheap financing and political support. Therefore, they have been able to achieve economies of scale. As a result, Indian companies have been blown away. An India-China decoupling might give sectors from aerospace components to advanced pharmaceuticals a second chance.

Third, Chinese imports into India are nice-to-have, not must-have, goods. Demand for them is elastic unlike the inelastic demand for energy from the Middle East and the US. An India-China trade war that leads to a decoupling of the two economies could lead to short-term pain but has a strong rationale for the longer term.

The Shape of Things to Come

In any case, experts forget that India is unlikely to turn entirely inward as it did after independence in 1947. Recently, billions of dollars have poured into India from the US. Reliance Jio, an Indian mobile internet company, raked in \$15 billion in 10 weeks. This is indicative of a deeper trend. Given new geopolitical imperatives, India is now looking to boost economic ties with friendly powers. It wants Korean, Japanese, European and American firms to set up shop in the country. Foreign market players who can act nimbly would be in a good position to grab some of the approximately \$60 billion China's trade surplus with India. There are new investment, manufacturing and trading opportunities emerging as the status quo changes and a new order emerges.

Many economists predict a short-term price shock as Chinese goods stop coming into the country. They forget that India has struggled with jobless growth even during the best of times. Decoupling with China could boost domestic manufacturing not only for large but also for medium and small industries. This would increase employment, tax revenues and even demand thanks to a multiplier effect. Improved job figures further increase political support for decoupling and decrease India's need to subsidize agriculture so heavily. For decades, agricultural subsidies have put pressure on public finances. If a lower amount is spent on subsidies, pressure on the fiscal deficit would abate.

To sum up, India has strong reasons to decouple and no longer consider WTO rules sacrosanct. A tectonic shift is underway. After World War II, a new rules-based order emerged. The end of the Cold War strengthened this order

and led to visions that Western democracy was the final destination for all societies. With polarization and partisanship at home, Western democracies themselves are in peril. The order that emerged in 1991 is crumbling and a new one is about to emerge. History offers us lessons as to what to expect.

In the past, India and China focused on their spheres of influence with the Himalayas keeping them apart. Both prospered. In this age of trade, peace and prosperity, a Chola empire based in the modern-day southeastern state of Tamil Nadu ruled Malaysia (Putrajaya), Indonesia (Srivijaya), Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The Middle Kingdom held sway over Mongolia, Korea and Japan. Both India and China could go back to sticking to their historic spheres and to trading with each other.

At the moment, China has followed salami tactics and encroached on territory India claims as its own. China has also been meddling in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, India's key neighbors. Since 1963, China has been in a close alliance with Pakistan. Yet China has never played a role in the Indian subcontinent and cannot suddenly turn into an overlord here. Therefore, close India-China economic ties no longer make strategic sense.

Additionally, China disingenuously claims to meet India halfway while insisting that the onus to improve the border situation lies entirely with its neighbor. This is a one-way, not halfway, diplomacy that suggests aggressive intent. The Chinese also seem determined to win the war of narratives and are enlisting the support of free market ayatollahs to do so. It is only natural that the Indian narrative is bound to be different. It is in sync with the new realities of the day, which drive India's decision to decouple its economy from China. Trade, investment and deep economic ties are a jolly good thing with allies and friends, not with rivals and foes.

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No Credible Alternative to the US Grand Strategy in Europe

Emir Hadzikadunic
September 4, 2020

Contrary to the claims that US liberal hegemony is a source of discord, its mission in Europe was historically successful and mutually beneficial both before and after the Cold War.

Never in the last 75 years has the US-led liberal order in Europe been intellectually more contested. Some in the United States, especially among realist and neorealist scholars, disapprove of what is commonly referred to as the West-centric institutional and rules-based order. They generally raise three interrelated, skeptical and somewhat pessimistic assumptions for growing isolationist sentiments in the US.

First, there are good reasons to think that the unipolar moment is coming to an end. As America's primacy gradually declines with the rise of China, its grand strategy of liberal hegemony should also dissipate, including its institutional leg of collective security in Europe to which the US has given too much and received too little in return.

Second, the Euro-Atlantic liberal order has generated more problems than solutions in the post-Cold War period. NATO expansion beyond the Iron Curtain poisoned relations with Russia and provoked unnecessary tensions in Georgia and Ukraine. The United States, so the argument

goes, should gradually reduce its military presence in Europe and turn "NATO over to the Europeans."

Third, Russia, in reality, is not as big a peril to European security as it is generally portrayed and perceived in the US and across Europe, for that matter. Moscow is driven more by defensive aims (or so it claims), so balancing between Russia and the European states on one hand and a restrained US foreign policy on the other is a better way forward for everyone. If we are to assume this logic is correct, then those who still prefer the liberal Euro-Atlantic unipolarity are wrong. Are they?

No Competitors Yet

On first assumption, the United States is still by all major accounts the top dog on the world stage. It is wealthier, more powerful and more influential relative to any potential competitor in the international system despite an ongoing debate, additionally fueled by global disruptive events such as COVID-19. Its geography, an often-cited structural advantage, will persist despite the pandemic. While the US is flanked by two enormous oceans and surrounded by much weaker and friendly states, Russia and China, on the other hand, face balancing behavior from powerful regional rivals coupled with having ongoing territorial disputes.

Second, Washington's annual defense spending is at least twice as much as Moscow's and Beijing's — combined. America's preponderance of power and strategic advance is far more superior considering increased military spending of its formal allies in the European and Indo-Pacific theaters. Out of 15 countries with the largest military spending, 11 are security partners of the United States. Russia and China neither have formal allies among the top 15, nor do any of their allies believe that an attack on one is an attack against all.

Third, the US still boasts the world's largest economy that can afford to fund the most powerful military in the world despite a disproportionately hard economic downturn

triggered by the pandemic. Its global GDP share is still larger than the global GDP share of China and Russia combined, even by factoring in GDP reductions in the US this July. Moreover, the share of the global economic output by NATO members reaches more than 40% in world proportions and roughly 50% if other democratic allies in the Pacific theater are incorporated as well.

America's geopolitical leverage is even greater considering three additional factors. The primacy of the US dollar has not waned in 2020 just as it had not waned during 2008 financial crisis. The US also rests on soft-power capabilities. The top spots in global rankings, such as the Soft Power 30, are held by democracies — the United States was in fifth position in 2019. Russia and China are ranked far lower. And third, its population growth rate has also been relatively high.

On the other hand, the Russian and Chinese workforce is aging, judging by all available measures. Given all these factors, it seems, as Gregory Mitrovich suggests, “wholly premature, short of a devastating major event, to claim that we are witnessing the end of America's global dominance.” Equally premature is any call for American withdrawal from Europe, where the US is not only unchallenged but is largely accepted as benevolent.

Whole and Free

On second assumption, from a realist or neorealist perspective, a more powerful country does not necessarily mean a more attractive choice. What makes great powers more appealing, especially in the European theater, rests on an enduring combination of other capabilities grounded in less tangible resources. In other words, dominant powers are to be feared, but no liberal European state in the post-World War II era has ever felt a military threat from American hegemony — as Gilford John Ikenberry put it, “reluctant, open and highly institutionalized — or, in a word, liberal.” Some may correctly argue this was an act of deterrence

against the common threat of the Soviet bloc in the bipolar system.

However, when the unipolar era began, America's liberal primacy has continued to offer system-wide benefits both within Europe's old and new democracies with lasting and far-reaching consequences for their peace and stability. Its benevolent leadership, for example, stood shoulder to shoulder with the Germans seeking freedom and reunification despite some opposition from Paris and London. Washington also laid out its vision for Europe's new security order and sought to keep a reunited Germany in NATO. Without such leadership, France and the United Kingdom would have been more fearful of Germany's unilateral plans, let alone weaker neighbors that would find new realities difficult to balance against. As one senior European diplomat put it, “We can agree on U.S. leadership, but not on one of our own.”

American leadership also persuaded Ukraine — also to a great benefit of Russia's vital interests — to relinquish possession of nuclear arms it had inherited after the dissolution of the USSR. Without such leadership, Ukraine would probably have had second thoughts. As Ukraine's then-Defense Minister Konstantin Morozov put it, plainly, “Ukraine would have posed no threat to anyone if, hypothetically speaking, it had possessed tactical nuclear weapons.” Had American leadership missed this opportunity, other states in the region would have also regarded their respective security distinctly from each other. Germany, for example, would have also been more tempted to contemplate nuclear deterrence at some point.

To zoom out a little wider, American liberal hegemony in general, and the NATO alliance with its institutional and rules-based order in particular, attracted central, eastern and southeastern European countries — former illiberal states — to choose a common prescription for perennial peace and prosperity in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. New democracies from beyond the Iron Curtain have managed to transform themselves: Their economies have

largely prospered, and their political systems liberalized despite recent authoritarian tendencies in Hungary and Poland. While some variation does exist, almost all new NATO members remain “free” according to the 2020 Freedom House scores. The only exceptions are Hungary, Montenegro and North Macedonia, which are marked as “partially free.”

NATO enlargement has been a net positive on security grounds as well. Europe has largely enjoyed peace and stability for the past 30 years. New allies offered themselves as foundational military partners and have willingly chosen to share the security burden to fight alongside the US. This mutual attraction within the Euro-Atlantic alliance has been so overwhelming in historical proportions that structural realists struggle to explain its extended lifespan and recent vitality. This includes the two latest enlargement rounds in southeastern Europe that happened on President Donald Trump’s watch, not sufficient but certainly greater share of collective defense burdens by European member states, regular military deployments and common military exercises all over the continent, as well as effective multilateral aid using NATO capacities during the COVID-19 crisis. This suggests, contrary to many pessimistic views, that American liberal hegemony in Europe is far from being in decline.

One can only imagine the different scenarios had the US decided to pursue a more restrained foreign policy in the region. Not only supporters but also critics of NATO enlargement also offered the possibility that Euro-Atlantic adversaries, namely Russia, would have been emboldened to expand the Kremlin’s sphere of influence beyond the current lines had any geopolitical vacuum existed in central and eastern Europe. J. J. Mearsheimer, for example, argues in his book that great powers “are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals, with hegemony as their final goal.” Stephen M. Walt also conceded that relations with Moscow, provided Russia regained some of its former strength, “might still have worsened.”

Counterfactuals such as these can hardly be verified. However, Russia’s brutal treatment of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine made it very clear what actually happens with states in geopolitical gray areas. Belarus, which falls in Russia’s sphere of influence, is not happy either.

Net Positive

American liberal hegemony has also been a net positive when it comes to security in the Balkans — if measured by the progress on where Balkan states started from and not their distance from a liberal Western world. US leadership, for example, contained an outbreak of nationalism in the region after the EU demonstrated neither effectiveness nor capacity of preemption in the early 1990s. The Clinton administration successfully brokered the Dayton Peace Agreement in a positive-sum game whereby Republika Srpska received formal recognition as a political entity within the sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the post-Dayton phase, the liberal-led European order, primarily NATO and the EU, patiently put in place new structures and policies so the country can move forward with the peace process.

Notwithstanding NATO’s intervention in Serbia in 1999 and CIA interference in 2000, the US and its allies also used an array of softer policy instruments to promote successful democratic change in Serbia. The International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute and former activists from new NATO members advised and supported independent civil organizations and opposition parties in Serbia to replace the “Butcher of the Balkans” Slobodan Milosevic in a democratic election. In recent years, Washington and Brussels also played an instrumental role in brokering the Prespa Agreement between Northern Macedonia and Greece. A bilateral deal between two bordering countries in 2018 put an end to the long-standing name dispute on the one hand and unlocked the Euro-Atlantic membership perspective for Northern Macedonia on the other.

Some of these hard-won historical achievements could have not been possible had the US decided to pursue a more restrained foreign policy. In all likelihood, weaker American leadership in Europe in the post-Cold War era would have created more problems, making European states less liberal and more domestically nationalist, rendering the European periphery full of prolonged proxy wars and skirmishes.

Russia would have also had more space to moderate such conflicts with its power-projection capabilities in the region. Likewise, absent integration into Western institutions, Europe's soft underbelly would have exposed itself to sudden geopolitical stress bringing different local and regional powers into direct collision.

In Russia's Image

On third assumption, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in his speech at the Munich security conference in 2007 that "the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world." Thirteen years later, speaking at the Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov endorsed a multipolar concert with new centers of influence at the international level and common geopolitical space from Lisbon to Jakarta at the wider regional level. Lavrov also stated that "Our common European home needs serious reconstruction if we want all of its residents to live in prosperity."

On a mission to correct "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" — the collapse of the Soviet Union — the Kremlin is practically interested in replacing an existing liberal order, primarily the one extended beyond the Iron Curtain, with favorable and less democratic European regimes that fit Russia's image. Second, it is also interested in replacing the hierarchic order in Europe with some unknown and certainly more anarchic multipolar structure. However, it is not surprising that the Kremlin's foreign policy attracted limited support from the former Soviet republics and other

central and eastern European countries. Most of them continue to fear Russia. Unlike their attraction to the US, their anxiety toward Moscow can be explained from their shared national memory of what can happen under the rule of an illiberal hegemon — or a potential hegemon that is, by the logic of Walt's balance of threat theory, too close, too powerful and too offensive.

So far, all attempts from the Kremlin to impose its own illiberal and structural order in Europe, largely constrained by its limits of hard and soft power, have only made young democracies and vulnerable countries scattered around the European periphery more divided and, eventually, more anarchic. In August 2008, Russia's military intervention in Georgia restored the Kremlin's geopolitical relevance in the European neighborhood. However, Georgia was divided between Russian-backed self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on one hand and the rest of Georgia on the other.

This small triumph encouraged Russia to bully again by lopping off Crimea from neighboring Ukraine in 2014. Ukraine was then equally forcefully divided along similar geostrategic and domestic lines between Kyiv's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and secessionist tendencies by a pro-Russian minority in the east. Some have argued that Moscow's incursions into Georgia and Ukraine were conducted preemptively and in reaction to perceived NATO enlargement and were therefore defensive in nature. Mearsheimer famously rejected prevailing wisdom in the West that this problem is largely the result of Russian aggression.

Stephen F. Cohen also justified Russia's interest in restoring traditional zones of national security on its borders, including Ukraine. However, Russia marched into Syria, dropping bunker-buster bombs on Aleppo, supported mercenaries in Libya and became increasingly offensive in the Balkans — not Russia's "near abroad" but deep inside NATO and the EU's eastern borders. The Kremlin has reportedly fanned the flames of internal crisis in

Montenegro in 2015-16 and Northern Macedonia in 2017-18. Milorad Dodik, a pro-Russian Serb leader in Bosnia and Herzegovina called his own country “an impossible state.” In February this year, he bluntly declared: “Goodbye B&H, welcome RSexit.”

Serbia and Russia carried out a joint Slavic Shield military exercise in 2019, including Russia’s first use of its advanced S-400 missile defense system abroad. In the meantime, Serbia also received Russian donations of MIG-29 fighter jets, T-72 tanks, BRDM-2MS armored vehicles and purchased, at Putin’s suggestion, the Pantsir S-1 air defense system in 2020. Russia’s appetite, therefore, goes well beyond its immediate neighborhood. It openly challenges the established liberal order in Europe by taking advantage of tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, and different ethnicities within North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and so on.

This revisionist path doesn’t lead to security in Europe but rather to new skirmishes and security dilemmas in the Balkans, a region divided between rival power dyads, which is at worst all too reminiscent of the 1900s, when unintended consequences of nationalist fervor led to the murder of millions.

Contrary to claims that the US strategy of liberal hegemony is generally a source of endless trouble, supported by real failures and terrible misadventures of social engineering in Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya, its mission in Europe was historically successful and mutually beneficial both before and after the Cold War. American leadership in Europe has been a net-positive force, essentially without US military casualties, mutually acceptable and institutional — all missing in other troubled areas. It has secured undisrupted peace dividends among major European powers, provided various public goods to newcomers from beyond the Iron Curtain, and eventually brought peace to the Balkans after the international community failed to prevent genocide in Srebrenica.

The United States, which is still the preeminent global power, does not need to reassess this grand strategy in Europe or quit NATO, an alliance encompassing nearly a billion people and half the world’s military and economic might. Down that road lie many other long-lasting win-win outcomes as well as serious challenges that are better faced collectively.

An alternative order that is promoted by some American realist and neorealist pundits on one side and revisionist challengers in the Kremlin on the other might have different motivations, means and ends. However, their common preference for dissolving NATO or having different poles in the European theater brings, by logic of structural realism, crosscutting relationships among different axes of conflict. That gloomy trajectory, if it ever happens, would make a perfect setting for a 21st-century Gavrilo Princip to fire his bullet again and trigger a chain of regrettable events here, there and everywhere.

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The Tangled Maps of Greece and Turkey

Nathaniel Handy
September 7, 2020

The dispute between Greece and Turkey over gas exploration is only the latest consequence of nationalisms that have poisoned an entire region.

A person sitting at a café in the small town of Kaş, on Turkey’s southern coast, where the Taurus Mountains drop precipitously into the Mediterranean, would look out upon a blue bay and a small island. If they

asked the waiter, he would tell them that the island — almost unbelievably — is in another country.

That island is Kastellorizo. It is Greek. It is far from being the only Greek island that sits close to the Turkish mainland, but it's perhaps the most striking, since it is 78 miles from its nearest Greek neighbor, the island of Rhodes, and fully 354 miles from the capital, Athens. Indeed, landlocked Ankara, the Turkish capital in the center of Anatolia, is nearer.

Who Owns the Sea?

Nation-states are the oddity of the modern age. To people in the era of empires, today's borders would seem extraordinarily restrictive. For centuries, Kastellorizo interacted freely with the mainland, which lies one mile away. Now it exists as a surreal outpost adrift in the Mediterranean. This tiny, quiet island is central to the latest crisis between Greece and Turkey — an argument over gas exploration rights and who owns where on the seafloor in the eastern Mediterranean. It has led to collisions between Greek and Turkish vessels, and even a confrontation in Libyan waters between Turkish and French frigates in June.

The clash with France is part of a wider confrontation in which France has become a vocal ally of forces in the eastern Mediterranean seen as broadly anti-Islamist. This includes European Union members Greece and Cyprus, as well as Israel, Egypt and the forces of renegade General Khalifa Haftar in Libya, a figure from the Gaddafi regime. All these alliances put France at odds with Turkey, which has emerged as the most vocal and perhaps the most powerful force for political Islam in the region. The alliance with Greece has helped to reignite much older hostilities between Greece and Turkey, feeding into dangerous older narratives.

The argument surrounding territorial waters is as artificial as the nation states that have given rise to it. The intricacies of maritime law hang around the question of whether the far-flung isles of Greece can claim exclusive economic zones

(EEZs) on the seabed around them — in effect, that they have a continental shelf that Greece can claim, a mile off the Turkish coast.

Such claims create a collision course with Turkey, given the unusual situation of the two geographic territories. The result of the 1919-23 Turkish War of Independence was the establishment of a Turkish state on the landmass of Asia Minor, but to the exclusion of almost every island in the Aegean and Mediterranean seas lying off its shore. The peculiarity of this scenario is evident to anyone who has visited the popular tourist regions of the Turkish coast and the eastern Greek isles. The two are intimate neighbors, far more alike than they are to their respective hinterlands, let alone their distant national capitals.

Arrival of Nationalism

Nationalism — since its arrival from Western Europe — has been calamitous for the wider region in which Greece and Turkey lie. It has brought chaos to the Arab world, to the Balkans and to Cyprus. Even today, it still informs the aspirations of the Kurdish people to add yet another state to a region of instability and ethnic tension.

On the face of it, Greece and Turkey appear to be two comparative success stories of the era of nation states in this region. They have been relatively stable, centralized states for much of the 20th century, despite the recurrence of military intervention in politics. Yet Greece and Turkey are also examples of the failure of the nation-state model in their very nature. Both espouse a virulent ethnic nationalism. Both are rooted in an ancient tribal exceptionalism, layered with later religious identities.

Like the wider region, this nationalism has required that what was a patchwork of ethnicities, indeed a form of multiculturalism — or, at least, co-habitation — was systematically uprooted, most brutally in the state-sanctioned ethnic cleansing of the early 20th century. State-sanctioned ethnic violence is nothing new to the region. It happened to the Sephardic Jews of

Greece in the 1940s (themselves previously cleansed from Christian Spain after the retreat of the Moors), it has happened in the Balkans in the past few decades, and it happened in Greece and Turkey in 1923.

That was the year of the Treaty of Lausanne, which stipulated the transfer of populations between the two states based upon religious affiliation: Greek Orthodox to Greece, Muslims to Turkey. In many cases, this papered over cultural and ethnic complexities that were far from the clear-cut distinctions that Greek and Turkish nationalists believed inherent in their respective nation-state projects. This history, and the very human and very personal tragedy of it, has embedded an antipathy towards the “other” in the body politic of both states to the present day.

It is this reality that makes questions surrounding continental shelves, exclusive economic zones and rights to resources that lie under the sea so intractable. It was hard enough and bloody enough to divide the land of this region between the warring parties, often leading to strange and unnatural results like the sad fate of the little isle of Kastellorizo — severed from the mainland it gazes upon with every sunrise. To attempt the division of the waters as well is likely to lead to yet another hard and bloody outcome.

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How Alexei Navalny Created Russia’s Main Opposition Platform

Dmitri Gorelov
September 11, 2020

Alexei Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation has flourished into the most influential of the

Kremlin’s critics, capable of effectively challenging the regime.

On September 2, German authorities stated that Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny had been poisoned with a nerve agent from the Novichok group. Since August 22, Navalny has been treated at the Charité university hospital in Berlin, where he was transported from Russia in an induced coma.

Navalny is best-known for his anti-corruption initiatives, particularly the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which is commonly known under its Russian abbreviation FBK. Since its inception in 2011, FBK has evolved into an important independent investigative media outlet funded by over 15,000 recurring donations from Russian citizens. Although Navalny is not allowed on Russian state-run television, FBK’s video investigations have been watched hundreds of million times on Navalny’s YouTube channel.

In July, Navalny was forced to dissolve FBK after a libel lawsuit filed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a US-sanctioned Russian billionaire accused of interference in the 2016 US presidential elections. Prigozhin is seeking 88 million rubles (\$1.4 million) from FBK, Navalny and Lyubov Sobol, FBK’s lawyer and a prominent opposition activist. Despite FBK’s liquidation, its team continued to work as usual, and on August 18-20 was filming a new investigation in Tomsk, where Navalny is believed to have been poisoned.

The Information Blockade

Navalny’s anti-corruption crusade began in 2008, when he purchased a small number of shares in Russian publicly-traded oil and gas companies, including the majority state-owned Gazprom and Rosneft, and became an activist shareholder. He started publishing investigations into the opaque operations of these companies on LiveJournal, formerly a popular blogging platform in Russia.

Launched in 2011, FBK initially published its reports on Navalny’s LiveJournal page. In 2015, it published its first investigative documentary on Navalny’s YouTube channel, previously used for

promoting his Moscow mayoral candidacy in 2013. In the ground-breaking documentary, FBK accused Russia's then-Prosecutor General Yury Chaika and his two sons of large-scale corruption, money laundering and links to organized crime figures.

Since then, FBK has regularly published its investigations on YouTube, pointing out the lavish lifestyles of Russian officials and visualizing complex ownership schemes of their businesses and properties. FBK's videos were particularly appreciated for their humorous presentation, impressive drone footage of luxury properties and high-quality animations. By keeping the content entertaining and accessible while describing complex fraudulent schemes, Navalny managed to expand his follower base to include people from across the country and its social classes.

In 2017, FBK published its best-known documentary, exposing the alleged corrupt activities of Russia's then prime minister and former president, Dmitry Medvedev. The video was viewed over 36 million times as of September 2020. Shortly after the release of this investigation, Navalny's YouTube channel gained one million subscribers, and Navalny announced the launch of a second YouTube channel, Navalny Live, intended for live streaming.

In June 2017, TIME magazine included Navalny in its list of the 25 most influential people on the internet for "breaking through the Kremlin's information blockade." Navalny's two YouTube channels became an influential alternative to state-run television and a vital source of information for many Russians. By September 2020, the two channels accumulated 4 million and 2 million subscribers, respectively.

Transparency and Accountability

FBK is widely credited for its scrupulous work with public records, which is the main source of information for its investigative documentaries. FBK has been actively challenging the common misconception that Russia is an opaque

jurisdiction with poor record-keeping. Indeed, Russian authorities collect and publish a wealth of regularly updated data that is readily available free of charge or for a relatively small fee.

FBK's investigations are often based on information from Russia's official land registry and corporate records as well as wealth declarations published by government officials. Based on open source information, in April 2019, FBK concluded that Russia's longstanding minister of finance, Anton Siluanov, owned a plot of land in the elite Rublevka district outside Moscow and that, taking into account his declared income over the past 10 years, he could not possibly afford it.

Similarly, FBK discovered that a neighboring plot of land is owned by an anonymous "natural person," according to the official land registry. FBK claimed that the land is owned by the Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Ruslan Tsalikov; the size of the plot was exactly the same as the plot of land Tsalikov mentioned in his wealth declaration. Once again, FBK concluded that Tsalikov would not have been able to buy land in Rublevka considering his declared earnings. Both the finance and defense ministries confirmed ownership of the land but denied FBK's allegations of illicit enrichment.

Despite the overall transparency of the official Russian registries, names of senior public officials from Russia's military and space sectors, and even their relatives, have been increasingly removed from the land registry filings on unclear legal grounds. For example, in November 2019, FBK stated that the 81-year-old father-in-law of Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Roscosmos (Russia's space agency), disappeared from the land registry. His name was substituted by the "natural person" entry. FBK claims that he owns expensive properties on behalf of Rogozin. Rogozin has not responded to FBK's allegations.

Various global NGOs and think tanks, including Transparency International, have continuously classified Russia as a country with a high level of corruption. Russian government officials are often involved in illicit enrichment

schemes, such as kickbacks, or conceal ownership of businesses and properties through their close associates or offshore shell companies. As demonstrated by FBK's investigations into Tsalikov and Rogozin's properties, officials tend to try to hide ownership by erasing their names from the official registries.

Even though FBK can identify individual cases of illicit enrichment, Russia currently lacks the necessary mechanisms to investigate such allegations. Article 20 of the UN Convention Against Corruption defines illicit enrichment as a "significant increase in the assets of a public official that he or she cannot reasonably explain in relation to his or her lawful income." While Russia ratified the convention in 2006, it refused to include Article 20. Due to this omission, FBK's anti-corruption investigations have little to no legal consequences within Russia. Against this backdrop, Navalny has repeatedly claimed that political changes are necessary to end endemic corruption in Russia.

Smart Voting Against United Russia

As Russia's leading opposition figure, Navalny has never concealed that FBK's investigations are intended as a call for political action. His most recent investigations, including the one filmed in Tomsk, support his political campaign against candidates from the ruling United Russia party on the eve of the regional elections on September 13.

This campaign is part of the so-called smart voting initiative, which is Navalny's wider strategy to challenge the protracted rule of President Vladimir Putin and United Russia. The central election commission has refused to register Navalny or any other FBK employee as a candidate in elections since 2013, when Navalny came second in Moscow's mayoral election with 27% of the vote. To challenge the situation, Navalny's team used its reach to coordinate opposition voters to strategically and effectively beat United Russia candidates in hundreds of local and regional elections. In practice, this means voting collectively for the strongest non-

United Russia candidate in any given district, regardless of his or her political affiliation or personal qualities.

In September last year, smart voting generated impressive results: Nearly half of the elected members of the Moscow city council — 20 of 45 members — had been recommended by the platform. During the campaign, FBK's investigations into the source of wealth of prominent United Russia members in Moscow proved to be a vital agitation tool, given that Navalny or FBK have no access to popular state-run media outlets. According to a research paper published in March this year by Russian political analysts Ivan Bolshakov and Vladimir Perevalov, Navalny's smart voting, on average, improved the results of opposition candidates by 5.6% in last September's Moscow city council elections. For instance, FBK accused Andrey Metelsky, United Russia's branch head in Moscow, of concealing his multimillion-dollar business empire by controlling it through his 75-year-old mother. Following the 2019 campaign, Metelsky lost his district to a candidate suggested by Navalny's smart voting. Prior to that, Metelsky had continuously held office since 2001.

According to the Charité hospital, on September 8, Navalny has been taken out of an induced coma and is reported to be responding to speech. His recovery will probably take a long time, and long-term after-effects cannot be ruled out. But it is worth noting that Navalny's projects seem to be working smoothly even in his absence: The latest investigation, released on September 9, has already garnered nearly 3 million views. Acting under constant pressure from Russian authorities, Navalny and FBK focused on establishing autonomous operations that do not overly rely on any single person.

On the eve of the 2019 elections, Navalny spent a month in jail for violating Russia's strict protest laws, while his allies continued to shoot FBK documentaries and campaigned for smart voting. The smart voting platform has already provided its recommendations for the upcoming local and regional elections scheduled for

September 13 and intends to do so for the 2021 state Duma elections.

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We Can Still Win the War on Plastic

Michael K. Dorsey
September 12, 2020

As with so many other things in 2020, the full-out war against plastic has abated.

For many years, even decades, before the current global pandemic, environmental advocates have waged a war against single-use plastic. We've been winning that war. More and more consumers are carrying reusable bags for groceries and other shopping items, asking restaurants to use more sustainable materials for take-out containers, and using fewer plastic straws. Homeowners are even rethinking and replacing plastic PVC (polyvinyl chloride) in everything from home siding to piping.

As with so many other things in 2020, the full-out war against plastic has abated. To be sure, some plastic personal protective equipment is utilized by medical professionals and others to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Some recent scholarly research used by the plastics industry to bolster its claim that reusable grocery bags somehow spread the coronavirus is "of questionable applicability." Nevertheless, states, cities and various municipalities have either suspended or put on hold implementation of bans on single-use plastics. Accordingly, there have been several articles about how the plastics

industry is one of the few winners from the ravages of COVID-19.

Environment, Livelihoods and Health

More than 120 environmental leaders are asking food delivery companies to help restart our efforts to reduce single-use plastic by giving consumers the option in mobile apps and online ordering systems to make utensils, straws, condiments and napkins opt-in only. This is a great first step, and the Center for Environmental Health (CEH), on whose board I sit, is proud to have signed that letter.

I am concerned about the environment and what we will leave for our future generations. There are tens of millions of people who think more like I do than like the plastics industry. The days of ignoring piles of debris littering beaches worldwide and pretending there aren't islands of trash floating in the oceans have long passed. The plastics industry is scrambling because it knows how bad it looks having conducted what amounts to tobacco and asbestos-like schemes from the late 1970s to purposely manipulate consumers to use more plastic with campaigns based on lies. The plan to make plastics seemingly indispensable to our lives sadly has traction, yet it comes at the great adverse expense against our environment, our livelihoods and our health.

Peer scientists and environmentalists have worked tirelessly to bring to light the lasting damage that single-use plastic does, and our efforts have resulted in hard-won bans and other actions as consumers realize the real price they are paying. Yet the ecological, economic and public health costs of plastics are not limited to just bags.

Many municipalities still consider plastic PVC pipes to be an acceptable option to use in the infrastructure systems that deliver drinking water to our homes. Consider that right now, the water that comes from your faucet may have traveled through miles of plastic pipes to get there. Who knows what it's brought along with it.

I have studied and read the research into the effects of plastics on human health and the

environment. Specifically, peer-reviewed research has found over the years polyvinyl chloride to be among the most harmful of plastics. PVC pipes are made from volatile chemicals such as hydrogen, carbon and chlorine, which is a common disinfectant for water supplies, and are known to cause harm to humans and the environment. The federal government and state of California have long warned of the potential human health risks from exposure to one of the core ingredients in PVC pipes, ethylene dichloride, which has been described as a cancer-causing carcinogen since 1980.

The report, “Our Health, PVC and Critical Infrastructure,” the production of which I supervised, examines in detail the consequences of plastic PVC pipes. Specifically, it considers four critical topics: harmful chemicals associated with the production of PVC pipes; long and short-term costs associated with PVC pipes; health and safety hazards of PVC exposure; as well as moving beyond PVC and passing legislation to reduce PVC and educate consumers about its presence in their lives.

Melting Pipes

Across the United States, melted PVC piping destroyed by intense fires has long threatened communities by exposing groundwater supplies to a litany of carcinogens and poisons, from benzene to toluene and much more. Analysis by municipal authorities following the catastrophic 2017 Tubbs fire that destroyed over 3,000 residential and commercial buildings across California found that “Benzene was detected at levels above the allowable regulatory limit (Maximum Contaminant Level, MCL)” in local drinking water.

Beyond benzene, investigators also identified “a suite of contaminants that include (but are not limited to) aromatic hydrocarbons (including benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and the xylenes), polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, chlorinated compounds (not related to water chlorination), ketones, furans, and thiophenes.” Similar groundwater contamination has been found

following intense fire in 2018 and 2019 — and the contamination lingered long after the fires.

The heat from the August 2020 CZU Lightning Complex fire in the Santa Cruz Mountains melted a 7.5-mile-long plastic water pipe. The pipe was part of a water system, and an official for the San Lorenzo Valley Water District said that “They found that there was a lot of water quality contamination from that melting plastic. The polyethylene put out volatile organic chemicals, benzene. So those are concerns that we are monitoring and we will be sampling for.”

It could take months to determine the full scope of the damage, but one thing is certain: People returning home after evacuating may very well find themselves without certified clean, fresh water to drink. The 2018 Camp fire, which similarly melted plastic pipes in Paradise, California, forced residents there to rebuild their entire water distribution system due to widespread contamination by toxic chemicals like benzene.

We’ve been fighting the war on plastic for decades, and at times, it can feel like we’re losing. Big Plastic is a global behemoth — consistently misleading consumers and communities with industry-backed “studies” and corporate-funded “research.” Its latest ploy, led by major oil companies, is to “flood Africa with plastic” since it can no longer send plastic waste to China. The keystone country in this plan is Kenya, which currently has the strictest plastic bag ban in the world. What a masterstroke for the industry if it’s successful in overriding this ban. What a shame for the world if we allow that to happen.

As numerous viable alternatives to single-use bags, PVC pipes and the litany of other plastic products abound, we can and must draw a line in the sand against this harmful concoction before more communities, ecosystems and livelihoods are compromised.

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Environmental Health, headquartered in Oakland, California.

Donald Trump: A President Against His People

S. Suresh
September 14, 2020

With his war on humanity, Donald Trump has cemented his position as the worst president in American history.

In less than two months from now, Americans would have elected their next president. One can only hope that they have elected their 46th president, not reelected their 45th for another four-year term. Electing Donald Trump was nothing short of shooting oneself in the foot with a .45-caliber pistol. Reelecting him will amount to taking that pistol to the head and pulling the trigger.

In four years, this man has caused countless harm to everyone possible, save rich white Americans and even richer American corporations. He has worked hard to reclaim whiteness in America, having done everything possible to ensure that to be American is synonymous with being white. He has characterized Mexicans as rapists and Central American refugees as criminals. Blinded by his xenophobic views, he promised his supporters a beautiful wall on the southern border that would be paid for by Mexico. Employing his executive powers to keep Muslims away from American soil, his exclusionary immigration policies have been openly Islamophobic from the first days of his presidency.

As president, Trump had the opportunity to make a positive impact on innumerable aspects of the lives of its citizens. Unfortunately, anything he turned his attention to — whether it's education, health care, taxation, immigration,

trade agreements or the environment — he managed to make worse. It requires an extraordinary amount of ineptitude and incompetence to accomplish what Trump has in his four years. He has done enough damage to the country — and the world at large — to vie for the unenviable top spot as the worst president in the history of the United States of America.

Enduring the final year of his presidency, I had thought that it is impossible to be surprised or outraged any longer by whatever the man says or does. I was proven wrong. Trump's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has made his previous transgressions seem like a walk in the park. On September 9, he acknowledged that he had intentionally downplayed the seriousness of the pandemic. The White House response was a pathetic effort to mitigate the fallout from the information contained in the upcoming book by The Washington Post's veteran journalist Bob Woodward.

The COVID-19 death toll in the US is just shy of 200,000, from over 6.5 million cases — the highest in the world. That Trump never cared for the welfare and well-being of his fellow countrypeople was amply clear from his policies and actions over these past four years. That he could turn a blind eye to the calamitous effects of the pandemic and lie to the nation about it likens him to a modern-day emperor, mocking the suffering of his subjects, not much different from Nero who fiddled while Rome burned.

Trump's bungling response to the pandemic makes him culpable for this exorbitant death toll, which could have been averted had he acted swiftly and decisively, with a plan of action based on scientific findings. Instead of encouraging responsible social behavior from the country, he mocked science with his refusal to wear a mask, by consuming hydroxychloroquine as a shield against the coronavirus and misleading the American public by not only not impressing upon it the gravity of the pandemic but, as we now know, willfully underplaying the dangers of COVID-19. Trump's callous and reprehensible behavior during the pandemic not

only taints his legacy with the unnecessary loss of life, but it also cements his position as the worst president of the country with an insurmountable lead over Andrew Jackson and quite possibly anyone else in the future.

America is a nation that loves to bookmark in history the wars its presidents spearheaded during their tenure. Lyndon Johnson is remembered for launching his war on crime in 1965, Ronald Reagan for his war on drugs in 1982. Today, both those wars have resulted in more than 2.3 million incarcerated Americans, with a disproportionate amount of them being black and people of color. George W. Bush is identified with the war on terror that he commenced soon after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

By contrast, what Trump has managed to do in his four years at America's helm is wage a full-scale war on humanity. Sadly, Republican politicians have been abetting this war by kowtowing to the president. A vote for Donald Trump this November is an endorsement of his war on humanity and actively lending support to it.

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Africa Needs Its Own “New Deal”

Betsy Henderson
September 17, 2020

African countries will need a New Deal to collectively recover from the pandemic and address the mounting debt crisis.

In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Africa faces an unprecedented level of starvation, poverty and suffering that will last far beyond 2020. A lack of medical

facilities and resources to offset economic losses is expected to push 37.5 million more Africans into extreme poverty this year, adding to the more than 400 million people already living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Compounding these challenges, African governments are encountering a major debt crunch. Over the past 15 years, African countries have been building new infrastructure projects, from roads to football stadiums, and collectively taking on \$417 billion in debt from lenders like the World Bank, the Chinese government and private investors. The pandemic has also drawn attention to the amount African governments pay in servicing these loans, where countries like Ghana spend five times on annual debt payments as on health care.

As Africa struggles to provide crucial medical services and build the necessary infrastructure, it is clear that African countries will need a new approach to collectively recover from the pandemic and address the mounting debt crisis.

Calls for Debt Relief

In response to the effects of COVID-19, African finance ministers have called for a \$100-billion relief package, including \$44 billion in delayed debt payments over the next two years. African countries that are unable to make debt payments risk having their credit ratings downgraded, which would limit their financing capabilities for future economic growth initiatives. Countries that default on these loans may also face nightmarish predatory vulture funds or a repeat of the 1980s debt crisis.

To alleviate immediate concerns surrounding debt repayment, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the G20 and other multilateral institutions froze debt payments through the end of 2020 to help African governments respond to the pandemic. They are now discussing additional measures, including involving more private lenders. There is a global dialogue about redistributing IMF special drawing rights for additional resources, while questions remain how China — Africa's largest bilateral creditor —

will manage its remaining African debt, with broad debt forgiveness looking unlikely.

While these measures will each have some effect, any meaningful approach to debt relief in Africa must help countries survive today while building a foundation for future economic recovery. Therefore, investing in infrastructure and creating jobs in the short term is crucial to Africa's economic recovery and advancement.

Infrastructure is widely viewed as a critical element for development and economic growth in Africa. Bureaucratic hurdles, lack of investment and perceived risk, however, remain key barriers to obtaining the estimated \$130 to \$170 billion of infrastructure funding the continent requires. Infrastructure construction in Africa is currently critical because it would expedite provision of basic services and regional trade, both necessary for alleviating economic pain from the global recession.

For example, improving regional road networks would allow countries to trade food more regionally rather than facing current shortages from reduced food imports. In addition, building power-generating facilities would increase access to electricity and the internet for students learning from home during the pandemic, power health centers and facilitate future investments.

Increasing physical infrastructure across Africa would also advance implementation of the long-awaited African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which policy leaders consider an important mechanism for the continent's economic recovery and resiliency to future shocks. Whenever the AfCFTA comes into force, having more regional infrastructure in place will only accelerate its ability to boost regional income by 7% (or \$450 billion) by 2035, despite COVID-19. The faster Africa's economies can recover and grow, the sooner countries can alleviate debt and address citizens' needs.

How Do We Get There?

Africa requires a "New Deal" approach to debt relief and economic recovery, a mechanism to provide jobs and infrastructure that helps African economies recover from the worst recession since the Great Depression. In the 1930s, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) on the heels of the Great Depression. The WPA alone put 8.2 million people to work and built 78,000 bridges, 800 airports and over 650,000 miles of paved roads across the United States in less than eight years.

As Roosevelt's New Deal focused on much-needed job creation, a similar plan could be adopted in Africa. Although not a silver bullet to the continent's high unemployment rates, jobs generated by regional infrastructure projects could reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty and provide skills training needed for future work, another oft-cited barrier to investment. Perhaps most importantly, creating more jobs in Africa during a generational recession could save lives and livelihoods.

The underlying principles of the New Deal could be applied in Africa in several ways, but creating a short-term pan-African fund for infrastructure projects could be most effective. Leaders could set up the fund as a special purpose vehicle or a designated initiative within an existing pan-African organization such as the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa or the African Development Bank.

Like the New Deal's WPA, this infrastructure fund could have a defined lifespan (five to seven years) and include appropriate financial oversight for donors like the United States, the European Union and private sector partners. The WPA was dissolved after the completion of its mandate, and adopting a similar approach for this initiative could focus efforts on critical projects, after which African leaders could choose how to address remaining infrastructure needs.

This fund should allow leaders to identify and implement infrastructure projects with the highest potential for economic recovery and regional development. Having a central entity with

authority to coordinate infrastructure projects among African member states could significantly fast-track execution and reduce bureaucratic red tape that often hinders infrastructure projects. A wealth of information about African infrastructure needs and opportunities already exists to facilitate project selection.

Infrastructure in Africa has long been viewed as a national issue that individual countries must address rather than a regional challenge that requires broad international collaboration. Through a New Deal approach that incorporates collective infrastructure investment into global debt relief efforts, international partners have an opportunity to help Africa weather unprecedented challenges today and build a foundation for an accelerated economic recovery that can be sustained well into the future.

***Betsy G. Henderson** is the 2020 Africa Fellow for Young Professionals in Foreign Policy (YPPF).

What the Death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg Means for America's Political Future

Matthew Kolasa
September 21, 2020

As the Supreme Court grows more politicized and voters and the politicians they elect grow more polarized, the future of the political branches of government hangs in the balance.

The death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on September 18 has shaken the judiciary at a moment that could test the foundations of American legislature. Justice Ginsburg was a leftist — or “liberal,” in American parlance — mainstay in

her 27 years on the court and four decades on the federal bench.

The ferocity of nomination battles has intensified in recent years. After Justice Antony Scalia's death in 2016, President Barack Obama nominated moderate DC Circuit chief judge, Merrick Garland, to the Supreme Court on March 16, more than seven months before the next presidential election. Senate Republicans used their majority to block the nomination, denying a vote and letting the nomination expire on January 3, 2017, shortly before Donald Trump's inauguration. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell then argued that “The American people should have a say in the court's direction. It is a president's constitutional right to nominate a Supreme Court justice, and it is the Senate's constitutional right to act as a check on the president and withhold its consent.”

A primary argument McConnell and his colleagues made was for awaiting the election to renew the presidential mandate because Americans deserved a say this close to election day. Democrats responded that the Constitution and traditional practice grant that power and that America already voted in 2012 for a mandate of four, not three and a half years — to no avail.

This recent political precedent will meet its first test over the next two months. Democrats remain the minority party in the upper house, leaving the path clear for Republicans, who unanimously supported President Trump's nominations of Neil Gorsuch, with 51 Republicans and three Democrats voting to confirm, and Brett Kavanaugh, with 49 Republicans and one Democrat confirming. Whomever President Trump nominates will likely enjoy similar partisan support. The conservative majority of five on the court could now grow to a commanding six out of nine and will influence American society for decades to come.

The vote count leaves the words of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, tweeting just hours after the announcement of Justice Ginsburg's passing, moot: “The American people

should have a voice in the selection of the next Supreme Court Justice. Therefore, this vacancy should not be filled until we have a new president.” Schumer’s decision to invoke the Garland precedent is far from obvious. Both party leaders have switched their rhetoric as their positions are reversed. Democrats blame Republicans, and Republicans cry hypocrisy.

This runs against observations by political scientists showing that fighting fire with fire weakens democracy. Gone are the days when a president with a governing majority would nominate a justice from the other party, as Harry Truman did in 1945. Trust and bipartisanship have reached a low not seen in decades.

Presidential nominees have required a simple majority since 2013, when Democrats for the first time changed chamber rules to allow federal lower court nominations to pass with a simple majority rather than a 60-vote supermajority, over the protests of Republicans. In April 2018, Republicans, now in the majority, expanded the rule to include Supreme Court nominees, making 51 votes sufficient to overcome Democrats still furious over the Garland affair. As both parties raise the stakes, the high court grows more politicized — and voters and the politicians they elect grow more polarized — the future of the political branches of government hangs in the balance.

Regardless of who replaces Justice Ginsburg, SCOTUS seats will again inevitably open up the floor to opposing parties. Vociferous opposition to Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh in 2018 suggests there may be appetite for a bitter battle, however quixotic. Whoever wins the November presidential contest will enter an embittered political environment where the comity and willingness to compromise that characterized Washington a generation ago has all but disappeared, replaced by weakened institutions and disunity in the halls of power.

While more active state and local governments, administrative agencies and even courts address questions unanswered by Congress and the White House, nothing can replace

efficacy in DC. When paralysis reigns, policies and the people they serve suffer.

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How Catholics Can Tilt the US Election

Hans-Georg Betz
September 28, 2020

It is one of the great ironies that today, the majority of the Supreme Court justices happen to be members of a faith that once was considered anathema to everything America stood for.

Few Americans these days are likely to recognize the name Thomas Nast. Yet in the Civil War era, Nast was arguably the most famous cartoonist in the United States, responsible for creating and popularizing iconic images, such as “jolly St. Nick” (aka Santa Claus), Uncle Sam and the donkey and the elephant — symbols of the Democrats and Republicans ever since. Nast’s fame was reflected in the Overseas Press Club of America’s decision, in 1978, to name their annual award for best cartoons on international affairs after him.

Yet 40 years later, the Press Club decided to wipe Nast’s name clean of the official title of the award. This came at the heel of the controversy, a few years earlier, provoked by Nast’s nomination for induction into New Jersey’s Hall of Fame. The nomination, his third in four years, once again ended in failure, despite Nast’s merits of having exposed the corruption of New York’s infamous Tammany Hall boss William M. Tweed, and despite his commitment to the anti-slavery cause and racial equality.

Unfortunately, Nast had a serious blind spot: a pronounced hostility to the country’s Catholic,

and particularly Irish Catholic immigrant, community. Nast routinely portrayed the Irish as drunkards with ape-like features, bent on creating havoc; one cartoon has an Irishman sitting on a powder keg, a bottle in one hand, a torch in the other. His famous cartoon, “The American River Ganges,” was a perfect expression of the way Protestant Americans viewed the influx of European Catholics. It depicts Catholic bishops as crocodiles crawling onto American shores bent on attacking innocent schoolchildren.

Blind Spot

Nast’s kind of bigotry was hardly something new. Anti-Catholic sentiments ran rampant throughout the 19th century, starting with the massive influx of Irish and southern German Catholics in the 1840s and 1850s, regaining steam in the decades of the Civil War, with the emergence of the American Protective Association and a wave of pamphlets peddling anti-Catholic conspiracy theories, most famously the claim that the Catholic Church had been behind the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Catholics were generally regarded with suspicion, if not outright fear, as an alien force sent by the pope to subvert the country’s republican institutions and destroy democracy in the United States. Even those who would concede that these allegations were highly exaggerated maintained that Catholic immigrants were not in a position to act as responsible citizens, lacking the independence of mind indispensable for being a good democrat. They were deemed to be under the influence of the pope and priests, who, in turn, were charged with being fundamentally hostile to American democracy.

Most of its detractors maintained that the Catholic faith was fundamentally incompatible with the basic values that informed the American republic. Nativist and white supremacist organizations in the 1920s, most notoriously the second Ku Klux Klan, routinely targeted the country’s growing Catholic community.

It took more than a century for American Catholics to be accepted as fully equal citizens.

In 1937, when Gallup first asked the question, no more than 60% of respondents said they would vote for a Catholic presidential candidate. It took until the late 1970s that that number surpassed the 90% mark. As late as 2003, a prominent book on anti-Catholicism referred to it as the “last acceptable prejudice” in the United States. Some 15 years later, a commentary in the Catholic News Agency charged that it was “becoming more and more obvious that the Catholic Church is being targeted as the public enemy of our society.” For the author, a retired bishop from New Jersey whose diocese was marred in sex abuse scandals during his tenure, the main reason for anti-Catholic hostility was the church’s standing firm on “her teaching on contraception, abortion, stem cell research, in-vitro fertilization, marriage and divorce.”

This is one side of the story and certainly an important one that must not be ignored or trivialized. For large parts of American history, Catholics represented a besieged minority, particularly if they happened to be of Irish or Italian descent. At the same time, however, as the size of the Catholic immigrant community grew in size, so did its influence. Many in the first wave of Catholic immigrants settled in large northeastern cities, such as New York and Boston, where they quickly became a major political factor, primarily for the Democratic Party, which built a whole patronage system on the largely Irish Catholic vote. From this perspective, Nast’s crusade against New York City’s Tammany Hall and his anti-Irish cartoons acquire a certain logic.

It is also a fact that the American Catholic Church actively opposed abolitionism in the United States. And it is also a fact that there was little love lost between the Irish, and later Italian, immigrant communities and the African American minority, with animosities coming from both sides. Catholic immigrants had always voted for the Democratic Party, and the outcome of the Civil War only strengthened the association, as did Lincoln’s Republican Party’s association with the anti-Catholic cause, albeit

rather subtle, even if it was well known that in some parts of the country there were strong ties between the Republicans and the American Protective Association.

Historical Irony

It is important to keep this in mind in order to appreciate the significance of the role of the Catholic vote for the November election. Gone are the days when Catholics formed a dependable vote bank for the Democratic Party, when the Republicans were seen biased, if not hostile, to the Catholic faith. In 2016, according to Pew Research, 56% of registered Catholics voted for Trump, 44% for Hillary Clinton. Generally, nowadays, about half of registered Catholic voters identify themselves more or less as Republicans; roughly the same share more or less as Democrats. This implies that the Catholic vote is a perfect reflection of the pronounced political polarization and partisanship that has characterized the country as a whole for the past few decades.

At the same time, Catholics are no longer considered unfit for high political offices, their republican credentials questioned, as was still the case when John F. Kennedy ran for office. To be sure, this has not yet played itself out with respect to the presidency. Joe Biden, if elected, would only be the second Catholic to be elected to the country's highest political office. It is, however, the case for the other branches of the American political system — the Congress and particularly the Supreme Court. It is perhaps one of the great ironies of American history that today, the majority of the Supreme Court justices who are supposed to interpret and uphold the Constitution of the United States happen to be Catholics — members of a faith that once was considered anathema to everything the country stood for, or at least claimed to stand for.

With the passing away of Ruth Bader Ginsburg on September 18, the Supreme Court has once again become a focal point of attention. This might appear a bit strange. After all, the Supreme Court is generally seen as “the least

dangerous branch’ because it can only tell you what the law means.” Its principal task is “to settle conflicting judgments from lower courts, and determine whether laws are in conflict with the Constitution or other federal laws.”

This, however, is not how America's Christian fundamentalists see it. For them, the Supreme Court is the one crucial institution that is in a position to reverse what they consider the greatest abomination in American legal history, *Roe vs. Wade*, the decision that made abortion legal countywide. President Donald Trump's choice of Amy Coney Barrett, a devout Catholic and mother of seven (two of the children by adoption), to fill the vacant seat on the Supreme Court is, therefore, of supreme significance. Not only because it would tilt the court decisively to the right, but also because it might help sway the outcome of the November election in Trump's favor, particularly with respect to the Hispanic Catholic vote.

In a recent commentary in *The New York Times*, Linda Chavez called upon the Democrats not to take the Hispanic vote for granted. In 2016, almost 30% of Hispanics voted for Trump, despite his blatant denigration of migrants from south of the border. There are numerous reasons for the way Hispanics vote the way they do, not least their national origins. And there is the religious factor. As Chavez points out, a growing number of Hispanics identify themselves as Protestants or even evangelicals, and as such are more prone to vote for Trump.

In addition, there is the question of abortion — an abomination to evangelicals and devout Roman Catholics alike. In a recent poll, more than 50% of Hispanic Catholics thought abortion should be illegal in most or all cases. In fact, Hispanics were the only distinct ethnic group to think so. Among white Catholics, for instance, roughly 40% took the pro-life position. To complicate things even more, a study from 2007 found a marked difference between first and second-generation American Hispanics on the question of abortion. Among the former, almost two-thirds indicated at the time that it should be

illegal; among the latter, only a bit more than 40% thought so.

God's Tool

In an earlier article, I suggested that Trump's core constituency, evangelicals and devout Catholics, have supported him not because they believe he is a man of God — he quite clearly is the opposite, all his pretending notwithstanding — but because they believe he is “God's tool.” Ginsburg's passing away a just weeks before the election, allowing Trump to choose an avowed abortion opponent to fill her seat, cannot but strengthen their belief that the president is on a mission from God. Trump, of course, has far more mundane motives, first and foremost to lock in all the conservative, reactionary and far-right groups in American society that might put him over the edge in crucial states.

There is a certain irony to the fact that the most widely loathed president, both at home and abroad, in recent American history might be put in a position to impose himself for four more years both on the United States and the world at large with the help of a community that for a long time in the past was one of the most disparaged, if not outright abhorred religious minority in America. One might be tempted to see in this an instance of belated revenge for the treatment received in the past. As the good book states in Romans 12:19, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” Poor Thomas Nast must be spinning like a mad top in his grave.

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