

THE
FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL



Volume 4, Issue 1
Summer Edition 2024-2025



The Democracy Issue

Letter from the Editors-in-Chief

Thank you for picking up a copy of our 2024-2025 Summer Edition! With a new school year comes a new volume, editorial staff, and group of authors at the Fieldston Political Journal—and we're all very excited for the year to come. Both our school and the world at large have faced myriad political challenges over the past year; some have been widely covered by the media and only grown within the public consciousness, while others have gone under-reported and largely unnoticed. Big to small, local to international, past to present, the Fieldston Political Journal confronts those issues and stories head-on. Each and every member of our school community brings different perspectives and opinions to the table, and our hope as the 2024-2025 Editors-in-Chief is to capture that intellectual diversity, providing a space for well-researched and nuanced ideas to prosper.

Loosely, the theme for this edition is “democracy.” In an election year for many countries across the world, including the United States, many questions arise. How does democracy flourish, and how does it falter? What does democracy represent on a personal level? Where did democracy come from and where is it going? While not every article is focused on democracy, most touch on it in some way. Whatever you choose to read, we hope that you learn something new, are exposed to ideas you've never thought about before, and challenge your own perspectives.

A special thank you to our faculty advisor, Mr. Montera, without whom the Journal would not exist! If you're interested in writing for the Fieldston Political Journal in the future, please reach out to Adia Stokes (25arstokes@ecfs.org) and Zeke Tesler (25zetesler@ecfs.org). Check out our website (fieldstonpoliticaljournal.com) for more!

We hope you enjoy our Summer Edition!

Adia Stokes

Zeke Tesler

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CRITIQUES OF DEMOCRACY

BY SUMI McMAHON-BAEK



Fresco of Roman Senate painted by Cesare Maccari (Source: Wikipedia).

It might be criminal not to introduce this article with the quote that so many similar ones include. Winston Churchill famously remarked that “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.” But what did he mean by this? Is democracy, the system of government touted by almost all Western nations, really so unsatisfactory? Is it just as prone to the corruption, injustices, and inefficiency that so often plague defective societies?

The success of democratic societies is largely dependent on

the average citizen’s freedom to choose and their civil wisdom. There has always been a belief in and a reliance on a well-informed citizenry. Democracies are threatened around the world because well informed citizens are under assault around the world. The very nature of knowledge and of what we know is being steadily undermined.

It’s important to firstly define what democracy is. Encyclopedia Britannica defines democracy as “a system of government in which power is vested in the people and exercised by them di-

rectly or through freely elected representatives.” The Ancient Athenians, who are credited with the creation of democracy, implemented a system where the citizenry had direct control over all aspects of the political process. This direct engagement allowed for public discourse, as citizens were encouraged to voice their opinions and influence the direction of their government. However, critics of Athenian democracy like Plato and Thucydides were concerned about potentially ignorant or misinformed citizenry having direct control over all aspects of the political process.

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The United States is unique in its appreciation and representation of democracy. It contains both direct and indirect forms of representative governance to ensure citizens have political power. From the outset, the US sought to create a system that balanced the will of the people with the need for competent leadership. Slogans such as “no taxation with representation” epitomize the American people’s commitment to civic engagement and demands for a voice in government. Many other mainstream symbols of democracy popularly touted as “American” exist as well. One slightly satirical, yet popularized amalgamation of symbols – the American flag, the eagle and guns – creates a maximalist metaphor of what democracy and freedom for the people looks like.

No method of governance is perfect. Even democracy is – and should be – scrutinized and criticized to develop the average citizen’s understanding of how our system of government works and how it might be improved. It’s a battle between the ideal and the real.

Some of democracy’s drawbacks are the shadows of unalterable elements of its design, problems that are inherent and cannot be resolved without scrapping the entire foundation on which democracy is based. To be specific, there are a few main weaknesses democracy presents:

1. The battle between political parties and ideologies sometimes lacks stability.
2. There’s a slow response to crises; an ardent insistence on debate, discussion and compromise.
3. There are those moments of individual or group corruption as well as the potential for abusing power for personal gain.
4. Democracy has a strong dependence on a potentially uninformed, mis-

Historically, a substantial amount of this is heavily influenced by education through literacy, schooling, and personal research and awareness. But can rational decision-makers and thinkers outwit mass media? According to the American Psychological Association, misinformation heard for the first time will be persuasive about 99.6% of the time. As the media increasingly shifts away from credible sources and toward the sensational and entertaining realms of Internet and social media, opportunities for misinformation continue to proliferate. From targeted ads based on algorithms that are getting smarter, political Instagram posts that conveniently don’t list their sources, or profit-driven and sensationalized news reporting, the internet provides the space for echo chambers that can be harmful to the average person’s political awareness.

Social media also provides ample opportunity for foreign nations to influence how young voters think by subtly injecting political propaganda into posts and generally causing political unrest. Russia, Iran, and China are the three most common sources of foreign influence operations, according to Meta, which owns Instagram and Facebook.

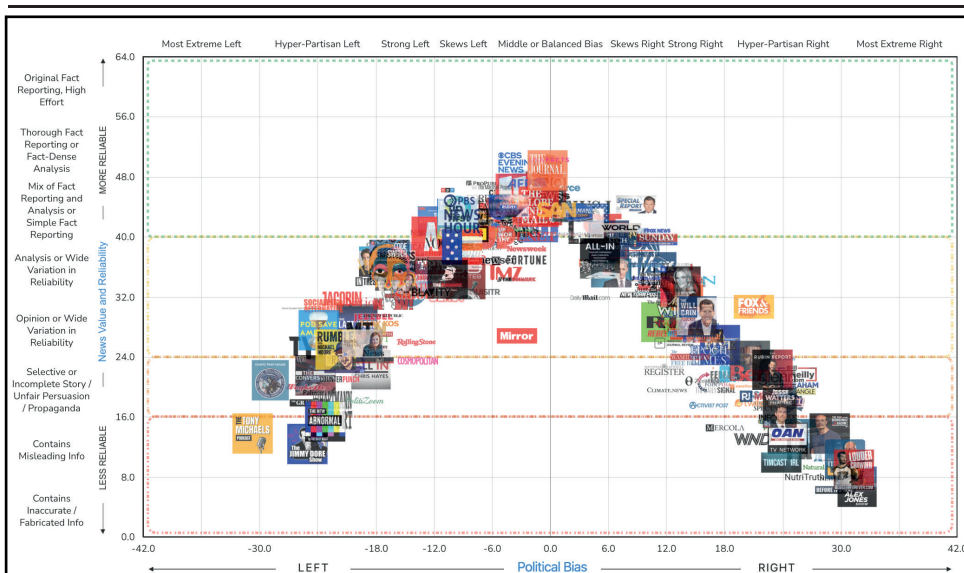
As NPR states, “Facebook parent Meta says Chinese law enforcement is behind the largest covert online influence operation the company has ever disrupted. The operation spread pro-China messages and attacked critics of Beijing’s policies, using a sprawling network of fake accounts across more than 50 websites, from Facebook and Instagram to YouTube, Twitter (now known as X), TikTok, Reddit, and dozens of smaller platforms and forums.” Increasing dependency on the internet and social media for information, particularly among young people, exposes them to a substantial amount of misinformation and propaganda – concerning both national and international affairs – that poses a clear threat to democracy. The former does so by diminishing the vital principle of informed decision-making when voting. The latter threatens democracy in a rather obvious way; Iran, Russia, and China are all autocratic nations, and their influence on any democratic voter body is dangerous.

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Media bias chart (Source: Ad Fontes Media).

One study done in 2020 titled “Is Journalistic Truth Dead? Measuring How Informed Voters Are about Political News” was authored by MIT Sloan’s Charles Angelucci and Columbia University’s Andrea Prat. They found that voters in the United States are 10 to 30 percent less likely to be aware of news stories that are unfavorable to their political party compared to voters of the opposing party. The same study found that the most informed voters were white, wealthy, and educated men above the age of 47, while the least informed voters were young, low-income minority women. The former had a 44% chance of knowing a given news story, whereas the latter had only a 30% chance of knowing the same news story. These findings point to education being one of the contributing factors when it comes to a voter’s political awareness, especially when considering wealthy white men have historically had more opportunities in the realms of education compared to poorer, younger, minority women (and women in general).

Politicians are not unaware of who is paying the most attention to politics. Angelucci says that this is a common concept in political science: Politicians end up catering to older, educated white men because they know they’re the ones who are the most invested in politics. They do this in hopes that they’ll gain more votes. In this way, it is not only the immediate reward of greater (political) knowledge that education brings, but the mere perception of a group of people being educated that can mean more policies benefiting them. This is one of the ways in which a democracy can end up supporting a minority of the people instead of the majority of the people.

Another reason education is so important when it comes to supporting democracy is it helps voters become aware of what they’re actually voting

for. If voters aren’t privy to how (at times, complex) policies shape their lives and the futures of their nations, they are more likely to be led astray by attention-grabbing, emotionally appealing propaganda. Without the opportunity to develop an appreciation for how politics, people, and logic work, which education often provides, it becomes easier to grow confused by complicated campaigns and instead feel a stronger attraction to simpler ones that induce fear. According to the American Psychological Association, in reference to political campaigns, “a meta-analysis conducted by Albarracín and her colleagues found that messages with fear are nearly twice as effective as messages without fear” (Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 141, No. 6, 2015).

The only way a voter can protect themselves from falling victim to these misleading tactics is to diversify the sources of information they consume to escape echo chambers, cross reference information to avoid misleading claims, stay up to date on current events to learn more, and form their own opinions. In simple terms: To effectively vote for what you believe will benefit you and your country, it is essential to educate yourself.

Of course, dependence on voters is far from an objective weakness. In an ideal world, a government dependent on a group of rational and informed people doesn’t have much to worry about. The real threat to democracy, rather, lies in the potential for a na-

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tion's government to have to rely on a politically unaware, propaganda-prone nation of voters that theoretically have the power to do a lot of bad for their own country – possibly to the benefit of one power-hungry politician. Propaganda and misinformation will always exist as any real democracy will promote freedom of information, so it truly is up to voters to be aware. The risk of depending on an uninformed or misled group of voters is inherent when it comes to democracy. The people, no matter if they've been manipulated, are the core of any democratic nation.

Adding to the confusion voters might experience alongside misinformation, it's incredibly easy to grow disoriented concerning just what you're supporting amidst polarization and the sensationalism of hot-button/controversial topics. Polarization is widely defined as the divergence of political attitudes away from the center, towards ideological extremes. A good example of this in The United States is how separated the political left and the right have become, with each possessing distinct opinions on a variety of controversial topics. Controversial social issues in particular have the capacity to overshadow many less provocative, but in some cases equally important, policies. Journalist Allen Faulton writes "Just because a candidate shares your view on abortion doesn't mean they're good at anything else. But that candidate is

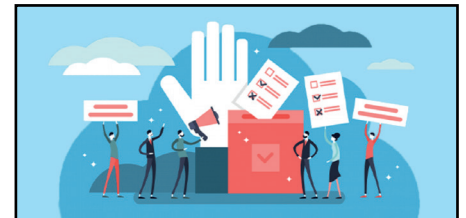
very likely to get elected (or not), depending on the prevailing views of their electorate on that trigger issue, and that issue alone. This has the effect of removing huge swathes of critically important issues from the public forum while also enabling absolute dumbasses to rise to positions of power."

Polarization is not necessarily guaranteed to exist alongside any democracy. Its presence depends on how simplified or complicated a democracy's political party system is and the size of the pool of representatives voters can choose from. Some simplification is necessary because people have lives outside of thinking about politics and are only willing to participate in government and vote if they don't have too many choices. It can lead to extreme polarization, as we see in the United States, where many voters don't like either of the only two main presidential candidates and rely on "voting for the lesser of two evils".

Polarization also relates to how informed voters of a nation are. Voters who aren't as politically aware are less likely to give thought to subtler, more complex elements of politics. Rather, emotional and extreme ideas or campaigns that arise as a result of polarization may appeal to them more. Even for the most informed of voters, it becomes so much harder to form cogent opinions on complicated issues when things become too polarized.

Another weakness of democracy that is less related to voter par-

ticipation is a slow response to threats, as well as an even slower process when it comes to drawing conclusions on convoluted, less immediate subject matters. This characteristic is baked into many democratic governments as a means to discourage the most powerful from making decisions that could change the course of an entire nation by themselves. Time for deliberation can be an upside when it comes to ensuring that everyone's voices are heard and a quality solution can be formulated. When it comes to national emergencies, however, determining a balance between speed (how quickly can an emergency be responded to?) and power (who is determining a fast response?) is necessary.



(Source: iSchoolConnect.com).

Prioritizing a timely response to emergencies can mean granting executive power to select individuals in a nation. This compromises some principles of democracy, such as equality – minority voices are likely to be overlooked. In times of crisis, many nations give executive powers the ability to override certain rights promised to citizens in constitutions and laws. The National Emergencies Act, or the NEA, which was passed in 1976 in the United States, is a prime example of this. As the Brennan Center describes it, "The law gives the President near-total

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discretion to declare a national emergency; there are no substantive criteria that must be met. The declaration then unlocks enhanced powers contained in more than 130 statutory provisions scattered across the U.S. Code.”

Of course, this unlocks the potential for the abuse of executive power. In 2019, for instance, Donald Trump declared a national emergency in order to attempt to procure eight billion taxpayer dollars towards building a wall along the southern US border after Congress refused to grant him these funds. On the other hand, prioritizing the principles of democracy over the speed the government can respond to an emergency has clear potential consequences for the wellbeing of a nation and its citizens. Many sources, such as *Scientific American*, partially attribute the United States’ mishandling of preventing the spread of Covid-19 to our government’s distributive power structure. Monica Gandhi, a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, states “Every district, every county, every state could make decisions and keep them to themselves. And we just have uneven applications of public health recommendations in a way that I can’t imagine any other country does.”

This lack of coordination is due to some responses to the pandemic being left in the hands

of state and local governments, meaning policies all over the nation differed. While in this context, decentralized governing was an obstacle, it is a feature that is embedded within America’s government to protect democracy. It is purposefully deeply rooted in our legislative system. While the Trump Administration has been widely blamed for the mishandling of the pandemic, the distribution of different policies during this time and the asymmetry and confusion it creates is difficult for any administration – left or right leaning – to try to mitigate.

While some of these weaknesses arise as a rather unalterable consequence of some of the main tenets of democracy, there are some complications that have the potential to be greatly attenuated. Particularly, complications surrounding voters. Every person has the ability to become a more active citizen in helping to protect democracy by educating themselves and learning to discern reliable, objective sources of information from misleading stories and propaganda.



Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (Source: Wikipedia).

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY: THREATENED, BUT BOUND TO ENDURE

BY CONSTANTINE SVORONOS



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking after the inauguration of a controversial parliament building (Source: CNN).

Liberal democracy, the form of governance which has grown to dominate the Western world since the end of the Second World War, is a philosophy that represents the culmination of thousands of years of historical development. It is also a form of government that is under assault by authoritarian and ultranationalist movements.

A democracy is a governmental system where the population of the state decides their own leadership/representatives and, in some cases, policies. It's "the consent of the governed." It mingles direct forms of democracy (citizen presence, citizen participation) with

more indirect forms (representatives or surrogates are delegated power by the people). However, for a democracy to be considered a liberal democracy, it typically must meet a few other criteria. One such is that a liberal democratic government must have a system of checks and balances in place that ensures that one governmental leader (or party or branch) does not gain outsized control. Liberal democracies tend to guarantee their citizens set "unalienable" rights – rights that are guaranteed and may not (easily) be taken away. In this way, a liberal democracy also protects its individual citizens from majoritarianism/tyranny of the major-

ity, where a group that is in the majority uses its power in a democracy to control or oppress a minority. Liberal democracies believe in constitutions, where powers and rights are enumerated.

The United States of America is typically considered to be the first country to have adopted liberal democracy as the basis of its government, although it did not permit, initially, a majority of its population (including non-white people, women, and non-land owners) to participate in this new system until over a century following its founding. Outside of one

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civil war, ideas and institutions had to be transformed by debate, discussion, advocacy and voting. It is a combination of a number of aspects of the United States Constitution that made the U.S. a strong liberal democracy in the 18th century following the ratification of that Constitution. The United States was the first modern democracy, establishing a novel system of government with three branches – executive, legislative, and judicial – a historical first. The checks and balances of this new system ensured that neither the president nor legislature took too much power. It put into writing a set of rights, known as the Bill of Rights, which were to be guaranteed to people (not just citizens) living in the United States. The Supreme Court of the United States (and judicial branch generally speaking) was created as a check on the democratically elected figures within the state, ensuring that no matter what laws or actions the legislature and president attempt to put forth, the courts would interpret and enforce their “constitutionality,” as the law of the land.

It is, however, possible in the case of a substantial legislative and state majority to make new amendments to the Constitution and repeal existing ones in accordance with Article V. So while they are not technically fully “unalienable,” the rights granted in the United States Constitution are here to stay. The ability to

undo any part of the Constitution with a massive and diverse majority of members of Congress and states is one example of how the framers of the Constitution tried to strike certain balances, in this case balancing the will of the people with preserving the most basic structures of government and fundamental rights. At the Constitutional Convention, the American system of government was systematically planned with the intention that American democracy would last in the face of all kinds of different threats. This new state was established in a way like no other before it. It is this setup of the American government – the checks and balances, protection for individual liberties, prevention of majoritarian rule, a limit on the power of the state, democratic election system, etc. – that made the United States the world’s first liberal democracy.



Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States, Howard Chandler Christy (Source: ConstitutionFacts).

The liberal democratic systems of the American Constitution did not come out of nowhere. Indeed while the idea of democracy originated in Ancient Athens (though it is possible there were other democratic civilizations that existed earlier) American liberal democracy was a unique prod-

uct of The Age of Reason, The Enlightenment, and The Age of Revolution, part of a new trend away from monarchy and aristocracy. It was associated with the anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism that emerged out of the British colonial and parliamentary system of which it was a part.

Some parliamentarians and constitutionalists would argue that the first event where an early liberal idea would begin to develop would be at the issuance of the Magna Carta in England in 1215. This revolutionary charter established for the first time in history the idea that the king and his will were not above the law, and that it was law itself that ultimately reigned supreme. Though it didn’t make England a democracy, the document established that taxes could not simply be levied by the king randomly, but had to be agreed upon to some degree by Parliament (albeit one mostly comprised of aristocrats). Hence the Magna Carta began the gradual development of a parliamentary system in England, pushing forth the first checks on the king in England, though the country would remain a mostly-absolute monarchy for centuries. These systems continued progressing as the years went on in England.



The signing of the Magna Carta (Source: Britannica).

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As the Enlightenment began in the mid 17th century, brand new ideas and theories started to emerge as a number of important political philosophers began to publish writings. One such philosopher was John Locke, an Englishman whose ideas form much of the basis of modern liberalism. Locke wrote, among other things, that government ought to be limited, and that it was the duty of government to ensure its citizens are guaranteed a set of inviolable rights. While such suggestions may not sound particularly controversial nowadays, they were revolutionary at the time. His ideas greatly influenced the writing of the 1689 English Bill of Rights, another major development in the history of liberalism, which put into law a number of important rights and liberties for the first time. The framers of the American Bill of Rights, which appeared a century later, largely took inspiration from this English document, using, for example, almost the exact wording of the English Bill of Rights for the 8th Amendment.

Following the birth of the United States, the next country to adopt liberal democracy was France, following its notorious revolution in the late 18th century. The words “liberté, égalité, fraternité” (liberty, equality, fraternity) came about in this period, famously demonstrating the ideals some revolutionaries saw as

fundamental to this new liberal democratic France. However, unlike American liberal democracy, that of France fell just as quickly as it began. Democratization gave way to extreme ideologies and behaviors. The French revolutionaries began to consume their own children. The revolutionary chaos ended with Napoleon Bonaparte subordinating democracy to nationalist ambitions under his own personalized power. Sometimes, it is argued, in 9th grade history classes, that French history is the story of the battle between democratic impulses and authoritarian rule.

It is important to also note that liberal democracies had and have major problems. Many liberal democratic countries participated in the violent system of colonialism, one that resulted in the deaths of tens of millions. Extreme racism has similarly played a major role in the decision making process of most of these nations, with histories marked by racial hierarchy and domination. Through the years, however, these countries have tried to reckon with their dark histories and change for the better, as liberal democracies ought to do. Though far from perfect to this day, liberal democracy has shown historically to be quite a successful political philosophy. Still it has had and does have its haters.

Following the end of the First World War, there were powerful backlashes against parliaments and democracies. In addition to overthrowing Tsarism, Com-

munist in Russia also sought to destroy the seeds of democracy, a key part of capitalism. Fascism in Italy served as a kind of backlash against the failure of democracy to win a war and bring economic security. Nazism in Germany assaulted democracy as an inherently un-German idea. The Nazis and others blamed democracy to some extent for the German defeat in World War I. To restore German greatness, they felt democracy had to be overthrown. When the Nazis failed to do that in the streets, they turned to other strategies of gaining power, with voting, ironically enough, being their main focus. Once in power, Adolf Hitler, killed off liberal democracy in Weimar Germany. Hitler proved that liberal democracies, even those with seemingly strong checks and balances, are vulnerable, and in times of crisis, democracy can quickly decline into totalitarian dictatorship. In our contemporary world, threats to liberal democratic systems are certainly present and even growing across the globe, coming from a wide variety of sources.

Indeed in our modern days attempts have been made, some successful, to dismantle liberal democracy in certain countries. In Hungary, for example, Viktor Orbán and his radical right-wing party Fidesz have managed to turn that country from the liberal democracy it once was into, as Orbán himself proudly described it, an “illiberal” state. Using an excessively large legislative majority his party gained

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in parliamentary elections, Orbán pushed through a number of changes that reduced checks on his leadership while increasing the power of the state. He turned the Hungarian Supreme Court from an independent body to one in service to the prime minister. He further removed government and public oversight while also creating a state-run press authority with the ability to penalize media outlets and journalists; the members of the board of this press authority are appointed by the prime minister. Orbán even changed his country's election procedure to favor his own party. Hungary is a prime example of how fragile liberal democracies can be in the face of large legislative majorities, especially in a parliamentary system like Hungary's, one which is shared by much of Europe. Orbán also provided a potential roadmap for how to de-liberalize a state and place more power in the hands of a leader and his supporters. Orbán also seeks to spread his ideas outside of just Hungary, becoming a kind of figurehead for the illiberal movement in Central Europe and beyond.

El Salvador is another case where a leader backed by a large democratic majority has managed to change the fundamental systems of government. In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele has radically transformed his country

in a multitude of ways. His chief accomplishment has been drastically reducing the crime rate in his country, a nation that was formerly one of the most dangerous on Earth. However, Bukele was only able to do this by arresting residents of his country suspected of being gang members en masse. He has placed his country into what is essentially a state of emergency for two years, all in order to suspend a number of constitutional rights and allow these mass arrests to take place. While this has worked at its intended goal, and many of those imprisoned are indeed the criminals that have been terrorizing the people of El Salvador for years, many are not. Due to the lack of regard for the full legal process, a number of innocent Salvadorans have been arrested. And whether or not the prisoners are guilty, they are still being treated in a way contrary to international law and basic human rights, as the government of El Salvador overcrowds prisons and uses methods such as torture on prisoners. Despite this, Bukele has proven to be extremely popular in his country, winning around 84% of the vote in the recent February 2024 presidential election. His party, Nuevas Ideas, also holds 54 of 60 seats in the legislative assembly of El Salvador. So, while daily life for the majority of Salvadorans may have improved, the liberal democracy of that country has largely faded away. As a result, were the power to get to Bukele's head – more than it already has, that is, given his references to himself as “the

World's Coolest Dictator” – and his intentions to become more malevolent, there would be few to no systems in place to prevent his will from becoming a reality, allowing him to do as he pleases.

While the situations like those of El Salvador and Hungary are far more pressing for those nations and their democracies than the issues of the United States are for us, we certainly have no shortage of challenges to democracy afoot. One of the largest such threats is a lack of confidence in the democratic system. Following the loss of Donald Trump in the 2020 election, claims that the election had been “stolen” and the American electoral system compromised began to circulate. Indeed much of this came from the very political leadership of the country, many of whom pushed forth these baseless claims. Donald Trump himself continues to refuse to accept that he lost the election, a first for any modern American presidential candidate (Samuel Tilden of the 1876 election is the most similar case to Trump's, though that election genuinely did involve voter fraud, but on both sides). Trump's refusal led to the violent attempt to overrule the results of the election on January 6, 2021. This particular problem of election denial remains vast, as tens of millions of Americans continue to believe that the election was “rigged,” and likely would find it difficult to accept another Trump loss. Confidence in democracy is imperative to a nation's health, but it is a historical constant which is increasingly threatened.

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January 6, 2021 assault on U.S. Capitol
(Source: The Conversation).

Through these issues we must remember that unlike the systems of Hungary and El Salvador, the American system is one that has stood the test of time. It is one that has, over the course of the centuries, been steadily improved. Indeed the American national consciousness has been hugely influenced by our Constitution and emphasis on certain ideals, one such being liberal democracy. So while current issues and threats may seem particularly pressing, we ought to take comfort in the fact that the system under which Americans live has been built up over the course of more than two centuries with the primary objective of defending the rights of Americans to live, as Lincoln put it in his famous Gettysburg Address, under a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Such is the point of having a liberal democracy. A liberal democracy is built to last.

The system of the United States was created with the knowledge that certain challenges would al-

most definitely come about in the future, thanks to prior knowledge of human nature and history. That is why it was created in the way it was – to simultaneously counteract both tyrannical autocratic and majoritarian rule. Hundreds of years of development have been used to try and establish “a more perfect union.” So while it may seem to be at one of its most divided times in history, the United States has withstood many great tests, thanks to its liberal democracy, and will likely withstand many more.



Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (Source: Politico).



President Nayib Bukele (Source: Reuters).

WHY I WILL VOTE AND WHAT IT WILL MEAN: FEAR AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN A BROKEN DEMOCRACY

BY ZEKE TESLER



The County Election by George Caleb Bingham (Source: Reynolda House Museum of American Art).

On Tuesday November 5th, 2024, I will come home from school, drop off my backpack, and go to my nearest polling place to cast a vote for Kamala Harris and Tim Walz. I will not vote out of enthusiasm for a Democratic Party that I find deeply unsatisfying and too mod-

erate, but because the horrors of the United States political sphere have coerced me into voting in the name of “preserving democracy.” I will be voting for the first time, and in what should feel like a moment of joy and importance gleaned from the growing responsibility of my civic duty, I will instead be incredibly frustrated.

In 2024, one thing unites all across the great American political divide: fear of the outcome of the presidential election. Look at any news source right now: everyone, from TikTok creators to MSNBC to Fox, is sure that the 2024 election is the most important election, full stop. Hear Sean Hannity, referencing the words of Donald Trump, say on his July

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12th segment that “We are a nation in decline; I’ve never been more nervous about the future of this country and the state of the world than I am right now.” Listen as Rachel Maddow tells us during her May 7th segment that “As the rule of law has bent and been broken by Trump and his movement, we’ve also seen the democratic system bend and get broken by Trump and his movement.”

In this rare moment of agreement—based, of course, in fundamental disagreement—the rhetoric of Trump’s potential victory in the 2024 election as the ultimate threat to democracy has emerged from the Democratic Party. This view is nothing new; the idea of Trump as a threat to democracy gained prevalence after his baseless claims of mass election fraud and the following insurrection on January 6th, 2021. However, as the 2024 election draws nearer and the threat looms larger, its pertinence and immediacy only increases.

There are two main factors driving this idea; first is the fear of election denial following the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. While definitely relevant, that discussion has been played out to every possible extent within the last three and a half years. The second (and more interesting) factor is concern over what a second Trump term would mean for American institutions of democ-

racy themselves. This category is a wide one, and fears span the potential for a conservative supermajority on an already conservative Supreme Court to the now ubiquitous threat of Project 2025, which has finally made its way into general public consciousness.

Produced by the Heritage Foundation as their latest in a 45 year history of Mandate for Leadership agendas dating back to the Reagan years and destined to feature heavily in the Republican policymaking agenda should Trump win the 2024 election, Project 2025 is suddenly on everybody’s minds and lips. While Trump has tried to distance himself from it, the Heritage Foundation has been a core part of conservative policymaking for decades, and no amount of denial will change that history and probable future. It’s impossible for Trump to legitimately distance himself from Project 2025 when 26 out of its 36 authors served in his administration.

Project 2025 promises to reform the Department of Justice, excising the Civil Rights Division that enforces federal voting laws. Additionally, Project 2025 proposes the end of the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency, which works to secure elections against misinformation, disinformation, and AI threats. Those reforms are just some of the myriad deeply concerning changes that would leave the rights of many Americans across the country unprotected.

The election-related provisions of Project 2025 are most relevant to the idea of this election determining the future security of American democracy. If Trump is elected, while not every single proposal in Project 2025 will come to fruition, ideas like these will permeate Republican policymaking during his term. That is a real threat to democracy, and a scary one at that.

Yet, there’s much more to the story. A more startling issue lies beneath that surface-level but terrifying reality. Our democracy is more than just threatened by a potential second Trump term; it is already bashed and broken.

This moment is undoubtedly important. However, Trump and Project 2025 are treated as “once-in-a-lifetime” level threats; now is the time to act, and if we fail now, we fail forever. This fatalistic view may be based in real possibility, but it also ignores how issues with American democracy stretch beyond the looming threat of the 2024 election and Project 2025. It ignores how American democracy’s already broken state contextualizes Trump’s current “threat to democracy.” Relating to the concerns around Project 2025, the U.S. has struggled with staggering voter suppression throughout its history and through the modern day. The most prominent examples include Jim Crow laws, which implemented poll taxes and literacy tests that purposefully disproportionately affected

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WHY I WILL VOTE AND WHAT IT WILL MEAN

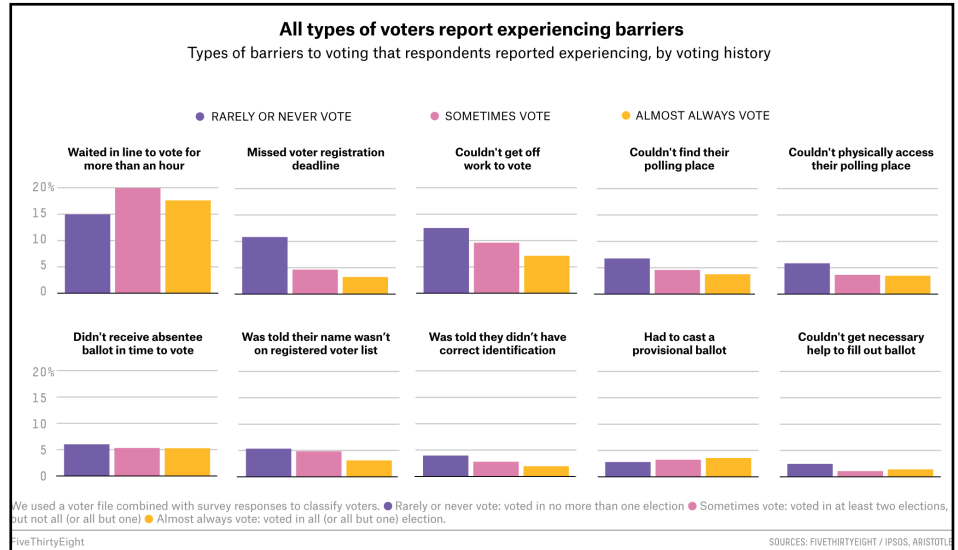
By Zeke Tesler

Black Americans in the South, gerrymandering, which is still a huge issue today and involves purposefully drawing districts to guarantee specific political outcomes based on population concentrations, and the 2013 gutting of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which involved striking down an important article that helped prevent individual states from implementing voter suppression tactics.

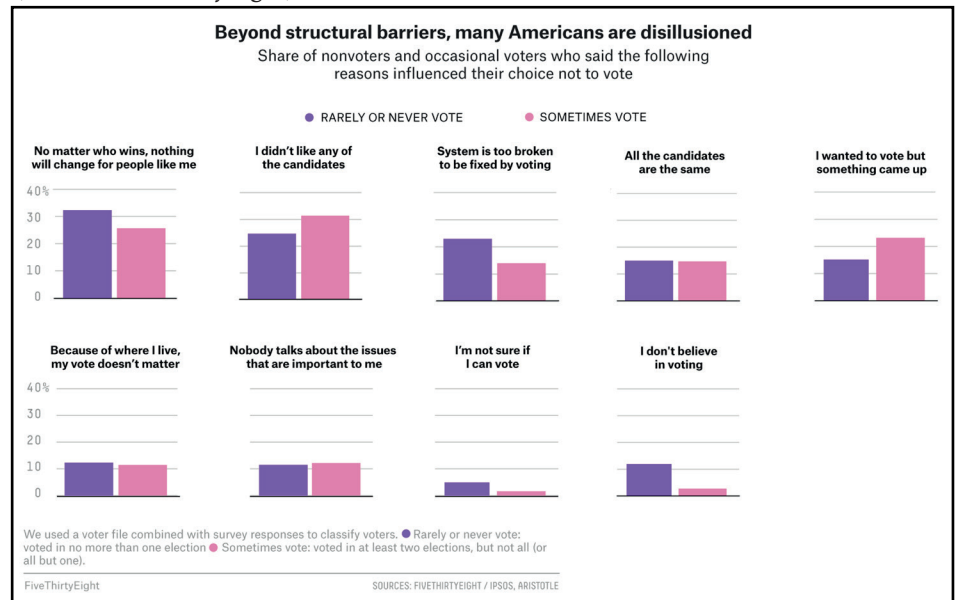
These institutionalized suppression tactics were and are harmful enough, but the environment they've helped to create provides a more existential threat. Widespread voter suppression has led to widespread disillusionment with American political institutions, which in turn has made for an atmosphere of apathy and frustration that maintains incredibly low voter turnout. While this election cycle has the potential to threaten American democracy, whatever form of American democracy that currently exists barely represents the American people.

In recent times, voter engagement is incredibly low with between 35 and 60 percent of voters not voting in a given election. Some of this low voter turnout stems from difficulty of access; with issues like having to wait in line for more than an hour, missing registration deadlines, and not being able to take off work, significant amounts of

voters and non-voters alike experience frustrating barriers. However, while responsible in part for many of the low voter turnout problems, these more tangible issues alone do not tell the whole story.



Different voting barriers that large proportions of the U.S. voting population face (Source: FiveThirtyEight).



Disillusionment permeates the American psyche (Source: FiveThirtyEight).

The American citizenry is infected with apathy and disillusionment. In an article by FiveThirtyEight that interviewed eligible voters before the 2020 election on their perspective on voting, many responses show just how deep this apathy has spread. One interviewee discussed difficulties at a polling place that took away confidence in the voting system, others complained about lack of information, but many had more basic explanations as to why voting was difficult or not something they planned on doing. Many felt like their vote wouldn't matter because of the state they lived in, that they didn't really have enough choice in the whole process, or that there was no one they felt would truly represent

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them. These are just a sample of the numerous other reasons listed in the poll, all pointing to distrust and disillusionment with American political institutions.

Even more alarming for the state of our democratic system is that the 2020 election had the highest percent eligible turnout in over a century, but that turnout was driven by desperation and fear rather than basic motivation to participate in democracy. Instead of thriving out of a sense of civic duty and excitement over good candidates, our democracy seems to produce its most engaged citizenry when it's in a state of distress. Additionally, even though 2020 turnout was relatively high at 66% of the voting-eligible population, that number still falls short of truly representing a large swath of the American public.

Of course, low voter turnout directly affects marginalized and disadvantaged groups at a higher rate. Suppression tactics tend to focus on low-income and non-white communities, creating a circular effect that constantly threatens the health of our democracy. Because American democracy has historically underrepresented or fully left out marginalized groups altogether, many feel unwanted by their institutions and are often unmotivated to participate in democracy, which in turn only worsens how democratic institutions treat them. Our current democ-

racy does not accurately represent the citizenry it's built to serve because of low voter turnout and apathy, and that foundation is what allows symptoms like election denialism and the voter suppression provisions of Project 2025 to pose more existential threats in the present day. While there is little proof that increased voter turnout would automatically turn the tide against a Trumpian "end of democracy", it's clear that the current state of U.S. political institutions cannot be relied on to accurately portray the needs of the people.

Apathy and disillusionment are compounded by other systemic issues that hinder democracy within the American political system, including the stifling nature of two-party politics. Third-party candidates simply don't get elected to federal office, and even at the local level, it's rare to find an elected official not affiliated with the Democratic or Republican Party. Across the world, other democracies host robust, multi-party systems that span the length of the political spectrum. In the United States, options are incredibly limited by the political apparatus; the U.S. presents a right-leaning political window and traps the public into deciding between a relatively moderate liberal party and an increasingly far-right conservative one. Even as progressive ideas begin to seep more and more into the American political mainstream, their actual enactment is constantly hampered by the moderate slant of establishment Democrats.

And so, with the calming and reassuring context that everything is much, much worse and more complicated than the outcome of the 2024 election alone, I come back to the voting booth. My vote will represent the lack of democracy in American politics. It will show how our institutions, which are supposed to represent us, have completely and utterly failed to uphold that mission. I want to vote for a candidate who will promise more for the American people than the relatively moderate, establishment Democrats have ever promised before. I deserve the opportunity to vote for a candidate in a (nonexistent, mainstream) American leftist party without essentially throwing my vote away. No part of that desire is realistic in our current system.

I will vote. I will vote because I do fear the consequences of a second Trump presidency. I will vote because when the president of the Heritage Foundation says on live TV that "We are in the process of the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the Left allows it to be," there is only one legitimate way to show my dissent in the voting booth. And in doing this difficult thing, I will be a rare case compared to the millions disillusioned by a deaf political apparatus. The blame is not on them--what allegiance do they owe to a system that has failed them? Rather than representing an exercise in functioning American democracy, my vote will represent its fundamental flaws.

BRITAIN'S CHALLENGE

BY FELIX STEELE



(Source: abposters).

In the wake of World War Two, in the midst of the Cold War, in the age of anti-colonial struggles and independence movements, at a time when new nations were emerging, The United States' Secretary of State Dean Acheson remarked in 1962 that the United Kingdom had "lost an empire and not yet found a role."

Most of these comments were unfounded. Though Britain will never return to the Pax Britannica dominance that it enjoyed in the 19th century, living standards continued to rise through

the 20th century, and the economy remained competitive. Although it wasn't a power house in world affairs, it was still a power broker.

However, British decline has become less imagined and increasingly real over the past ten years. It is in crisis. The U.K. can no longer afford to keep up its treasured national healthcare system, or its expansive public transit network. Last year, British courts were told to delay sentencing criminals because prisons were full. Companies are fleeing London's stock exchange for New York

and Paris. Economic growth has all but stopped. If the current malaise persists, Britain will be poorer than Poland — a country whose cheap labor exports partly triggered Brexit — in just 7 years' time, according to the Economist.

What to do? No political party has offered a convincing response: the political landscape is dangerously fragmented. In Scotland and Wales, insurgent parties (the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru) threaten to eviscerate the U.K., imagining that they would fare better on their own. Meanwhile, Reform

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U.K., a new hard-right party, hopes to double down on isolationist, anti-immigrant politics — while the Green Party promises to spend nonexistent billions on carbon neutrality and radical-left social initiatives. The two mainstream parties promise only to maintain the status quo, though they disguise their similarities.

Britain has an unhealthy relationship to government spending. Brits are poorer than Mississippians (and only 60% as wealthy as Americans overall) — yet receive government services that would be unimaginable in the U.S.. This isn't a problem, as small-government types insist, with social spending alone: it is a problem of economic policy. In Ireland, a demographically similar nation with comparable social policies, GDP per capita is about 50% higher — a divergence which has emerged only in the last 15 to 20 years. British leaders have failed to enable their welfare state through economic policy. For instance, most British cities are surrounded by “green belts” — areas where development is heavily restricted. These preserves were intended to maintain the “green and pleasant land” of which Shakespeare wrote and prevent American-style suburban sprawl. They have also throttled growth.

Britain's top economic hubs — like the vibrant research centers

of Cambridge and Oxford, as well as the polyglot city that is London — should be growing fast. In the U.S., cities like Phoenix and Austin have boomed in recent years. However, British planning law discourages substantive new development. Most old buildings are subject to draconian restrictions on renovation. New builds can't be “out of keeping” with a neighborhood, nor can they be taller than a few stories — lest views be blocked. They can also be arbitrarily denied by local councils. The result is that people cannot live where they work — which, very often, means that they can't work there either. Many Britons have both the skills and desire to work productively in big cities. But so acute is the nation's shortage of housing that they cannot — a problem that strangles growth. The solution is simple: the British government must defang local busybodies and allow building to proceed without restriction.



(Source: History.com).

A similar problem applies to business. Britain has imposed onerous restrictions on business owners — a thicket of regulation that the kinds of scrappy young startups that thrive in America would struggle to cut through. Innovative British companies, like Arm, a designer of computer

chips, have increasingly chosen to set up shop in the U.S. or E.U.

Previous British governments have attempted to fix these issues by pouring money into the country's least prosperous and slowest-growing areas. However, rather than focusing on fixing the structural problems associated with these regions, they have simply attempted to redistribute cash from the wealthy London area.

These questions of policy also dovetail with demographic issues.

Britain is an aging nation. Its healthcare system will struggle to keep up with the rising number of elderly patients flooding into hospitals. Already, 8 million Britons are waiting for hospital treatment — a number which will only rise in the years to come. Britain's aging population also poses challenges for the labor market. With a shrinking workforce, Britain will become less innovative. Youngsters, facing the high housing costs and poor job prospects created by British policy, are increasingly disillusioned with their prospects. Many will seek opportunities abroad. Immigration presents a potential solution to the coming shortages of taxpayers and laborers — millions around the world are willing to live and work in Britain — yet that is a prospect that is politically untenable after Brexit. This summer, right-wing riots flared

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across the U.K. in response to the new Labour government, which has reversed some of the anti-immigrant policies of its predecessors. The violence was stoked by spurious claims that a Muslim immigrant had stabbed three children in Stockport, a suburb in Northern England. Britain has been among the best nations in the world to be an immigrant: the robust and cost-effective school system means that the gulf between long-established and first-generation families is smaller than in other countries. It is a testament to the increasing multiculturalism of Britain that Rishi Sunak, a child of immigrants, rose to the top of the Conservative party. Yet, right-wing violence has imperiled Britain's attractiveness to immigrants, and with it, the potential for Britain to continue its path towards openness for the best and brightest from around the world.

Britain's challenges are not insurmountable, though. By rectifying its wrongheaded policies and welcoming the world, it can create at least the chance for a resurgent economy. Brits should hope that the new government is brave enough to take an ax to the inefficient apparatus of the state as it stands.



British rioters, August, 2024 (Source: CNN).



Palace of Westminster/House of Parliament (Source: Wikipedia).

NATIONALISM VS. LOCALISM: RESHAPING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN 2024

By ISHAAN AKILESWAR



(Source: TheStreet).

Nationalism, as a textbook term, was once a force that made nations, liberated peoples, or invaded other countries. In its contemporary political context, nationalism emphasizes strong identification with one's nation-state, often prioritizing national interests over international cooperation or global concerns. Nationalists typically advocate for stricter immigration controls, protectionist economic policies, and a more assertive stance in foreign affairs. At its core, na-

tionism seeks to strengthen and preserve the cultural, economic, and political sovereignty of the nation, sometimes at the expense of foreign states. Nationalist policies can also target ethnic groups and feed the fires of class hatred.

Localism, by contrast, centers on empowering local communities and governments. It prioritizes decision-making at the municipal or regional level, emphasizing the unique needs and identities of specific areas over central-

ized, national solutions. Localists argue that communities are best equipped to address their own challenges and that a one-size-fits-all approach from the federal government often fails to meet the diverse needs of different regions. In federal states like the United States, localism tends to have more significance, while it is less applicable in unitary states like France or Japan, where governance is more centralized.

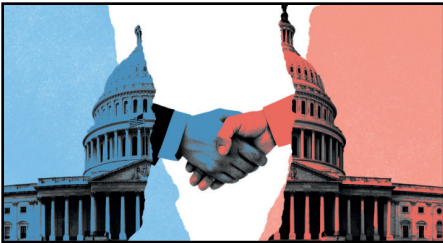
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By ISHAAN AKILESWAR

As the 2024 election cycle gains momentum, two distinct ideological forces are increasingly shaping political discourse, voter preferences, and policy proposals across the United States: nationalism and localism. While both ideas relate to identity and governance, they differ significantly in scope, focus, and implications for the future of American politics. This article explores the nuances of these ideologies, their impact on current political debates, and how they are influencing the strategies of candidates and parties in the lead-up to the 2024 elections.



(Source: CNN).

The tension between nationalist and localist approaches is particularly evident in economic policy debates. Nationalist candidates are pushing for trade protectionism, including advocating for tariffs on imported goods and the reshoring of industries to bolster national manufacturing and reduce dependence on foreign supply chains. This approach is often framed as essential for national security and economic sovereignty. Localist-leaning politicians,

on the other hand, advocate for community-based economic development and greater regional autonomy in fiscal matters. They argue that local governments and businesses are better positioned to understand and respond to the specific economic needs of their communities. This might involve promoting local supply chains, supporting small businesses, and tailoring workforce development programs to regional industries.

Differences between nationalism and localism also shape environmental policy discussions. Nationalists often prioritize energy independence and may be skeptical of international climate agreements, which they sometimes perceive as infringing on national sovereignty. They might advocate for policies that exploit domestic energy resources, even if these conflict with global environmental goals. Localists, conversely, tend to support tailored environmental policies that address specific regional concerns. This could involve community-led conservation efforts, local renewable energy initiatives, or region-specific approaches to climate adaptation, emphasizing the connection between communities and their immediate natural surroundings.



Demonstrators at climate change protest (Source: EduKite).

Immigration policy is another arena where the nationalist-localist divide is evident. Nationalism focuses on stricter border control and national security, often framing immigration as a potential threat to national identity and economic stability. This approach typically calls for reduced immigration levels and more stringent vetting processes. Localist approaches to immigration, by contrast, emphasize community integration and local decision-making on immigrant settlement. Some localist-leaning politicians argue that communities should have more say in determining how many immigrants they can accommodate and how best to integrate them into local economies and social fabrics.

Interestingly, there are cases where nationalists and localists may find common ground, such as in border towns where both groups may advocate for restricting immigration due to local concerns. On the other hand, disagreements can arise in regions where localists may favor more immigration, while nationalists oppose it. The tension between nationalism and localism also drives discussions about governance. Localists emphasize decentralization and increased state or municipal authority, arguing this allows for more responsive and efficient governance tailored to local needs. Nationalists, by contrast, often advocate for a strong central government to maintain national unity and implement consistent policies across the country. They may view exces-

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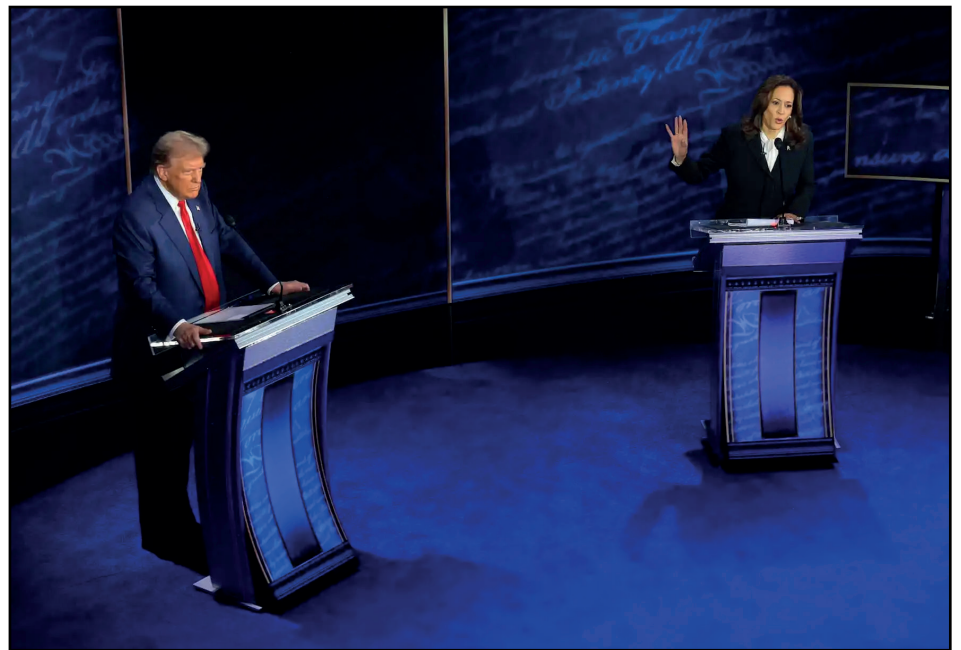
By ISHAAN AKILESWAR

sive localism as a threat to national cohesion and the ability to address large-scale challenges.

As the 2024 election approaches, the interplay between nationalist and localist ideologies is reshaping political alliances and forcing candidates to carefully balance national and local interests in their platforms. Some politicians are attempting to bridge the divide, advocating for what might be termed “cooperative federalism” – a system that maintains a strong national identity and central government while also empowering local communities to make decisions on issues that directly affect them. Voters, grappling with complex global challenges and seeking solutions that resonate with their immediate communities, are increasingly evaluating candidates through both nationalist and localist lenses. This is leading to more nuanced and sometimes contradictory voter preferences, where support for strong national policies in some areas coexists with demands for local autonomy in others. Political parties are also adapting their strategies to this evolving landscape. Some are embracing a more decentralized approach to policy-making, allowing regional party chapters greater autonomy in crafting localized platforms. Others, however, are doubling down on nationalist messaging while

attempting to frame it in ways that appeal to local concerns.

Ultimately, localism and nationalism are not necessarily opposites. Unitarism could be considered the true opposite of localism, while globalism might serve as a counterpart to nationalism. Theoretically, one could be both a nationalist and a localist, seeking to strengthen national sovereignty while also advocating for more power to local governments. As the campaign season progresses, observers should pay close attention to how politicians – namely President Donald J. Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris – attempt to balance these competing impulses and how voters respond. The 2024 election may serve as a referendum on how to balance national unity with local diversity in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.



Presidential debate, September, 2024 (Source: Brookings).

AN UPDATE ON DONALD TRUMP'S LEGAL MINEFIELD

By ADIA STOKES



(Source: Reuters).

Since publishing my last article, titled “A (Not-So-) Brief Overview of Donald Trump’s Legal Minefield” on April 30th, multiple updates have occurred across the numerous cases. Two have seen major decisions that have determined their outcomes while a landmark Supreme Court decision has rocked the country.

CANNON RULING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS

22

Judge Aileen Cannon has dropped the case concerning the classified documents stored at Mar-A-Lago, Trump’s Florida residence. Cannon’s authority over the case was highly controversial because Trump nominated her to become a federal judge. Trump nominated Cannon in his final year in office to the bench in a district that included his Florida home.

On July 15th, Cannon declared that special counsel Jack Smith’s involvement in the Classified Documents case against Former President Donald Trump was

unconstitutional. Smith was appointed to the position by the US Justice Department, which Trump’s defense team argued was unlawful. They claimed that the man who appointed Smith, US Attorney General Merrick Garland, did not have the power to do so, and thus, Smith should not have been involved in the case.

This ruling remains controversial, as many call into question both Trump’s involvement in Cannon’s position as judge and the fact that courts have func-

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tioned under the 1974 ruling in the case *United States v. Nixon*. In this case, special prosecutor Archibald Cox was appointed by the Attorney General at the time to investigate the Watergate scandal. Although Cox's validity as the special prosecutor was not called into question, the case was resolved in such a way that set a precedent for special prosecutors to be appointed by the Attorney General. Judge Cannon argued against this precedent, claiming that since Cox's validity was not challenged, *US v. Nixon* is not binding. The lower courts that this case has gone through functioned under the above precedent, leading to much scrutiny over Cannon's decision. Trump had worked to delay the trial as long as possible in the hopes of preventing a verdict before Election Day in November and has vocally praised Cannon for her ruling. Special Counsel Jack Smith has promised to appeal the decision, as has the Justice Department. However, the case will be significantly affected by the July 1 Supreme Court ruling that gives presidents near-immunity over what they deem "official" acts.

CONVICTION IN HUSH MONEY CASE

Donald Trump went to trial on April 15, 2024, in New York City. A jury of 12 members heard ar-

guments from Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg and from Trump's legal team, consisting of Todd Blanche, Susan Necheles, and Emil Bove. After a month and a half of trial and two days straight of deliberation, the jury found Trump guilty on all 34 counts of attempts to impact the 2016 election by covering up hush money payments to Stormy Daniels, an adult film actress. This is the first time in history that a sitting or former president has been convicted of a federal crime. This amounts to a Class E felony, which is the least severe felony. However, these can still lead to prison time, as will be decided by Judge Juan Merchan. The original sentencing date was set for July 11, mere days before the start of the Republican National Convention. However, due to the Supreme Court ruling detailed below, the sentencing date has now been moved to September 18th. After the verdict was announced, Trump called the trial "rigged, disgraceful" and said that "the real verdict is going to be November 5th by the people."



Trump's mugshot (Source: AP News).

SUPREME COURT IMMUNITY RULING

On July 1st, the Supreme Court ruled that US presidents can not be prosecuted for any "official acts" while in office without significant challenges. The ruling describes a "presumptive immunity" for any official act performed by an acting president, leading to an extra set of difficulties for anyone attempting to punish a president for their actions. The case came to the Supreme Court concerning Donald Trump's actions during and following his 2020 Presidential Election loss to Joe Biden. This essentially gives Trump immunity to any charges brought forth for anything he did during his term as president.

Throughout history, one of the core tenets of the US government has been checks and balances that prevent any one figure from gaining too much power. We function not as an autocracy but as a democracy, with three branches of government created to counteract corruption and ensure the continuance of that democracy. However, the Supreme Court gave the president power to be above the law, and therefore immune to prosecution. President Biden spoke out against this ruling, saying that the US "was founded on the principle that there are no kings in America...no one is above the law, not even the president of the United States." Biden also stated that although "any president...will now be free to ignore the law," he would "respect the limits of the presidential power."

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This ruling is widely seen as one of the current Supreme Court's first official showings of support for Former President Trump, as the ruling was 6-3 with all six conservative justices voting in favor and all three liberal justices voting against it. This immunity ruling "presumptively" covers all "official" acts by a president, which as the court describes, includes his attempts to overturn the 2020 election.

This will delay the federal election interference case because special counsel Jack Smith is prosecuting Trump for his actions before, during, and after the January 6th insurrection. Due to the court's vagueness and lack of clarification on the term "presumptive," Smith's path to a guilty verdict is uncertain. Additionally, the court did not define what is considered "official" versus "unofficial." Both of these words are subjective and can be construed in many different ways by many different people. Smith could choose to try and prove that Trump's actions were not "official," opening up the doors to prosecute him as an everyday citizen. However, this would require proving that every piece of evidence he uses was an unofficial act, limiting what evidence he could use. This case is not necessarily shut down but will face intense challenges.

The immunity ruling will also impact the hush money case. Trump was found guilty on all 34 counts of falsifying business documents in an unexpected turn of the case. The verdict out of New York came on May 30, 2024, with the sentencing scheduled for July 11. However, that was derailed by the Supreme Court's ruling. The events of this case occurred well before the 2016 election when Trump took office. Still, pieces of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's prosecution evidence were from his four years as president. The defense team will have the opportunity to argue that this evidence cannot be used by Bragg if it was part of an official act by Trump. The sentencing is now scheduled for September 18, 2024, unless the defense team can convince Judge Juan Merchen to throw out the above evidence.

The Georgia election interference case has seen significant delays and setbacks throughout its existence. The Supreme Court ruling has pushed a trial back even further than it originally was. However, the case will gain additional significance as the election looms closer. As Georgia State University Law Professor Michael Kreis puts it, "The ultimate question is whether his actions in Georgia were actions in furtherance of an official duty, or whether Trump was acting as Donald Trump, candidate for president." This essentially means that Judge McAfee will have to determine whether Trump was attempting to overturn the 2020 election as

President Trump or as the Republican nominee for President. Regardless, the trial for this case has been delayed numerous times and likely will not go to trial before the November 5th election.

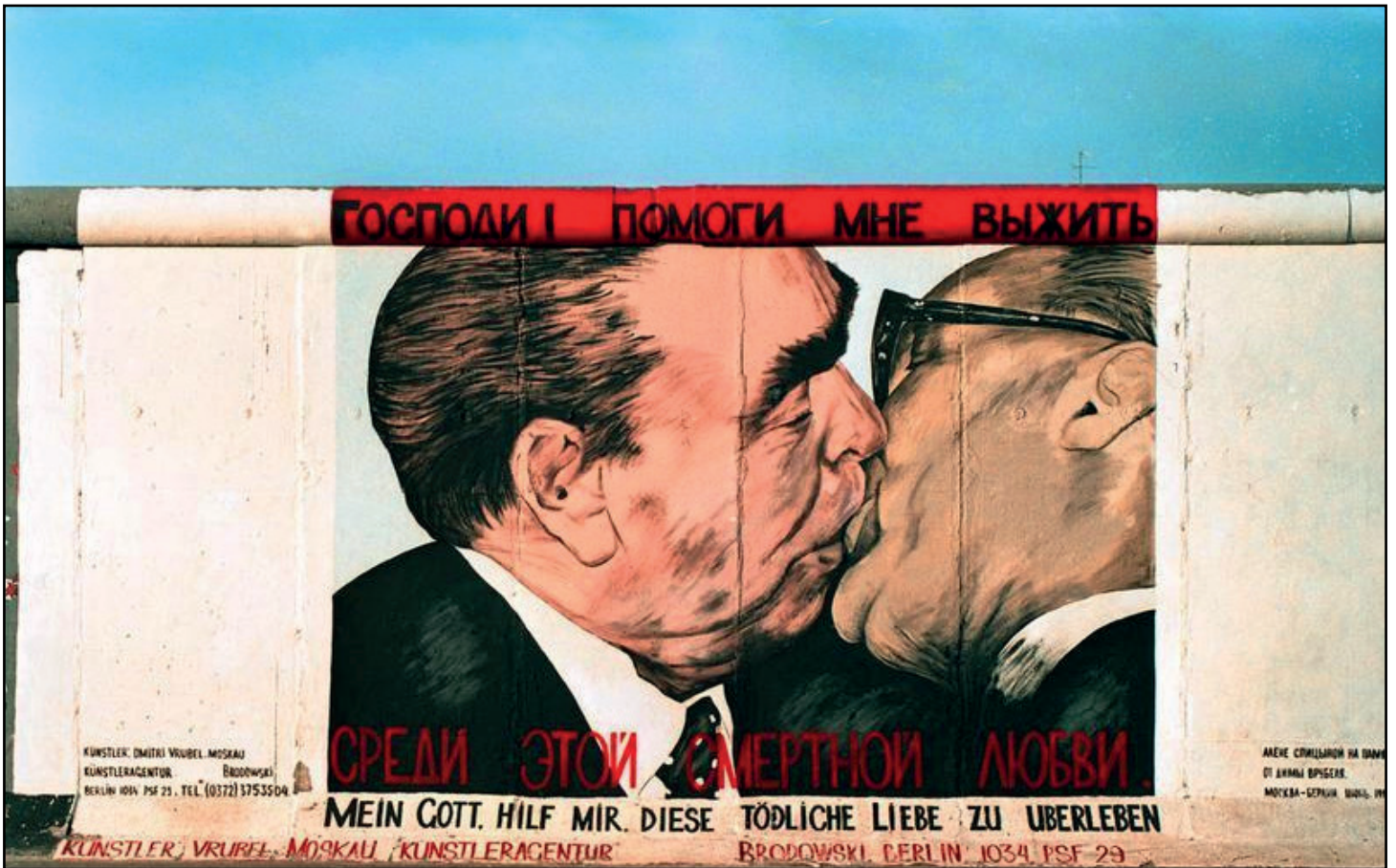


Current Supreme Court Justices
(Source: Supreme Court Historical Society).

Many of Trump's legal troubles stem from his actions directly leading up to and directly following a presidential election. The hush money case focuses on his actions around the 2016 election while the Georgia election interference, classified documents, and federal election interference cases revolve around the 2020 election. As November 5th creeps up on us, we must remain watchful and do what we can to ensure a safe and honest Election Day, leading to an appropriate transfer of power to whoever may win. With neither major-party nominee currently serving as President, there will be a new Commander-in-Chief come January so the chaos of four years ago cannot be allowed to repeat itself. There is a pattern of behavior from Former President Trump, one that tells voters to be wary of his actions throughout the coming months.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL GRAFFITI

By ELA GARLIN



My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love (Source: Wikipedia).

People have always sought to leave their mark on the world. From hand tracings in ancient caves to “___ was here” etched beneath classroom desks, the motivation has consistently been to make an impression on one’s physical environment. While graffiti and its motivations are timeless, the term itself was first formally recognized in the 1800s when used to describe ancient inscriptions on the walls of Pompeii’s ruins, dating back to 78 B.C. One historian noted that graffiti was cheeky declarations of existence in which the monumentality of the past was slyly undone. If only for a moment.

These early scribbles included declarations of love, memorials, advertisements for gladiatorial games and political statements. The roots of traditional, text-based graffiti can be traced to the protest stencils utilized by Latin American student groups in the 1960s and Italian fascist propaganda during World War II. Though often creative, text-based graffiti is a form that aims to center its message rather than its artistic qualities. In the United States, political graffiti of the same era focused on the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War.



Writing on a wall in Brooklyn, New York, 1970: “We the Blacks must rise” (Stephen Shames, 2017).

Today, our perception of graffiti often involves spray paint. Edward Seymour invented the first aerosol spray paint in 1949 for industrial purposes, and it quickly became the preferred medium

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for graffiti artists due to its quick application and drying time. Pioneers like Darryl “Cornbread” McCray began tagging walls, where an artist writes their signature in the form of a name or symbol. Artists and their street names gained popularity in the



Cornbread, otherwise known as “the first writer” standing in front of his tag circa 1968 (Source: Rock the Bells).

Cornbread, otherwise known as “the first writer” standing in front of his tag circa 1968

In New York, simple and early graffiti tags featured the writer’s name followed by their house number, with “Tracy168,” based in the Bronx, being one of the most well-known.



Two Tracy 168 murals on 231st Street in the Bronx, New York (Source: Norwood News).

By the 1970s, graffiti had exploded in popularity, covering the subways of New York and the walls of most major cities. Negative reactions from the upper class led New York City to spend \$10 million in 1973 to erase graffiti, but the art form prevailed. Hip-hop graffiti emerged as the visual component of hip-hop culture in the late 1970s, spreading from the East Coast of the United States to Europe. Inspired by New York graffiti, French street artist Blek le Rat began spraying stencil images in Paris in the early 1980s, popularizing stencil street art in Europe. New York graffiti became a popular movement, a people’s movement, a declaration of art outside of traditional studios, galleries and museums. If public schools were cutting budgets for art instruction, graffiti artists were proclaiming that people had the power to take to the streets and make their own art.

Graffiti became a tool for resisting oppressive regimes in various South American countries like Chile and Argentina. Messages denouncing dictatorships and advocating for human rights were common for the “Desaparecidos” and their “mothers of the plaza.” The counterculture movement continued this trend with anti-establishment sentiments and themes of rebellion.

The Berlin Wall in the 1980s became a powerful symbol of graffiti used for expression, rebellion and highlighting social contrast. The West Berlin side displayed vibrant artistic images and state-

ments, while the East lay gray and untouched. The graffiti on the Wall held profound cultural and political significance, symbolizing resistance against division, and capturing the social and political climate of the Cold War. Graffiti on the western side was an expression of a liberal vision; on the eastern side, it was a



West Berliners spray paint messages on the Berlin Wall near Zimmerstrasse, 1988 (FORTEPAN/Tamás Urbán, 1988).

In 1980s America, galleries began showcasing work from artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Lee Quinones, who were among the first graffiti artists to be taken seriously by the traditional art scene. Basquiat’s work in particular achieved significant recognition, with an untitled piece from 1982 becoming the most expensive work by any U.S. artist and the first \$100 million artwork created after 1980.



“Untitled,” Basquiat’s 1982 painting, sold for \$110.5 million at an auction in May 2017. (Source: The New York Times).

THE FIELDSTON POLITICAL JOURNAL

SUMMER EDITION 2024

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL GRAFFITI

By ELA GARLIN

Basquiat's work generally included graffiti which seamlessly flowed among his abstract figures and symbols. His art was expressive, free and out of the ordinary. Today, his logos and iconography, particularly the crown which appeared in much of his art, can be seen all across the world.

In the late 1990s, the name "Banksy" began appearing alongside stenciled images throughout London and Bristol. Banksy's provocative and political street art criticized capitalism, consumerism and war. His international stunts and culture jamming—subverting advertisements, material goods, or even currency—gained him global attention and commercial success. In 2003, Banksy was at the center of global attention when he painted an image on the West Bank Wall that criticized Israel's policies towards Palestine. He would continue his visits in the following years, with his most recent known work in Palestine made in February 2017. During that time, he opened "The Walled Off Hotel" in Bethlehem, a hotel that is directly adjacent to the separation wall. The hotel is filled with Banksy's artwork, offering a satirical commentary on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Two men sitting beneath a piece by Banksy, painted on the wall of a West Bank gas station on December 16, 2015 (AFP, 2015. Source: The National News).

Banksy's street art and global stunts have propelled him to prominence at prestigious auctions. In 2007, one of his pieces sold for a record £102,000. Banksy's significant influence and commercial success have wide-ranging implications for urban art in modern cities. Some believe that while graffiti is traditionally controversial, it has evolved into a platform for international youth to express socio-political discontent, leading to greater tolerance of illegal urban art by public officials. Cultural geographer L. Dickens refers to modern street art as "post-graffiti," due to his perception of the shift from traditional tagging to "street logos." Taggers sometimes see Banksy as a gentrifier, partly because terms like "street art," "post-graffiti" and "logos" carry positive, artistic connotations, whereas "graffiti" is associated with poverty, crime, uncleanliness and disorder. Graffiti is also historically provocative due to its association with lower socioeconomic groups and Black and Brown youth; it's been targeted by New York mayors since John Lindsay. Many traditional graffiti artists

began their work to challenge mainstream sensibilities, making Banksy's media fame and the mainstream elevation of his art controversial.

The 2010s' political graffiti continued the themes of anti-war and anti-capitalism, with movements like Occupy Wall Street. The movement's rallying cry, "We Are the 99%," succinctly captured the anger and disillusionment of a generation facing growing economic disparity and the unchecked power of the financial elite. These demonstrations were not just about physical presence; they were educational and revolutionary in nature. Activists organized "teach-ins," where people gathered to discuss issues of inequality, capitalism, and the possibilities of systemic change. These teach-ins were designed to educate participants and inspire a broader revolution in thought and action. Graffiti served as the visual track to these moments of teaching, reinforcing the messages being shared in these gatherings and ensuring that the ideas would resonate far beyond any specific moment or group of activists.

The graffiti of this era was more than mere decoration; it was a vital tool in the dissemination of revolutionary ideas. It provided a visible, accessible way for people to engage with the movement, whether they were passing by on their way to work or actively participating in the protests. The walls of buildings, sidewalks, and

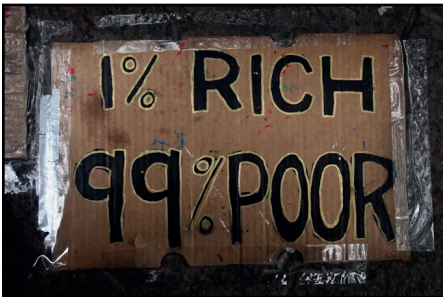
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other public spaces became living textbooks, with slogans and images that challenged the status quo and urged people to question the systems of power around them.



Occupy Wall Street: "1% Rich 99% Poor"
(Source: Al Jazeera, 2011).

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, cities across the globe became epicenters of protest, fueling a renewed surge in the Black Lives Matter movement. The outrage and grief felt by millions were channeled into powerful street art, which became a unifying force within communities and a means of reclaiming narratives that had long been dominated by systemic racism and violence. Murals honoring victims of police brutality and racial injustice emerged as focal points in cities worldwide, serving both as memorials and calls to action.

These vibrant displays of protest art were not just local expressions; they quickly transcended geographical boundaries. Social media played a crucial role in amplifying these works, transform-

ing what was once a localized form of expression into a global phenomenon. Graffiti and street art, which had long been associated with specific urban environments and subcultures, suddenly became ubiquitous. The images of murals and graffiti honoring George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others were shared and replicated in cities from Minneapolis to London, Tokyo to Cape Town.



A mural of George Floyd in Manchester, England (Source: Manchester Evening News).

Today, political graffiti continues to reflect pressing social and political issues. Public reaction, particularly from the white upper class, often views graffiti as vandalism due to its association with illegal activity. However, many artists, like 23-year-old Gunk, see it differently. In an interview with "The Temple News," he states: "I don't look at it as me doing something illegal—I think of it as me being in a competition with my surroundings. I'm not a criminal by any means. I'm not a violent person. I just enjoy making art. You can take your own power in it, I don't have to ask anybody to do this, I just go and do it."

Graffiti, unbound by external control, delivers a raw, uncensored

message that sets it apart from other forms of street art. While it often involves marking property without permission, graffiti uses disruption and inconvenience to force those in power to pay attention. Political graffiti remains a powerful medium for grassroots expression and activism, evolving over the decades to address the most urgent social and political issues of our time.

JANE FONDA: AUTHOR, ACTRESS, ACTIVIST

BY IRIS SULLIVAN



(Source: L'Officiel).

Jane Fonda, 86-year-old actress, author, and model turned activist, has won two Academy Awards and has made appearances in movies such as *Nine to Five*, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, *Coming Home*, *Klute*, and *On Golden Pond*. Not only is she a spectacular actress, but her work to promote left-wing causes and politicians has undeniably influenced thousands across the globe. At the same time, a Fieldston teacher observed, "Fonda found a way to merge causes with commercialism

and often was in the vanguard of entrepreneurial activity. The assumptions about beauty that underlay her modeling and acting careers were transformed into fitness, self empowerment and self-care that was embedded in her work out tapes for two generations of women. That recognition of her, as a person, and her product gave her a kind of credibility and access for future causes."



(Source: Climate One).

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Though she has been an icon for generations past, with Gen Z she has gone relatively unrecognized despite her efforts to promote feminism, inspire solutions to the climate crisis, and end eating disorder culture. In other words, fighting many issues that we, as teenagers, are exposed to daily.

In a 2023 podcast by Alex Cooper titled “Jane Fonda: The GOAT,” Fonda goes in-depth on her life, addressing her successes, struggles, and low points. As a woman of many talents, we must observe Jane Fonda as a model, actress, author, *and* essential activist.

Fonda, the daughter of Hollywood royalty actor Henry Fonda, was born and raised in New York, and was interested in the arts from a young age. Having a problematic home life, with her father being distant and her mother struggling with severe mental health issues, she often resorted to the natural world for peace of mind. When Fonda was only 12 years old, her mother tragically committed suicide while being treated in a psychiatric center. After dropping out of college the semester before her junior year, she returned home to New York and channeled all of her energy into an acting career. She landed roles in movies, TV shows, and Broadway plays. It was during these years that Fonda began to develop bulim-

ia and anorexia, two incredibly harmful eating disorders.

In “Jane Fonda: The GOAT,” Fonda discusses this further, stating, “I never felt like the girl next door, but I know that I kind of looked like the girl next door.”

As she expands on the point, she touches on expectations for women, which she would protest in her later life. “I’ve worked most of my life to overcome the judgemental, the objectification and judgmentalism, and unconsciously making me feel that I’m not lovable, you know, if I’m not really thin. Things like that.”

As she grappled with her eating disorder, work life, and personal issues, she never considered herself someone who could ever become an activist.

Fonda was radicalized by her times. Fonda, and other actors like Donald Sutherland, formed an anti-war theatrical troupe that performed at American military bases in South Viet Nam. The documentary “FTA” captures that irreverent show. In July of 1972, Fonda traveled to Hanoi, in communist North Vietnam, and had an opportunity to speak to soldiers and civilians

“I was not an activist at all until I met soldiers who’d been fighting in Vietnam who opened my eyes to what the Vietnam War really was. And I was just; I was, I was horrified. I couldn’t believe it.”

who were fighting against the Americans in the Vietnam War.

She reflected on her initial thoughts with embarrassment and shame. “I really grew up believing, boy, if our flag is flying, if our troops are fighting, we’re on the side of the angels. And so when I heard from soldiers what was really happening, I felt so betrayed, and everything in my life changed.”

During her visit, a picture of Fonda sitting in an anti-aircraft gun began circulating, and the public gave her the nickname “Hanoi Jane.” When asked if she was frightened of controversy, or what we would now call “cancel culture,” Fonda responded:

“I didn’t even think about that. It was my heart that was opened up, and everything I believed was shattered, so I had to look for new realities. I wasn’t even thinking about this controversy. It could affect my career; all I knew was this is really wrong; there are a lot of people in my country who are standing up and trying to do something about it. I want to be with them.”

As she grew up and matured, so did her understanding of what it meant to be an activist. Setting her apart from others at the time, rather than just donating money to various charities and organizations, she lent a physical hand. However, as she involved herself

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in more hands-on work, she realized that her celebrity prowess set her apart from those around her.

In a protest to restore indigenous lands, these biases became evident when everyone

“There was a young woman who had her young child in her arms. And she says, well, you have a young daughter; where’s your daughter? My daughter was at home with a governess; it made me more and more uncomfortable. My celebrity and privilege separated me from those I wanted to work with.”

Rather than using her uncomfortable position as an excuse to step down from the work she wanted to do, unlike others at the time, she used her celebrity influence to educate others, as she understood that she had a platform that people would listen to.

As Fonda severed her ties to the acting world, she directed her energy towards political movements.

Her first strategic move was to release a workout program to promote her then husband, Tom Hayden, politically. Hayden was a founding member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). She needed a business model to increase her popularity as she transitioned into activism and helped raise money for her Hayden’s

political campaign for the Senate. After her program gained massive worldwide success, she used this new platform she had built for both her and Hayden, and they debuted a documentary following the events of the Vietnam War titled *Introduction To The Enemy*.



Fonda participates in a demonstration in Rome in 1972 (Source: NPR).

Though not a massive success, it continued to give Fonda an entryway into the political world she strove to be a part of and it was a signature move in the early stages of her anti-nuclear activism. “No Nukes” defined both anti-nuclear weapons as well as opposition to nuclear power plants. Some of this was captured in her film, “*The China Syndrome*,” which depicted a power plant nuclear accident. The film was prescient. Days after its release a nuclear accident took place at the Three Mile Island plant in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Fonda seemed to be America’s Cassandra predicting doom.

While she continued anti-war campaigns, she also became massively interested in the climate crisis and has been advocating for green policies for decades. Today, she openly criticizes people and legislation that actively denies the changing of our planet while also encouraging every-

one to vote for people and policies that aid in the climate crisis.

“I mean, it’s good to do individual things because it makes you feel good and makes you feel like you’re not a hypocrite, but we have to change systems. We have to change who we elect to the government. We have people in the government that are Democrats and Republicans, who take money from the fossil fuel industry and vote against bills that can save your lives in the future. So we have to get rid of those people most, and they’re not all guys, but they’re mostly guys, and they’re mostly white. So we have to pay attention to who we vote for. We have to vote but become familiar with our climate crisis. And join with the others.”

In 2019, Jane Fonda protested on the steps of the US Capitol Building in something called “Fire Drill Fridays” and became recognized as a woman who wanted to step up and tackle the climate crisis head-on.

Post-COVID, in 2022, she began the Jane Fonda Climate PAC, which targeted acknowledging and taking down companies with heavy ties in the fossil fuel industry. In her latest book, *What Can I Do? My Path From Climate De-*

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spair To Action, she also protests the changing environment and discusses her motivations for becoming a climate activist in-depth.

One of the biggest constants throughout her life has been her heavy belief in feminist causes. Reflecting on her journey, she began to realize that throughout her three marriages, she had been doing everything to please her partner, even if that meant putting her own well-being in the way.

Coming to terms with her personal definition of independence, she began to advocate for other women globally. In 2005, she co-founded the Women's Media Center (MDC), a non-profit organization that strives to raise visibility for the many women and girls in media. By telling their stories, they hope to bring together women throughout the world and give them a platform to share their voices.



(Source: The Hollywood Reporter).

“I think we can’t do it by ourselves as individuals. I think getting together with other young people or, you know, whoever is listening, whatever age you are, and it may not be with other females, to talk about it. And when you recognize this shared challenge that you’re all facing, it helps to say well fuck this.”

As she approaches her 90s, she remains a phenomenal role model and plans to stay active in the political world well into her later life.

Her journey is unique, and she now lives in California, where she is fully independent and thriving. “When I moved in, like a lot of California houses, there was a man’s bathroom and a women’s bathroom. I said no, no, no, no, no. There will never be a man living in this house ever, so they took both bathrooms for me.”

An author, model, actress, fitness guru, and activist, Jane Fonda is one of the most iconic women of our generation and should serve as a role model for everyone. Though her name is occasionally swept under the rug in the current activism world due to her past of modeling and acting, her character is one we, our generation especially, should certainly focus on in upcoming years.

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