The
Fieldst🌐n Political Journal

Volume 4
Autumn Edition

The Think Globally, Act Locally Issue
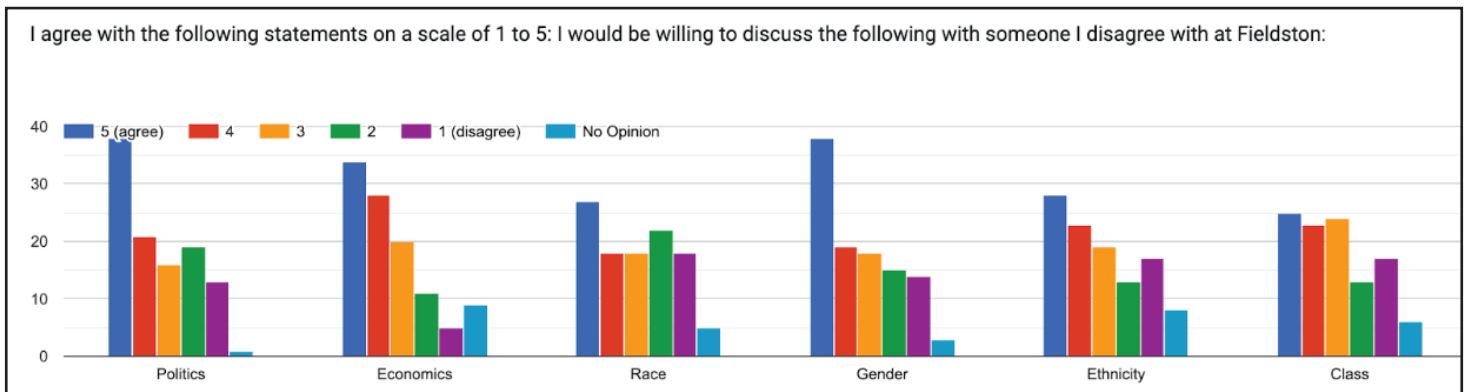
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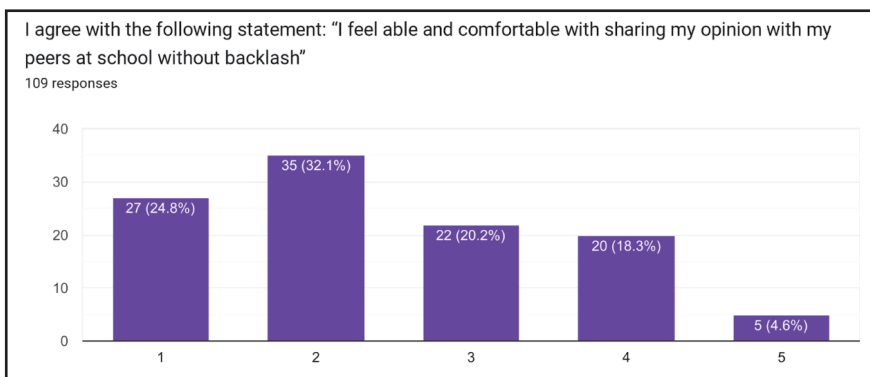# A STUDY OF DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT AT FIELDSTON

By Adia Stokes

When I sent a survey out to the student body asking about people's experiences with the "diversity of thought" at Fieldston, I expected to hear back from maybe twenty people. I was thrilled when I received more than one hundred responses within twenty-four hours. In an Upper School body of more than 600, the FPJ received 109 responses.

There were two original goals of the survey. The first was to find out if students were willing to engage in potentially tense conversations. To do so, we asked students to rank their willingness to discuss race, class, gender, ethnicity, economics, and politics, on a scale of one to five. A "No opinion" option was included.

The second goal was to gauge whether students experienced a diversity of thought at our school and what the cause of that satisfaction or dissatisfaction is. We thought that this is a very broad question and might be hard to measure. To cope with this, we asked students to rate their agreement with two statements on a scale of one to five. The first statement was "I feel able and comfortable with sharing my opinion with my peers at school with backlash." The second statement was "Fieldston is an intolerant/closed-minded institution." Lastly, we asked students to rate on a scale of one to five how they feel: one was labeled "I feel silenced" and five was labeled "I feel heard/free to speak." The first two questions may seem very similar, but I wanted to discover whether students' opinions come from the actions of the school or if they are more socially dependent.

The first prompt of the survey asked students to rank their agreement with the statement, "I would be willing to discuss the following with someone I disagree with at Fieldston." The numerical average in response to each topic (politics, economics, race, gender, ethnicity, class), respectively, was 3.49, 3.77, 3.14, 3.50, 3.32, 3.23.

Out of 109 responses, 61 students disagreed with the statement, "I feel able and comfortable with sharing my opinion with my peers at school without backlash." 22 students are in the middle while 25 students agree. The first and second modes of the students' responses are 2 and 1, respectively, which are the two closest to the
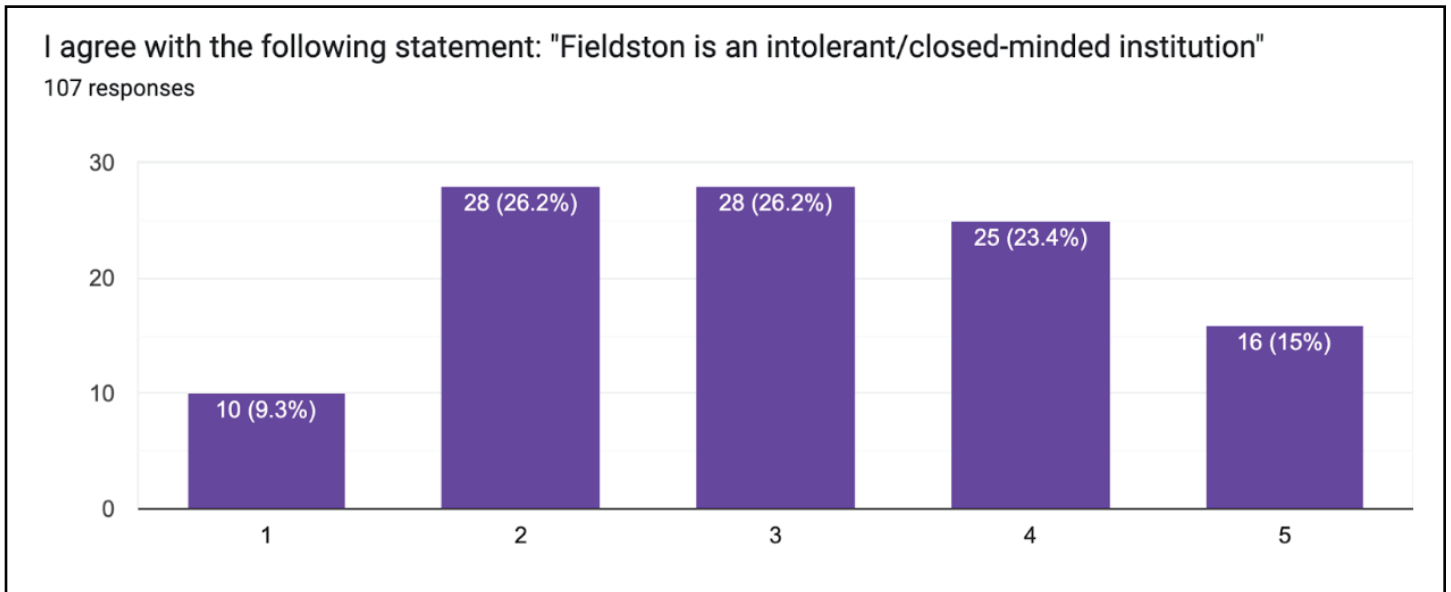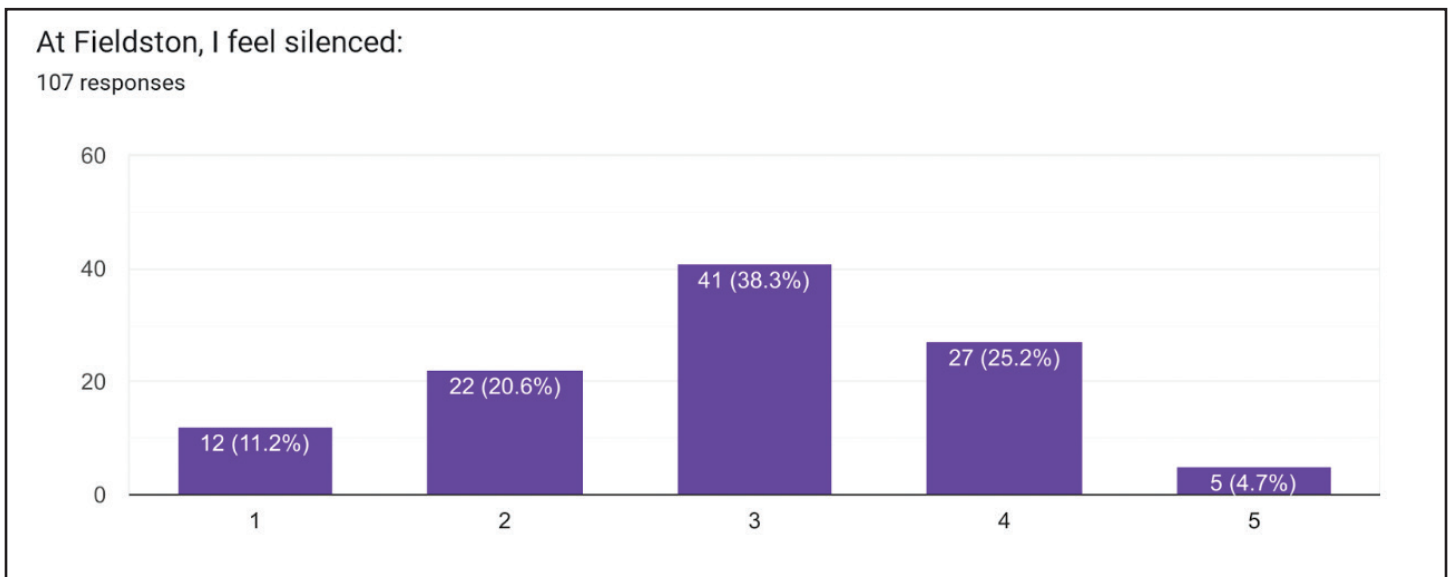
A STUDY OF DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT AT FIELDSTON
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"I disagree" statement. The average response is 2.46, 0.54 lower than the range's middle, 3.00 while the median point is 2.00. Of the two extremes (1 and 5), 27 people chose 1 while 5 people chose 5.

One hundred and seven students elected to report their agreement with the statement, "Fieldston is an intolerant/closed-minded institution." 1 was labeled "I disagree" and 5 was labeled "I agree." Of the 107 responses, the average is 3.08, which is 0.08 greater than the middle of the range, 3.00. (The middle of the range is 3 because instead of 0-5, the range is 1-5.) The median is 3.00 while the mode is 2 and 3. The majority of responses (75.8%) are between 2 and 4.

The last prompt of the survey was "At Fieldston⋯" with a scale of 1 to 5. One was labeled "I feel silenced" while 5 was labeled "I feel heard/free to speak." This question measures emotions over actual quantifiable ratings. Of 109 total survey responses, 107 people elected to respond to this question. The mean was 2.92, which is

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0.08 lower than the middle of the range, 3.00. 41 students chose not to lean towards either side, while 34 leaned closer to the "I feel silenced" side. A similar number, 32, chose either 4 or 5, which are "I feel heard." The mode was 3.00 and the median was also 3.00.

Finally, the survey offered students a chance to type out a response. We wanted to collect "anecdotal" observations that would travel along with the raw data. This included a disclaimer that it is "completely anonymous and may be quoted in my article." 44 students typed out replies. The theme of these statements is an overarching displeasure with the diversity (or lack thereof) of thought. This displeasure stems from a multitude of origins: the school itself, other students, teachers, and more.

Multiple statements described the environment at Fieldston as an echo chamber. A common refrain was, "I feel as though Fieldston has been an echo chamber for since-minded liberal ideology, and has resulted in students and teachers being incredibly unwelcoming to thoughts or even inquiries about centrist or right-winged ideas."Another repeated claim was, "Fieldston is a total echo chamber. Although I feel comfortable discussing opinions with certain peers, I often feel that most will judge me for opinions that are not totally mainstream."

Many of these statements gave nuanced views: students said there are personal variables that influence how they engage in discussion with their peers.

Multiple students said that it depends on the topic. As one put it, "When the issue is especially emotionally charged, that's when 'diversity of thought' really suffers." another mentioned that "At Fieldston, we can say anything about politics without being silenced. Unless it is about Israel, in which case I would be ostracized by my friends if I said anything."

Others mentioned who they are speaking to as the main variable: "It's hard to answer these because my relationship to any person really affects my comfort level···I tend to only talk to people that I think of as nice, or, at least, unlikely to tell everyone about our conversations." Another respondee wrote, "It is difficult to characterize the institution of Fieldston as a whole - I think the barriers we encounter in discourse and cross-communication stem from ill-nurtured interpersonal skills and a lack of understanding of our peers' lived experiences."

A couple of students expressed appreciation for the diversity of thought they experienced at Fieldston and the conversations they have had. One wrote, "I feel that there is a good diversity throughout race at Fieldston and I also feel that it creates a better and healthier community." Another responded, " I feel [diversity of thought] is a given at this school with so many different types of people and is something that I find interesting to be able to talk about with people of different views than my own."

An overwhelming majority of these responses, however, made their dissatisfaction with the level of political diversity clear. For some, this frustration stems from social closed-mindedness and gossiping.

One student wrote, "There are still social constructs that exist with this institution where you could be penalized by your fellow peers···there is such a clear division between the minority and majority at Fieldston···people bring harsh emotions into things which cause blowback and more of a distance between minority and majority groups." Another student responded, "A lot of both students and teachers are rather close-minded when it comes to politics and current world issues."

Another responded that "It's supposed to be a comfortable environment, but when you actually try to speak your mind, you're shut down." There are a plethora of similar responses, ranging from critical to scathing.

Other students shared personal anecdotes and experiences. "I never really felt free to speak about my feelings or opinions at Fieldston." One student wrote that they "once shared their opinion on a view, on a political issue

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that others were also sharing their support about but because mine was opposite I was immediately talked bad about and it was the topic of the day." A teacher responded, "I am afraid to talk freely about all of the topics you mention with students and peers, unless I have developed excellent rapport with them. I mostly feel silenced."

While some focused on the social implications of sharing an opinion, others opened up on frustrations with the organization and structure of how they feel the school has handled hard conversations. One response reads "There is a lot of diversity of thoughts here but the school won't let us talk about them. This was especially shown last year. When someone shares an idea that is just a bit too radical the school shuts it down." Another student wrote, "The gap between what we say we stand for and what we actually do is so large, I don't even recognize the school anymore." Another said, "I feel like Fieldston only endorses the progressive school of thought, which I agree with, but I also think that more conservative people might not feel welcome here." One student wrote that "Fieldston preaches ideas such as free speech and diverse opinions, but shuts them down the moment they are spoken of…The hypocrisy and feeding to the majority

opinions is all Fieldston really does."

Other students disagreed with this statement. In a statement that remained critical of the school's actions, one student acknowledged that, "I personally believe that…Fieldston offers a wide range of perspectives and history in its academics."

A few statements mentioned frustration with specific departments or teachers. "I think it's absurd how often grading…is based on how well you regurgitate the teacher's politics." "The fact that even teachers who are meant to guide kids through their thoughts and let them grow into their own person with their own ideologies can sometimes be seen pushing their own ideologies and agenda in their grading and assignments is disappointing."

One student responded, "I thought we were not allowed to speak politics and stuff like that."

A handful of responses gave messages of hope. One student's statement reads "I think many students can get very offended when someone disagrees with them. However, I have also had experiences where people accept opinions, and believe most Fieldston students in their heart believe in diversity of opinion." Another student pointed to the opportunity that the recent presidential election gives the school: "Since the election, I think Fieldston can find a way to demonstrate both the red and blue perspectives, WHILE incorporating

a blur or connection between the two parties that will hopefully not determine politics in Fieldston as just black and white. Left and right."

A GUIDE TO TRUMPIAN ECOMONY

By Jackson Wang

To many, a Trumpian economy promises chaos and calamity; to others, it promises utopia. Having decisively secured the title of America's 47th president, Donald Trump vows sweeping economic changes, many of which will build off of his first term. From tax cuts to universal tariffs, Trump's policies highlight a growing "America First" fiscal ideology. While the economic outcomes of these policies remain uncertain, certain impacts are more predictable. Tariffs are likely to heighten trade tensions, while tax cuts are expected to add trillions to an already ballooning federal deficit.

Nevertheless, Americans want change. Voter frustration with inflation, which reached a record high of 9.1% under the Biden administration, and an economy struggling under high interest rates significantly contributed to Trump's return to the White House. It is now up to him to live up to those expectations.

Donald Trump speaks about the tax code and manufacturing at a rally in Savannah, GA, Sep. 24, 2024 (Photo: Evan Vucci via AP)

TAXES

Lowering taxes is central to Trump's economic agenda. His campaign supports extending many of the expiring provisions under the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), which were signed into law during Trump's first term and are due to expire in 2025. The TCJA was a major overhaul of the U.S. tax code that reduced taxes paid by individuals and businesses alike. Among other things, Trump plans to make permanent the individual tax provisions under the TCJA, which involve reduced income taxes and a greater standard deduction — a fixed amount taxpayers can subtract from their income before taxation.

Trump's administration has promised to cut the corporate income tax rate from 21% to 20%. More substantially, he plans to cut the corporate income tax rate for domestic manufacturers from 21% to 15%.

Also key to his tax plans, Trump will exempt tips, overtime pay, and Social Security income from taxation. While not official, Trump has called for expanding the child tax credit, ending American taxation abroad, and instituting a tax credit for family caregivers.

Tax cuts as a philosophy are central to classical fiscal conservatism and economic stimulation.

Republicans argue that corporate tax cuts spur technological advancements, job creation, and wage growth, while lower individual taxes give families more freedom to spend, save or invest. Overall, reduced taxes make the U.S. more business-friendly and shift spending power to the people.

The truth behind these notions has always been heavily debated. A 2017 study from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) finds that tax cuts provide a one-time boost to consumption, GDP and investment, but are never enough to prevent a loss of government revenue. Tax cuts would have to be funded through public debt, spending cuts or raised taxes elsewhere.

The study also found a tradeoff between growth and income inequality. Tax cuts for higher-income groups boost GDP growth through higher labor supply and investment but worsen income inequality. Conversely, cuts for lower-income groups reduce inequality but offer smaller growth benefits. Tax cuts, even for higher earners, can indirectly benefit lower-income groups by increasing demand for services they provide and raising wages for lower-skilled labor.

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Contrary to popular belief, Donald Trump is not solely focused on cutting taxes for the wealthy. During his first term, the Tax Policy Center reported that over 80% of the population benefited from his tax cuts. Moreover, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act reduced the top tax rate for the wealthiest Americans only slightly, from 39.6% to 37%.

Donald Trump displays the first tax cut package he signed on Dec. 22, 2017, in the White House (Photo: Evan Vucci via AP)

According to the Congressional Budget Office, Trump's tax cuts would add roughly $9 trillion to the federal deficit. This calculation factors in the extension of the TCJA tax cuts, the reduction of the corporate income tax, and the elimination of taxes on tips, Social Security benefits and overtime pay.

Nine trillion is certainly a frightening figure. The U.S. federal deficit has reached extraordinary levels and continues to grow, posing serious economic risks.

Higher interest rates, reduced investment, depressed wages and inflation are just some of the potential consequences. Trump's proposed tax cuts make it clear that slowing deficit growth is not a top priority in his economic agenda.

But the situation is not as bad as it seems. The $9 trillion figure doesn't account for revenue gains from GDP and consumption growth. As the IMF notes, tax cuts can spur short-term economic growth, partially offsetting their cost. While this is likely true, it would not come close to offsetting the cost of tax cuts.

Additionally, exempting certain income categories from taxation would likely reduce government revenue less than anticipated, especially in the case of tips. Since only 2.5% of the workforce earns tips and over a third of these workers already don't pay federal income taxes due to low earnings, eliminating taxes on tips would have a minimal effect on revenue. The most significant factor mitigating the deficit impact is Trump's focus on spending cuts. He has tasked the newly formed "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE), led by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, with reducing wasteful spending, slashing regulations and restructuring federal agencies.

Additionally, Trump plans to end student loan forgiveness programs and repeal green energy tax credits from the Inflation Reduction Act, though it remains unclear how much these measures can reduce spending.

Trump's proposed tax cuts are less crippling than headline figures suggest. However, even with spending reductions and possible revenue gains from tax cut-driven growth, they will likely add significantly to the federal deficit. While tax cuts offer a variety of fiscal advantages, the current high deficit makes them less viable in today's economic context.

TARIFFS

Sweeping tariffs are another central pillar of Trumponomics. Under his agenda, Trump has called for a universal baseline tariff of 10-20% on all U.S. imports, and at least a 60% tariff on all imported goods from China.

Tariffs are taxes levied by a government on imported goods, requiring importers to pay fees to bring products into the country. Trump plans to use tariffs to help offset the cost of tax cuts. However, the Tax Foundation estimates these tariffs will generate only $3.8 trillion over the next decade — far short of the $9 trillion needed.

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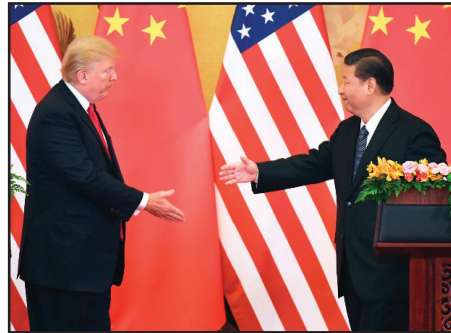
Moreover, these estimates don't account for foreign retaliation. It is highly plausible that affected countries impose counter-tariffs on U.S. exports. Such measures can reduce export demand and trigger other downstream economic effects that further diminish government revenue.

Escalating tariffs could lead to a trade war, as seen during Trump's first term with China, with significant consequences for both economies. Tariffs raise import costs, which are often passed on to consumers, risking a resurgence of inflation — an especially critical concern given Trump's plan to impose tariffs on all imports. On the other hand, retaliatory tariffs can erode the competitiveness of U.S. export industries, making their goods less affordable abroad. Trade wars can also cause supply chain disruptions and disproportionately harm lower- and middle-class demographics.

In addition to raising revenue, Trump aims to use tariffs to protect and grow domestic industries.

Under the pillars of Trump's protectionist ideology, the greater cost of tariffed foreign products will theoretically incentivize consumers to purchase domestic goods, boosting domestic manufacturing and job growth. However, increased production costs of imported materials, reduced competitiveness of counter-tariffed U.S. exports and reduced consumer demand are all likely challenges domestic industries may face under Trump's tariff plan.

Donald Trump and Xi Jinping at a joint press conference in Beijing, 2017(Photo: Kyodo News/AP)

Trump's proposed 60% tariff on all Chinese imports aims to address two key issues. First, Chinese goods are artificially underpriced due to overproduction in its slowing economy and government subsidies, which allow it to flood foreign markets with cheap exports. Second, the tariffs retaliate against China's unfair trade practices, including forced labor, intellectual property theft and illicit trade.

Although the Biden administration imposed tariffs on Chinese goods, Trump's proposed universal tariffs represent a far more aggressive approach and will likely provoke retaliation from China, further straining an already tense relationship.

Overall, Trump's tariffs are unlikely to significantly boost government revenue or effectively support domestic industries. Instead, they are likely to provoke retaliation, drive up prices, and damage American exports.

DEREGULATION
&
THE FED

In line with traditional GOP values, Donald Trump plans to significantly deregulate various industries. His business-friendly policies are expected to stimulate activity in the mergers and acquisitions space, which has been relatively quiet under the Biden administration's crackdown on corporate consolidations.

Mining and fossil fuel companies anticipate looser regulations on emissions caps and green energy mandates. Additionally, after previously criticizing cryptocurrencies, Trump has promised to deregulate the digital asset industry, positioning the U.S. as a leader in this space.

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However, reduced regulations could exacerbate already rampant illegal activities like money laundering.

During his first term, courts blocked nearly 80% of Trump's proposed deregulation measures. If his current policies are enacted, he may still face challenges with signing them into law, despite a Republican-dominated federal government.

Despite being a champion of small government, Trump plans to intervene with the Federal Reserve — the United States' central banking system in charge of setting interest rates, managing the money supply and regulating financial markets. Trump has argued that the president should influence the central bank's decisions despite the Fed's independent status since 1951. For instance, he has pledged to lower interest rates, a move that could jeopardize the delicate balance between low prices and a strong economy. Trump has also threatened to fire Fed Chair Jerome Powell, a threat Powell has strongly rejected.

From tax cuts to tariffs, Trump's economic agenda unequivocally reflects the rise of an increasingly popular "America First" protectionist ideology alongside the principles of fiscal conservatism. While the economy is not as troubled as often portrayed, tax cuts offer minimal benefit to our financial landscape. What they do contribute is trillions of dollars to an already record-high deficit. Though Trump's proposed spending cuts and tariffs aim to reduce the federal deficit, they fall far short of making a meaningful impact. By the end of his second term, the U.S. can expect not only a larger deficit, but also

With a GOP-controlled House, Senate, and Supreme Court, little stands in the way of the Trumpian economic behemoth.

Donald Trump walks with his nominee for Federal Reserve chair, Jerome Powell, in 2017 (Photo: Drew Angerer via Getty Images)

LOCAL POLITICS: A TRAGEDY OF MISPLACED FOCUS

By Zeke Tesler

In the wake of Donald Trump's re-election to the presidency of the
United States, what might be changed forever in American life? As in every election, big issues were at stake –
immigration policy, education policy, climate policy, foreign policy, economic policy,
reproductive rights – all spring immediately to mind as political arenas that are bound to change.

These overarching concerns make sense. It's only natural to look up to the highest office, projecting totality, and place all hopes and fears there.
Especially in today's increasingly polarized and highly fractious political
environment, where
political pundits have their hands firmly and
continuously pressed on all of the panic buttons.

In reality, that
heightened sensation of an
all-encompassing
importance – manufactured by a need for straightforward competition in
individuals and the media – can actually be a fragile one. The presidential election is important, but it is only one election in a sea of many.

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An article written in a world-where the current unusual trifecta in American politics – the perfect convergence (or perfect storm) of one party dominating the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government – did not shape out, would be an article focused on the importance of local government in a federal system that is often in deadlock.

However, the American federal government is entering a rare period when, due to Republican majorities in the three branches, it may actually be able to get things done. Of course, there are still roadblocks – internal Republican infighting, the filibuster – that will somewhat hinder federal action, but a Republican policy agenda is still sure to make waves.

A largely unrestrained federal government is scary. With life-changing issues hanging in the balance, it's easy to look up, consider the at least two years before the makeup of the American legislature can shift, and give up hope.

Unfortunately, all that looking up detracts from change that can still be made downstream, through state and local politics.

Local elections are not as glamorous as federal ones. They're harder for the media to gamify, they don't feel as big or as personal, the stakes feel lower, the same buzz isn't there – yet, especially in a world with total Republican control at the federal level, local politics are hugely important.

State and local politics have different goals than federal politics – while communities may be represented by a member of the House of Representatives at a "local" level, that representative still only represents that community's interests on the federal scale. State and local politics involve the same kind of community representation, but act further down the food chain at state, city, town, or community levels rather than at the top. As such, state and local politics are more specialized and focused on their own communities – policy will impact a smaller group of people, and will often have a much more noticeable direct effect on people's lives as compared to federal policy that blankets the nation.

In the wake of Trump's re-election, the importance of state and local politics is already apparent. In New York State, Proposition One appeared on the ballot, which strengthened anti-discrimination protections and protected abortion. Because it passed, even should the federal government pass legislation peeling back anti-discrimination protections at a national level, New Yorkers will still be secure.

California Governor Gavin Newsom has committed to "Trump-proofing" his state before the President-Elect enters office, which has involved calling a special session of the California state legislature to make sure that state agencies had the funding they need. These efforts are a continuation of statewide strides California has made since Trump left office to protect abortion rights and same-sex marriage while pushing for stricter gun laws.

Unfortunately, despite the power that state and local governments have to make change in their communities, elections for state and local office receive much less attention than they should.

In New York City, voter turnout for the 2021 mayoral election was just below 20% of eligible voters-
-and while at surface level, that low number may be explained away by the uncompetitive nature of a heavily Democratic New York City, turnout was similarly

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That staggeringly low turnout shows a concerning amount of disengagement and apathy for the races that really count. Take the difference between New York City's current mayor, Eric Adams, and a candidate like Maya Wiley. Backed by NYC's largest labor union as well and endorsed by prominent progressives Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and Elizabeth Warren, Wiley promised to shift one billion dollars from the NYPD, focus on shifting the homelessness narrative from a "right to shelter" to a "right to housing" while removing NYPD participation in homeless response and to raise the minimum wage while indexing it to inflation.

These policy goals were much more progressive than what the city was promised by and has received from Eric Adams during his tenure. Maya Wiley is just one example – a race that only represents the wishes of 25% of eligible voters is far from truly representative, despite the fact that a Maya Wiley New York City, an Andrew Yang New York City, or even (however far-fetched it may seem) a Republican Curtis Sliwa New York City would look incredibly different than an Eric Adams New York City.

The scope of local elections spans far beyond mayors of America's biggest cities – and if those races fail to capture even middling voter turnout, the attention placed on races for other local offices is truly minuscule.

School boards shape local school policy, curriculum, budgets, and handle major decisions around the school system. Recently, the power of school boards has manifested in removing books that cover topics deemed unsavory by board members, as well as in the proliferation of conservative political groups such as Moms for Liberty that challenge "wokeism" in the American education system.

Local elections elect prosecutors who have the power to shape the criminal legal system with little oversight. Their decisions on bail, pretrial detention, and severity of sentences can turn the system towards or against mass incarceration, with disproportionate consequences for different communities.

City Councils are the legislative bodies for their respective cities, and essentially serve the same role as the U.S. Congress at a dramatically smaller and more directly important scale. City Councils handle city budgets, criminal and civil laws, regulations, public health, taxes, and land use.

Because of their smaller scale and more focused nature, local officials have more direct influence on the day-to-day lives of those who live in their municipalities than federal officials do. Their influence on local communities exists at a level that completely eclipses the inattention they receive.

State and local government expenditures amount to about 2.9 trillion dollars annually – while this is less than the federal government's 4.3 trillion dollars, around two thirds of federal expenditures are transfers to either individuals or local or state governments. State and local governments therefore have a decision-making role in American economy and policymaking that greatly outsizes how much the American public actually participates in electing their representative local officials.

The lack of participation in hugely important local elections is not a new issue, and has systemic drivers. According to the National Civic League in 2020, local election turnout reached historic lows and was less representative of community demographics than ever, with only 15 to 27 percent of eligible voters voting across the U.S. – a pattern which held true despite high participation in the Presidential election. High-income voters have a 30-50 percent higher turnout than low-income voters, voters 65 or older turnout at seven times the rate of 18-24-year-old voters, and

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white voters vote 20% more than non-white voters. These disparities in turnout in turn produce dispar-

ities in local government representation. As data about 2024 elections pours in, time will tell if and how turnout demographics have shifted – but presumably, nothing drastic has changed.

Issues with low turnout in local elections are similar to issues with low voter turnout generally, but greatly exacerbated. Lack of awareness on where and how to vote, lack of voter ID or necessary assistance, conflicts with getting to the polls, as well as good old-fashioned cynicism all act as barriers to higher voter turnout. Looking specifically at local elections, the largest barriers include lack of awareness of local candidates and the importance of local elected officials in everyday life, as well as the fact that most local elections occur in off-cycle years where there is no federal or state election to motivate turnout.

While there is no easy fix, there are many avenues to improving turnout and interest in local elections. In New York City, the New York City Civic Engagement Commission began a two million dollar voter education campaign in 2023 that aims to engage

More broadly, solutions may include changing local election timing to align more with major election cycles, incentivizing participation through collaborations with local businesses, offering local election information as a supplement to other public services like housing and healthcare, and creating other targeted initiatives to raise awareness about the impact of local officials and their policies.

In the coming years of Republican federal dominance, state and local politics will be more central to combatting conservative policy than ever, especially in blue states. Given the new American political reality, the underappreciation of local politics is truly dire. Aside from creating local governments that fail to represent the interests of the people, it's indicative of larger issues of media gamification of competition and an emphasis on showmanship in the American political sphere. Distracted from the races that hit closest to home, the American public is trapped in a cycle of longing for change through the federal government without realizing how much can be done on the local level. Through this misdirected attention, Americans lose out on their own futures – only a drastic paradigm shift will rectify this great American tragedy of ignorance.

"Judge Throws out NYC Law Allowing Non-Citizens to Vote in Local Elections." Joseph Borelli, 2022, council.nyc.gov/joseph-borelli/2022/06/28/judge-throws-out-nyc-law-allowing-non-citizens-to-vote-in-local-elections/. Accessed 7 Jan. 2025.

BRAZIL: LAND OF POLITICAL TRADEOFFS

BY CONSTANTINE SVORONOS

Latin America's largest country (more than 3 million square miles) and the world's fourth-largest democracy (more than 210 million people), Brazil, has been defined by the presence of two major political figures in recent years. Jair Bolsonaro and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as Lula) both have massive and devoted followings. But both leaders possess qualities that make them problematic either for Brazil or the world (or both).

Brazil, though currently a federal presidential democracy (a system very much like that of the United States on paper, having states with power and the same three branches of government) with protections for civil liberties, does not have a long consistent history of liberal democracy. Since 1889, the country has found itself oscillating in and out of democracy, experimenting multiple times with other systems, including prolonged periods of military rule and authoritarianism. At the height of the Cold War, an American-backed Brazilian military dictatorship ruled the country from 1964 through 1985, after which the country began its transition into its current conflicted democratic form.

Democracy, worldwide, is particularly fragile in countries whose histories have mostly been marked by dictatorship and authoritarianism. Even in countries with strong democratic traditions, democracies are being seriously threatened.

As an example, after the fall of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Russia tried democracy, initially holding genuine elections and establishing a federal republican government. Following Vladimir Putin's rise, however, the country began to drift into undemocratic autocracy, the system that had essentially defined its entire history and which it lives under today.

While Brazil is different, it by no means has the same democratic tradition as the United States and its history of democracy is still less even when compared to some other developing nations, such as India, for example, where major threats to democracy – including radical populist religious nationalism – are afoot as well. Indeed this lack of democratic history can be seen in the two

Image source: IPS Journal Jair Bolsnaro.

Jair Bolsonaro, president of Brazil from 2018 until 2022 emerged from the fringes of the Brazilian right and quickly rose to the nation's highest office. His presence in the public eye was marked by bigoted remarks against various groups and praise for the military dictatorship of years past. Bolsonaro also oversaw other destructive acts, such as the removal of protections for Brazil's famed forests and the consistent denial of the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine. However, his response to his loss in Brazil's 2022 election was potentially most politically damning for him. Similarly to Donald Trump in 2020 (a man Bolsonaro fervently admires), Bolsonaro refused to accept his own loss. This only made the already existing and deeply entrenched political polarization in Brazil all the worse. It led to an attack by his supporters on Brazilian government buildings on January 8, 2023, an event eerily similar to that of January 6, 2021, in the United States.

BRAZIL: LAND OF POLICIAL TRADEOFFS

By Constantine Svoronos

Bolsonaro also reportedly began to plan a coup d'etat of the Brazilian government behind closed doors. Leaders in the Brazilian military have testified that he approached them about the possibility of overthrowing Brazil's 39-year-old democracy after his election loss. Bolsonaro allegedly hoped to declare martial law to prevent Lula, the rightful winner, from assuming the office of the president. This leads many to wonder what would have happened if those same military figures had agreed with his plan for a coup. Such a reality was not far from happening, as the Commander of the Brazilian Navy at the time, Almir Garnier Santos, alongside other military leaders, supposedly supported

Bolsonaro's prospective coup. Brazil truly was just inches away from losing its precious democracy. Bolsonaro has been barred from running for any political office in Brazil until 2030, though this punishment arises more from his efforts to delegitimize the Brazilian electoral system in advance of the 2022 election than from his attempted coup afterward (as of November 2024, investigation into his attempted coup remains ongoing).

Image Source: The Economist Lula (above)

Lula too, is far from perfect, though unlike Bolsonaro, he presents no existential threat to Brazilian democracy. However, Lula seeks close relationships with global totalitarians to a much greater level than did Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro by no means shied away from relationships with people like Vladimir Putin or Viktor Orbán, but his overall foreign policy agenda did not consistently hope to align Brazil with dictatorships, instead pursuing a more random form of international relations that seemed more based in Bolsonaro's personal beliefs than in Brazil's interests or ideology.

Lula, who is the current president of Brazil, and who held that same position from 2003 to 2011, remains extremely popular among the Brazilian left (and more). Lula spent a brief stretch of time in prison beginning in 2018 over questionable corruption charges but was released after the Supreme Court annulled the case. This case is largely seen as one created for political purposes to help Bolsonaro. Even while in prison, Lula remained widely loved by many.

He immediately returned to politics after his release, winning a historically narrow electoral victory over Bolsonaro in 2022.

Lula is and always has been a behemoth of the Brazilian left. The first era of his presidency saw tremendous economic successes and better conditions for tens, if not hundreds, of millions of Brazilians, especially poorer Brazilians. He protected Brazil from ecological destruction and was admired and greatly respected by many, including those with differing political persuasions, on the world stage. Thus far into the second era of Lula's presidency (his third term), his tenure has allowed him to undo some of the policies of Bolsonaro – such as Bolsonaro's permittance of deforestation – and keep the country intact in the aftermath of a near coup. It is for these reasons that so many both inside Brazil and abroad worship Lula. Lula has also adjusted Brazilian foreign policy in order to accommodate what he sees as a new international alignment, positioning Brazil as a neutral country. Both Bolsonaro and Lula did not pick a side between Russia and Ukraine. Lula attributed equal blame for Russia's invasion of Ukraine to Putin and Zelenskyy, damaging his image in the eyes of American and European leaders alike. Bolsonaro's presidency, the right-wing former president's close relationship with Donald Trump meant that for a brief period, Brazilian accession into NATO was briefly

BRAZIL: LAND OF POLICIAL TRADEOFFS
By Constantine Svoronos

During Bolsonaro's presidency, the right-wing former president's close relationship with Donald Trump meant that for a brief period, Brazilian accession into NATO was briefly discussed. Once Biden became president however, Bolsonaro's hope for stalwart cooperation between the United States and Brazil diminished. Bolsonaro also asserted he "stood in solidarity with Russia."

Throughout the almost two years of Lula's third term as presidency, Brazil has become more active than ever in BRICS, an intergovernmental economic alliance that originally was composed of developing economies Brazil Ms m, Russia, India, China, and South Africa but has since expanded. This action is part of Lula's plan to increasingly align Brazil with a diverse set of states.

To the disappointment of the United States, Lula has also moved Brazil to closer relationships with Iran, a country where many in the government refer to the United States as "great Satan." Last year, Lula allowed two Iranian warships to dock in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro.

He supported allowing Iran into BRICS – an endeavor that proved successful – and has not condemned Iranian abuses of human rights. Similarly, he has remained silent on human rights abuses at the hands of the Chinese government as well as on Russian crimes in its invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, Lula has defended Cuba's undemocratic Communist regime and has referred to Cuba as a "victim" of the American embargo.

For years Lula has also maintained close relationships with Venezuela's left-wing dictators Hugo Chavez and Nicolás Maduro. Lula has previously dismissed human rights abuse allegations against Venezuela and spoken out against American sanctions. Lula has, however, finally begun to acknowledge the lack of Venezuelan democracy, criticizing the regime for the first time following its undemocratic 2024 election. He did, however, stop short of aligning himself with American policy and labeling Maduro's opponent Edmundo González the true victor.

At the same time that he refuses to condemn many of the world's worst, most authoritarian regimes, Lula has no problem harshly censuring Israel, a democratic state, for its actions in its war against Hamas.

At one point, Lula singled out the Israeli government and compared it to that of Nazi Germany, saying, "what is happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people has not occurred at any other moment in history – actually, it has, when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." Following backlash for these comments, he refused to apologize. Brazil has seen an increase of over 1000% in anti-Semitic attacks under Lula's leadership since October 7, 2023, with many people, including members of Brazil's Jewish population, attributing the uptick in hate to rhetoric like Lula's. Just four days after Hamas's brutal invasion of Israel which took the lives of more than 1000 innocent Israelis, on October 11, Lula called for a ceasefire, insisting Israel end its retaliation. Lula's focus on the world's sole Jewish state is especially questionable given his clear indifference to human rights breaches by some of the countries he seeks closer relationships with. Israel has deemed Lula a persona non grata, meaning that he is not welcome in the country.

His condemnation of the actions of Western states, like Israel with its war and the United States with its embargo on Cuba, gives a clear look into the world Lula wants to help fashion.

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He hopes to challenge the existing American-led unipolar world order, and replace it with a multipolar world order that sees other states, like Brazil and its BRICS allies, on equal footing with the United States and its NATO and G7 allies.

Lula is not anti-American or anti-Western, and indeed he has maintained good relations with the United States during his tenure, cooperating on a variety of issues. Rather, he simply does what he thinks will put Brazil in the best position possible, whether or not that means aligning with like-minded states. Lula ultimately seeks to be a pragmatist, not a moralist. He is fully aware of the overtly totalitarian and oppressive nature of many of the countries he seeks closer relationships with; he is also likely aware of his own hypocrisy in refusing to condemn their actions. His primary goal is to establish Brazil as a global leader. When contrasted with what seems to be Bolsonaro's objective – doing away with Brazilian democracy and establishing himself as a right-wing dictator with no regard for the climate and rights of certain minority groups, among other things – Lula seems like a promising alternative.

And while he certainly has many positives, most importantly the fact that he fundamentally believes in Brazilian democracy, he also has his share of negatives.

Brazilian politics are incredibly complex, just like any other country. After all, it is a nation of more than 200 million people. Most Brazilians likely did not vote for Bolsonaro because they seek to undo their own democracy and most Brazilians likely did not vote for Lula because they hope to align their nation with China, Iran, Russia, and the like. Brazil faces other major problems that cripple the livelihoods of millions – including its infamous crime and poverty – , and it is likely these issues that lead most Brazilians to support certain candidates. It is necessary, however, for us to be aware of the characteristics – both positive and negative – of global leaders that garner mass popularity.

AI BOOM COULD SPARK CHIP SUPPLY CRISIS
By Noah Levine

Artificial Intelligence has become the hot topic of the year, having expanded rapidly in many fields and captured global attention. The language around it swings from the hyperbole of true believers to the nay saying of doomsday prophets.

This excitement is evident in the meteoric rise of AI-related stock prices. Beyond the excitement, however, lies a looming challenge: explosive demand for computing power is likely to hit supply shortages in the next two years.

The "ex" driven by AI can be seen in many fields. In sectors like healthcare, AI tools have enhanced diagnostics and personalized treatments, allowing for faster and more accurate decision-making. Manufacturing automation is driving efficiencies, reducing production time and cutting costs, while technologies such as generative AI and machine learning allow companies to optimize supply chains, predict maintenance needs and implement flexible production methods. Furthermore, AI has transformed customer service by streamlining operations and significantly enhancing the customer experience.

AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants, such as those used by Amazon, Bank of America and Microsoft, can handle vast volumes of inquiries, providing customers with instant responses to common questions, order tracking, or technical support without human intervention.

On a broader economic scale, AI's impact is poised to be massive. McKinsey estimates that by 2030, AI could contribute an additional $13 trillion to the global economy, equivalent to a 16% boost to global GDP.
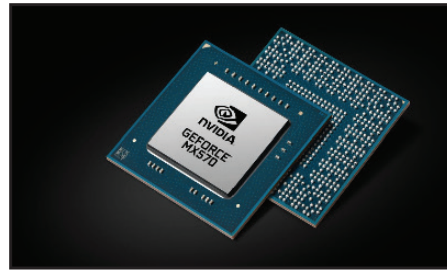
AI BOOM COULD SPARK CHIP SUPPLY CRISIS

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This growth is being driven by increased productivity through labor automation, innovations, and new competitive dynamics across multiple industries.

Investors have viewed this expansion favorably. American Century Investors reported that strong demand for AI-related technology stocks fueled the surge in U.S. stocks during the first half of 2023. Four companies—Microsoft, Nvidia, Amazon, and Meta—accounted for two-thirds of the S&P 500 Index's return during this period.

AI applications require advanced semiconductors, such as graphics processing units (GPUs), to process large datasets and power sophisticated models like generative AI. To understand the future opportunities in the AI industry, it's essential to understand the basics of semiconductors—what they are, how they're made, and who makes them.

GPUs require a wide variety of materials such as copper, cobalt, and tungsten, as well as multi-level operations.

Nvidia's New Next-Generation GPU MX570 Chip
cnet.com/tech/computing/nvidia-quietly-launches-rtx-2050-mx570-mx550-budget-laptop-graphics.

Nvidia controls 80% of the global GPU market, sourcing nearly all its chips from Taiwan. These GPUs, critical for training AI models (like OpenAI's ChatGPT), and major technology companies continue to acquire GPUs from Nvidia. These GPUs are typically located in data centers—a physical location with servers and computing machines. As Nvidia notes in a blog post on their website, GPUs are exceptionally well-suited for AI tasks due to their ability to handle parallel processing. Unlike traditional CPUs, which are designed for sequential operations, GPUs can perform thousands of tasks simultaneously, making them ideal for training AI models that require immense computational power.

The AI chip market also encompasses chips for smartphones and computers that allow these devices to run AI applications locally—as in the case of Apple's new AI-equipped smartphones. Companies like Qualcomm are leading the endeavor to develop this application.

Notably, Qualcomm also sources nearly all its chips from Taiwan. Other big tech players, however, have started to design their own custom AI Chip in the U.S—attempting to reduce cost and reliance on Nvidia and Qualcomm. For example, Microsoft has developed its own custom AI chip ,Azure Maia, which is specifically designed to train large language models, while Google has developed "Tensor Processing Units" (TPUs) to handle advanced AI calculations.

According to Bain & Company, the increased demand for both GPUs and AI-powered consumer electronics is likely to contribute to a growing chip shortage, putting pressure on the supply chain and potentially limiting the availability of these crucial components. Bain and Company estimates that "the AI-driven surge in demand for graphics processing units alone could increase total demand for certain upstream components by 30% or more by 2026."

This supply-demand imbalance is contributing to price increases across several industries that rely on semiconductors, including automotive, consumer electronics, and manufacturing. The automotive industry, for example, has already experienced significant production delays due to the lack of critical chips.

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As Bain & Company's report notes, as the shortage intensifies, industries that depend on AI applications—such as e-commerce and healthcare—may face reduced operational efficiency and higher costs. Consumer products like smartphones and laptops are also expected to see price hikes as chip manufacturers struggle to meet rising demand for AI-enabled devices. To address this challenge, companies are pursuing strategies like signing long-term contracts and diversifying their supply chains to include suppliers in regions beyond Taiwan. Governments are also stepping up. For example, the United States passed the CHIPS Act of 2022, which invests almost 53 billion dollars in funding to increase semiconductor production in the United States—creating jobs and supporting innovation.

As Fieldston's computer science teacher, Mr. Kurt Vega explains, "The big problem is because chips are off shore, mainly in Taiwan⋯The CHIPS act I think is a very good initiative, but it takes years and billions of dollars to get these things up and running. So there could absolutely be a chip crunch." His insight highlights the precarious dependence on international supply chains for semiconductors and the significant time and investment required to bolster domestic production. Mr. Vega highlights the urgency of looming the supply chain challenge in the swiftly growing A.I. sector.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE VALIDITY OF VOTES IN A UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COMES INTO DOUBT?

BY SAM FIROOZI

In common parlance, a vote is usually some kind of formal expression of where you stand, what you believe, what you support, what you don't want and where you would like to go. You raise your hand, you say yes or no, you give it a thumbs up or down, you count all in favor-all against. That simple intention has come under scrutiny in the United States of America, one of the world's largest and most powerful democracies.

"Flipping votes," the art of changing a vote electronically against the will of the voter, is a new concept recently being bandied about in political circles that has jeopardized this key building block of democracy. Politicians, like Representative Marjorie Taylor Green from Georgia's 14th district, and other influential figures, such as billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, have made claims through well funded campaigns to discredit electronic voting machines (EVMs). These well known Trumo supporters have stated EVMs can be hacked and were at risk of flipping votes. It is another assertion of an overwhelming crisis that threatens the republic.

And yet, in the aftermath of the Trump election, the crisis seems to have vanished. Or has it?

The 2024 election results, much to the surprise of many pundits, saw a clean sweep of the so-called swing states of Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Nevada, Arizona and Pennsylvania by Trump and the Republican Party. While all the other states in the union went in the direction politically as expected, these swing states decided the election by way of the electoral college. None of the swing states had vote counts that were close enough to trigger any paranoia from either side, specifically Trump's side due his previous track record of questioning election results. So the question remains, has the crisis been averted if the system was not put in a position of being questioned? What if the vote counts were too close to call in a few of those swing states? What if Trump didn't have to ask someone to find him 11,000 votes in Georgia, but instead resurrected the old standard of claiming voter fraud through suggesting irregularities with EVMs? All one has to do is think back to 2000 when one of the closest elections in US history turned the country upside down.

The close election of Gore v. Bush represented the wolf at the door in terms of claims over voter fraud.

In 2000, the presidential election hinged on the state of Florida to decide the ultimate winner of the electoral college. Gore initially conceded the race given Bush's insurmountable lead in the state, but when the following morning's vote tallies revealed the difference was a mere 600 votes, Gore rescinded his concession. Under Florida state law, a machine recount was required for a difference of less than 0.5% in votes. After this machine recount, the vote difference dropped to 327 votes in favor of Bush. At this point, the Democratic party questioned the validity of excluding votes due to ballot issues such as hanging chads (voter cards not punched all the way for the vote to have counted), pregnant chads (voter cards punched to create a dimple, but not enough for the vote to be counted) and overall issues with butterfly ballots that caused confusion and inadvertent voting for wrong candidates by older voters. These were all considered "undervotes". A hand recount of those votes were then demanded by Gore and his team in four counties. These hand recounts were started, and created even more controversy around voter intent. Even though the Florida Supreme Court ruled in favor of a hand recount of those "undervotes", the Bush campaign asked the Supreme Court to submit a ruling on the matter.

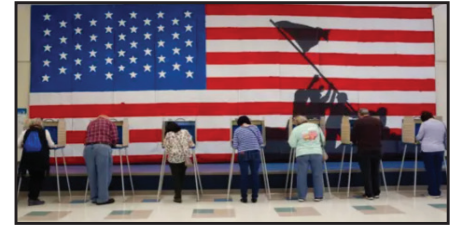## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE VALIDITY OF VOTES IN A UNIT ED STATES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COMES INTO DOUBT?

BY SAM FIROOZI

In a majority opinion ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that the hand recount should not take place. According to the ruling, "Because it is evident that any recount seeking to meet 3 U. S. C. § 5's December 12 "safe-harbor" date would be unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause, the Florida Supreme Court's judgment ordering manual recounts is reversed. Having once granted the right to vote on equal terms, Florida may not, by later arbitrary and disparate treatment, value one person's vote over that of another. The recount mechanisms implemented in response to the state court's decision do not satisfy the minimum requirement for nonarbitrary treatment of voters." Of note, there were four desenters to the ruling which included Justices Souter, Breyer, Stevens, and Ginsburg. They believed the case should be returned to Florida to have them create a uniform guideline for a recount; these desenters did not agree that the recount should be stopped. Nonetheless, as a result of the 5-4 ruling, George W. Bush won the Florida electoral college votes and was named the 43rd president of the United States. In the aftermath of this election, Americans on both sides of the aisle were left with a deep distrust of the election process. Voter intent

With this background of issues related to the physical counting of votes, and the delayed process of this method, EVMs were thought of as a failsafe solution. Ballot issues would be addressed, and the rapid vote counting and results of elections would satisfy the American appetite for getting elections results quickly. In the time since the Gore v. Bush election, voter fraud has been claimed, but never as aggressively as the 2020 Trump v. Biden presidential election.

The 2020 presidential election saw former President Trump and the Republican Party protesting the results, claiming voter fraud was partly to blame. However, every investigation that was carried out ruled out any significant voter fraud or wrongdoing. That includes the misrepresentation that a single person can vote multiple times or that deceased citizens can have their votes illegally cast by those committing voter fraud. Yet, again, ahead of the 2024 presidential election, some forces were carting out the same old claims of vote rfraud, this time trying to pin the blame on faulty or hacked EVMs. According to Matt Zdun from Reuters, in the 2022 Midterm election, 70% of voters lived in jurisdictions that primarily used paper-based ballots.

"US Election 2020 : All You Need to Know about the Presidential Race." BBC News, 12 Feb. 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51070020.

Although paper-based, the ballots are generally scanned electronically and counted; rarely are the ballots hand-counted. Approximately 23% of voters lived in districts that used ballot marking devices, which permit voters to enter a vote electronically, which is then printed out. That printout is then scanned by a different machine to count the vote. Zdun then goes on to report that the final 7% used electronic voting machines, which store the vote in its memory to be counted. This last type of voting has become less common in recent years. All of these different types of machine-based voting, with their speed of reporting results, help deliver American need to get their election results on the same day of voting. This desire can only be met with the existing technology. The first claims about "flipped" votes date back to 2004, with claims made on both sides of the aisle that votes were being switched by EVMs. Every one of those claims was refuted, with the "flipped" votes actually resulting from human error.

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According to Danny Hakim, Nick Corasaniti and Alexandra Berzon from a recent New York Times article, more recently, in the 2020 presidential election, former president Trump supported claims that EVMs were hacked and helped to rig the outcome of the election. Multiple investigations were carried out which did not find any truth to those claims. Dominion, one of the largest EVM companies in the world, successfully sued Fox News for nearly $800 million for false claims supporting EVM conspiracies.

In addition to Trump's personal attacks against the validity of EVMs, proxies of those conspiracies ranging from politicians like Marjorie Taylor Green to social media billionaires like Elon Musk have been pushing claims of vote flipping and hacked EVMs. Just weeks ago, before the election was decided, a voter in Georgia claimed her vote was flipped from one candidate to another in the early voting for the US presidential election. According to reporting from Stuart A. Thompson from the New York Times, a woman accidentally picked the wrong candidate on her ballot.

News, PBS. "A Presidential Campaign Unlike Any Other Ends on Tuesday. Here's How We Got Here." PBS News, 4 Nov. 2024, www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/a-presidential-campaign-unlike-any-other-ends-on-tuesday-heres-how-we-got-here.

The woman, recognizing her error, fixed it with another try and ultimately cast the correct electronic ballot for her vote. However, once word of the initial error became viral, Marjorie Taylor Green posted another version of the story on X, claiming the women's vote was "flipped". She further claimed this type of vote flipping also occurred during the 2020 presidential election, which has been thoroughly debunked. During a town hall in the swing state of Pennsylvania, Elon Musk claimed a false conspiracy that EVMs had rigged elections in the past. According to reporting from Olivia Rubin at ABC News, Musk stated "I'm a technologist, I know a lot about computers. And I'm like, the last thing I would do is trust a computer program, because it's just too easy to hack." Musk went on to mention the voting machine company Dominion in his conspiracy. These vote-rigging conspiracy proxies have been weaponized by Donald J. Trump in order to plant a seed of doubt among American voters. In the event that former president Trump lost the 2024 election, he had already established the foundation of doubt to deny an unfavorable outcome.

One other component of Americans questioning the validity of votes in US elections is the dissemination of misinformation. In 2000, during the Gore v. Bush election, there were no smartphones and the internet was still in its infancy.

Conspiracy theories could not spread as fast, and most information to the masses came by way of print and television news outlets. The information landscape has changed dramatically since that election. According to a report from the Pew Research Center in September 2024, 86% of Americans get their news from their smartphone, tablet or computer. Only 26% of Americans get their news from print media. More than half of Americans get their news at least sometimes from social media. That number will likely increase in years to come. The algorithms used in social media platforms means Americans will get information fed to them according to what they will likely want to see, not necessarily what is factual. This poses a huge problem when it comes to concern over false claims about voter fraud in the future. Add the accelerator of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and there can be enormous problems in our collective future. The use of EVMs, in all of its different forms, is integral to the success of American democracy. We have to trust the system, which has been validated over many decades. The idea of machines "flipping" votes or being rigged through claims of hacking has never been proven.

Although Donald J. Trump has recently been elected to his second term as US president, there is still reason to be concerned about

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE VALIDITY OF VOTES IN A UNITED STATES PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COMES INTO DOUBT?

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his, and his proxies', goal to cast doubt on the American election system. In the hypothetical that President-elect Trump lost the 2024 election, most experts agree that he would have contested the outcome with the already debunked claims about voter fraud related to EVMs. It seems safe to assume that additional figures in American politics will want to use false claims about the legitimacy of EVMs to push their own agenda for winning elections by any means necessary. Mid-term elections are only a couple of years away; will the American people have to deal with the shadow of doubt over EVMs cast by some, like president-elect Trump, over the election process? Will the delivery of news, more and more through social media platforms increasingly controlled by AI and algorithms, accelerate the doubt Americans have in regards to EVMs and the election process? At this point, there are more questions than answers over this EVM controversy. Only time will tell whether we will have answers suitable for the American people.

BBC. "US Election 2024: A Really Simple Guide." BBC News, 2 Nov. 2023, www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-67285325.

THE PITFALLS OF BIDEN'S STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS

BY JACKSON WANG

There is no denying that college tuition has reached insurmountable levels. Since 1980, tuition has increased by over 180%, with the average cost of higher education now exceeding $32,000 per year. As tuition costs rose, so too did the student debt burden—a burden that has now reached $1.75 trillion. Over the past few decades, different presidential administrations have approached this pressing issue in various ways. Over the last two years, President Joe Biden has chosen to combat the student debt crisis through direct measures—measures that involved canceling billions of dollars in student debt. As Biden's presidency comes to an end, it's essential to examine his approach to the problem and consider the potential long-term economic repercussions of his solutions.

U.S. President Joe Biden announces a new plan for federal student loan relief during a visit to Madison Area Technical College Truax Campus (Photo: Kevin Lamarque via Reuters)

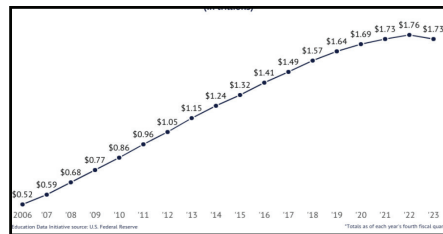## THE PITFALLS OF BIDEN'S STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS

By Jackson Wang

Student loan relief programs and federal financial aid have a long history, with initiatives like the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant of 1972 highlighting the ongoing financial challenges of affording college and the relief measures established since the 20th century. Despite various relief programs, student debt has continued to rise. President Biden has always been a staunch advocate for student loan forgiveness programs and has, before his presidency, discussed plans to reduce the financial burden placed on students.

On August 24, 2022, President Biden introduced a comprehensive three-part student loan forgiveness plan to eliminate $430 billion in student debt. The first part offers $20,000 in debt cancellation for Pell Grant recipients and $10,000 for non-Pell Grant borrowers. The second part caps monthly payments on undergraduate loans at 5% of a borrower's income and includes significant enhancements to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program to simplify qualification.

The third part promises to increase Pell Grant funding, make community college tuition-free and take measures to prevent future college tuition increases. With the average student loan debt at $38,000, this plan would have provided substantial relief, particularly for low-income and minority borrowers. It's important to note that this forgiveness applies only to federal student loans, which constitute 90% of student debt, excluding loans from private lenders.

The program launched on October 14, 2022, but was temporarily suspended in November due to several lawsuits. Among these, a coalition of six Republican states argued that the program jeopardized their loan servicing revenues. The Supreme Court agreed to review the case and invalidated Biden's three-part plan in a 6-3 ruling on June 30, 2023.

U.S. Federal Reserve via Education Data Initiative

Yet, as of today, the Biden administration has forgiven $169 billion in student loans for 4.76 million borrowers through various existing relief programs. One major initiative is the Income-Driven Repayment (IDR) forgiveness program, which adjusts monthly payments based on income and family size and can forgive the remaining balance after 20-25 years of qualifying payments.

Among the IDR plans, the Saving on Valuable Education (SAVE) program, introduced by Biden, is the most affordable and popular. In addition to the IDR plans, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program targets government and non-profit employees, offering loan forgiveness after ten years of qualifying payments. Other loan relief options are available, including School-related Discharge Options, Teacher Loan Forgiveness, and Total and Permanent Disability Discharge.

After his three-part plan was dismissed, Biden introduced a "Plan B" for loan forgiveness. He announced that the Department of Education could implement debt relief through rulemaking under the Higher Education Act. By February 2024, a consensus emerged around Biden's "Plan B" program, which could assist 30 million student borrowers in repaying their debt if it can successfully navigate legal challenges. But what are the economic consequences of canceling student debt? Well, it's important to understand that canceling student debt does not make the debt disappear. Instead, it's added to the federal deficit.

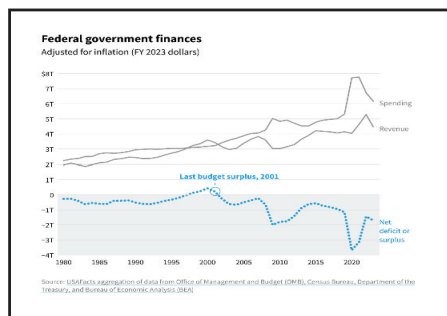## THE PITFALLS OF BIDEN'S STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS

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On the positive side, canceling student debt relieves borrowers of a significant financial burden, putting thousands of dollars in their pockets, and, eventually, back into the economy.

Theoretically, think of it as an understated stimulus package. With a greater financial base, students will have an easier time starting businesses, buying homes, and being effective consumers—activities that will undoubtedly increase economic productivity. Additionally, student loan relief often targets low-income individuals, aiding those from disadvantaged backgrounds in building wealth.

One downside of canceling debt is that the government's increased spending could lead to inflationary pressures. However, estimates from various organizations suggest that any resulting inflation would likely be minimal. The primary concern with canceling student loans is its impact on the national debt, which is approaching $35 trillion. The federal deficit—the gap between federal spending and revenues—currently stands at $1.27 trillion and is only projected to rise. A growing federal deficit is unsustainable in the long term and could have severe economic consequences.

Rising federal debt means the government will need to allocate more funds to cover interest payments, reducing the amount available for public investment. Additionally, increased debt drives up the demand for money, leading to higher national interest rates.

Federal government finances
Adjusted for inflation (FY 2023 dollars)

Source: USAFacts aggregation of data from Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Census Bureau, Department of the Treasury, and Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

These higher rates can slow economic growth, depress wages for American workers, stifle innovation, and hinder the productivity of U.S. businesses. Moreover, in free market thinking investing in government bonds diverts funds away from private investment, which can further impact the future success of American corporations. A growing national debt also undermines public confidence in economic stability, exerting upward pressure on prices. Simply put, a high national debt adversely affects all aspects of our economy. While President Biden's current efforts to reduce student debt have not significantly impacted the federal deficit, ongoing debt cancellations could have that effect. Additionally, if students frequently depend on government debt relief, colleges might be incentivized to raise tuition even further. However, the rising federal deficit is not solely due to student debt cancellation; it is also a result of increased federal spending across the board. During Biden's presidency, the national debt has risen by more than $6 trillion, with projections indicating a $7.9 trillion increase over his four-year term. Former President Donald Trump added $7.7 trillion to the national debt, reflecting a similarly substantial increase.

However, Biden's increase in debt occurred during an inflationary period, where additional public spending could further drive up prices. In contrast, Trump's debt increase happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, when heightened public spending was critically needed. Either way, attributing the national debt crisis to just two individuals oversimplifies the issue. The growth of the national debt over recent decades results from various presidential administrations' policies, which have led to GDP growth struggling to keep pace with rising debt and spending. It is hoped that future administrations will implement measures to enhance economic growth and address the national debt more effectively. Returning to the issue of student loans, Biden's actions fall short of addressing the fundamental problem behind the significant borrower burden: exorbitant tuition costs.

THE PITFALLS OF BIDEN'S STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS

By Jackson Wang

(Photo: AP via FT Montage)

Instead, his programs merely provide temporary relief from the symptoms without tackling the underlying issue. Increasing college tuition lacks a simple solution. The government might consider boosting college funding, imposing a cap on tuition fees, or closely regulating college expenditures. However, each of these potential solutions comes with its own set of challenges.

Biden's student debt relief programs also have significant ethical concerns. Funding these programs requires the government to cut spending—likely from essential social services—or raise taxes. The ethical dilemma with raising taxes is that it means American taxpayers are essentially covering the cost of college for others. The debt burden shifts from the student who took out loans and benefited from their education to the taxpayers, two-thirds of whom did not attend college. J.D. Vance, Trump's future vice president, argued, "If you want to provide student debt relief, you should penalize those who have gained from this cor-

rupt system, not ask plumbers in Ohio to subsidize the choices of college-educated individuals, many of whom will earn substantial incomes over their lifetimes."

On the other hand, Vice President Kamala Harris opts to follow Biden's lead, stating "most people should not have to carry this kind of worry." Addressing the student debt crisis requires more than just temporary relief—it calls for systemic change. Although Biden's debt cancellation efforts have offered significant significant relief, they underscore the necessity for sustainable, long-term solutions rather than a one-time fix. relief, they underscore the necessity for sustainable, long-term solutions rather than a one-time fix.

Senator J.D. Vance delivers a speech at the Republican National Convention (Photo: Alex Tabet via NBC News)

Additionally, greater attention must be paid to the growing federal deficit, as it could have severe repercussions for the American economy. To genuinely transform higher education, we need to invest in a future that empowers, rather than burdens, the next generation.

MISOGYNISTIC TROPES IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

By IRIS SULLIVAN

Throughout history, women have notoriously been diminished and attacked for their policies, looks, backgrounds, and mistakes. Female leaders and pioneers are at constant risk of being belittled by society. Even as early as 1412, Joan of Arc, a peasant girl, led French forces during the Hundred Years War and, following the victory, was quickly burned at the stake for her role as a powerful woman. Accused of heresy, witchcraft, and cross-dressing for wearing male military attire, her example, though six centuries ago, mirrors the systematic misogyny we see in contemporary politics today.

Sadly, the ways in which they are belittled might also stem from much greater notions built into misogyny, which are frequently seen in the realm of politics across the world. Margaret Thatcher in the UK faced criticism for being "hysterical," "unfeminine," and "cold," whereas the media painted Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar as "soft," "fragile, and "in need of protection." They are the tropes of disparagement, the lies built into the politics of gender, and the casual insults and stereotypes that serve an agenda.

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During his campaign, Donald Trump continually called presidential candidate and former Vice President Kamala Harris a plethora of racist, misogynistic, and downright mean nicknames such as "an extremely low IQ person," "dumber than hell," and "Lyin' Kamala."

The rhetorical excess and nastiness are not new in American politics.

As early as 1917, Montana Republican Jeannette Rankin was accused of crying during her vote to prevent the US from interfering in World War I. The news coverage honed in on her clothes, dancing, needlework, and the "lack of flowers or feminine knick-knacks" in her congressional office. Titles of articles described her as "Congresswoman Rankin Real Girl; Likes Nice Gowns and Tidy Hair." According to the Washington Post, Rankin was "thoroughly feminine—from her charmingly coiffed swirl of chestnut hair to the small, high and distinctively French heels. She is given to soft and clinging gowns, and, according to her own confession, is very fond of moving pictures." After losing the election, opponent Jacob Crull was so upset about being beaten by a woman that he then attempted suicide.

In the 1990s, when the first Black woman to be elected as US senator, Carol Moseley Braun, had her hair and body mocked on the cover of Women's Wear Daily. "Women's Wear Daily had me on its cover — actually a picture of my butt," she said, "and it said, 'this is what a Chanel sweater set should not look like.'" However, this was just the beginning of a century-long fight to disprove the misogynistic tropes we constantly see in contemporary politics.

Women are frequently labeled with cruel, sexist insults. One that seems to come up again and again is "bitch", often used by male politicians to describe a woman when she does anything they disagree with, denies their sexual advances, or fights for women's rights.

New York's 14th congressional district representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, has repeatedly expressed her feminist values and spoken out against systems currently in place that are constructed to tear women in power down. Most famously, in 2020, Ocasio-Cortez gave a moving speech on the Congress floor reflecting on Representative Ted Yoho calling her a "fucking bitch" on the steps of the US Capitol building. "When you do that to any woman—what Mr. Yoho did was give permission to other men to do that to his daughters," she said. "In using the language in front of the press, he gave permission to use that language against his wife, his daughters, women in his community, and I am here to say that is not acceptable."

During AOC's speech, one of the most powerful women in politics today, Nancy Pelosi, offered her thoughts, stating, "I can tell you this firsthand: they called me names for at least 20 years of leadership. You'd say to them, 'Do you not have a daughter? Do you not have a mother? Do you not have a sister? Do you not have a wife?' What makes you think you can be so — and this is the word I use for them — condescending?"

The sad reality is that anything can make a woman a "bitch" in a man's eyes, but this profoundly offensive term hasn't only been used against Ocasio-Cortez.

In the lead-up to the highly anticipated 2016 election, Trump notoriously sold "TRUMP THAT BITCH" shirts, bumper stickers, yard signs, and even hot sauce bottles at his rallies. Trump has an infamous history of referring to women as "bitches", and even as early as 2006, Trump stated he wished then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was a "bitch," as he found her attractive and reflected on how he would want a sexual relationship with her. Though this makes no sense, Trump consistently has voiced his opinions surrounding women, which remain untrue and unfair.

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BY IRIS SULLIVAN

Whether too nice, too mean, too "sharp-elbowed," or too much of a "people pleaser," both men and women in politics continually diminish other women for doing the smallest of things. In Ocasio-Cortez's words, "But hey, 'b*tches' get stuff done."

Racism is recurring among both men and women in politics, manifesting in both rhetoric and the policies of people in power. Yet, it is frequently disappointing how women are put down for how their race and gender intersect. The idea that women have to pick one piece of their identity to define their political stance is absurd but typical, as we see so many female politicians being boxed into stereotypes.

After Biden dropped out of the race in June, we watched Trump attack and belittle Kamala Harris for her gender, personality, and intelligence. In a forum with Black journalists, we even saw him "race-baiting" her, then questioning her race, stating, "She was always of Indian heritage, and she was only promoting Indian heritage. I didn't know she was Black until a number of years ago when she happened to turn Black, and now she wants to be known as Black. So I don't know, is she Indian or is she Black?"

Harris has been pushed into the "aggressive and power-hungry" trope, which has continued since her initial run for vice president under Biden in 2020. A'shanti Gholar, president of Emerge, a company that focuses on training Democratic women, added, "There is a history in the United States about the perception of Black people, about the perception of Black women, that we're not smart enough, that we're not good enough, that you only get to where you are because of affirmative action," she said. "So when you attack people of color, when you attack the vice president, you're really showing that you have these biases."

"The Evolution of Harris' Stances on Key Issues, from the Death Penalty to Marijuana." PBS News, 16 Aug. 2024, www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-evolution-of-harris-stances-on-key-issues-from-the-death-penalty-to-marijuana.

Racism in politics, though it often disguises itself in sneaky policies and microaggressions, can sometimes come in more obvious forms. When racism and misogyny come together to target women of color, the impacts can be devastating and lead to local lawmakers enforcing unfair policies.

Trump is an extreme example of this, often calling women of color stupid and unfit for politics. Trump actively demeans his opponents. In 2018, while being interviewed by three Black reporters, he called one a "loser" and laughed at another while saying that they asked lots of stupid questions. In 2019, he went as far as to take to social media while in a fight with House Democrats, calling a group of POC congresswomen "The Squad" and telling them "to go back to the crime-infested waters from which they came."

Donald Trump's potency in politics is not only incredibly harmful to politicians around him but also gives Americans an excuse to be openly racist and misogynistic. After all, if the President of the United States can do something, why can't everyone else? By voting for candidates who don't perpetuate harmful messaging and stereotypes, we can cause change and see more women and people of color voted into our local offices.

Votes often end up coming down to what women are wearing. The double standards we see among the policies of men versus women are not where the misogyny ends, and throughout history, these unfair notions have expanded into even personal fashion sense. Until the 1990s, there was an unwritten rule that women had to wear skirts and dresses on the Senate floor. This was unknowingly challenged in 1993 after Moseley

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Braun, oblivious to the unspoken rule, wore an Armani pantsuit to work. Reflecting on the time, the former senator said, "It was kind of shocking to me at the time that there would be this unwritten rule that women had to wear dresses. What century is this?"

More recently, in 2011, when Hillary Clinton frequently wore pantsuits, Tim Gunn asked, "Why must she dress that way? I think she's confused about her gender." The absurdity of these unwritten rules is evident. Why should it matter what a woman is wearing? No matter how foolish this may seem, it significantly impacts how people across America and even the world vote for local leaders.

Even in the left-leaning media, women's clothing and looks are almost always mentioned. In 2019, when Elizabeth Warren was interviewed in the New York Times, one of the most liberal newspapers in America, stereotypes were still heavily perpetuated. A piece intended to highlight Warren's policies instead gave people an image of Warren in the kitchen, opening with what she was wearing when walking her dog at a nearby pond.

"It was a sunny day in February, a couple of weeks after Warren announced her candidacy for president, and she was wearing a navy North Face jacket and black sneakers with, as usual, rimless glasses and small gold earrings. Her hair had drifted a bit out of place."

The color of a man's shirt rarely characterizes men in politics, yet it is an "important" piece of a woman's potency.
However, it is also true that due to public attention on a woman's choice of clothing, there are also ways to send messages through colors and cuts. For example, at Donald Trump's inauguration in 2016, Hillary Clinton wore an all-white pantsuit, referencing the women's rights movement. She wanted the media to cover that.

Clinton wasn't the first woman to do this, however. In 1968, Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman to be elected to Congress, wore an all-white outfit on Election Day, and in 2016, Michelle Obama wore an armor-inspired suit to the last state dinner, which designer Donatella Versace claimed to be "all about a woman's freedom: freedom of movement, freedom of activity, freedom to fight for their ideas, freedom to be whomever you want to be."

Journalists, reporters, and even us, as viewers, consciously and subconsciously judge women in politics based on their looks and style. Although some may not see a deeper meaning behind these actions, both male and female politicians know that if they can attack a woman based on her policies and appearance, there is a higher chance that the public will take their side. The media knows this, too, often calling out female politicians for looking unfit to be in power. However, it is critical to understand that there is always a hidden connotation behind one-sided coverage. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, as mentioned before, has constantly spoken up against these systems and recently tweeted that the reason journalists "can't help but obsess about my clothes" was because "women like me aren't supposed to run for office — or win."

The United States of America has now chosen a man with 34 felonies, two impeachments, six bankruptcies, and accusations of rape and sexual assault to run the country twice. In both circumstances, the other option has been a woman. Though we may disagree with policies on both sides, it is crucial to vote for candidates who reflect who you want to shape the lives of those around you. Of 47 presidents across 235 years, not one has been a woman, and only one has been a person of color. Let us all take this as a chance to be better, reflect on our actions, campaign with local law-

CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS ON LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

BY MALAIKA SINGH AND MR. WALDMAN

September kicked off a very busy season in New York City with events at every level from international meetings (the United Nations General Assembly and Climate Week) to national and statewide elections to community panel discussions.

Climate Week NYC 2024 is the largest climate event of its kind. It is an annual gathering held at multiple locations throughout New York City (including spaces like the United Nations Headquarters, the Jacob Javits Centers and numerous invitation-only corporate gatherings). This year, it brought over 10,000 people from around the world together over one week (September 22-29). In nearly 1,000 sessions including panels featuring speakers from countries as diverse as Brazil and Japan, Climate Week brought a wealth of knowledge about what cities, societies and countries are doing to adapt and mitigate climate change seen in higher temperatures, groundwater scarcity, and extreme precipitation. It reached tens of thousands of global citizens, and leaders from business, government, influencers and campaigners discussed current policies and further positive changes that could be enacted.

On a national scale, we heard two vastly opposing views of climate change from the presidential candidates. In 2012, Trump repeatedly called global warming a "hoax" and said it "was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive." His views have not changed since; when asked about his presidency, Trump replied "[the US] had the cleanest air and the cleanest water." During his time as President, Trump rolled back over 70 environmental regulations, increasing emissions from power plants, factories and pollutants flowing into public waterways. Given his position on climate change, many environmentalists believe that legislation will be repealed, including Biden administration measures. During Trump's campaign, he said he would repeal all of Biden's regulations intended to reduce emissions and shift away from fossil fuels. Trump has also called for Biden's signature environment bill, the Inflation Reduction Act, to be repealed.

At a local level, a panel held at the Ethical Culture Society Great Hall, at West 64th Street and Central Park West, in September discussed the language of climate action in the 2024 Election. Par-

Moderated by Genevieve Guenther, author of Language of Climate Politics, the panelists included prominent climate advocates author Bill McKibben; reporter Kendra Pierre-Louis and reporter and podcast host Amy Westervelt. The discussion centered around how citizens consciously or unconsciously believe certain "facts" about climate change. These "facts" can lead some to believe that combating climate change will have negative economic impacts, while others are led to believe we are already working to mitigate climate change and things are going smoothly. Despite these differences in opinions, the reason they are so widespread is the same: there are "buzzwords" causing us to lean towards these trains of thought. The language the media uses, including terms such as "innovation" and "greening" or blaming emissions on faraway countries, severely limits the scope of addressing the catastrophe of climate change.

Language can make us believe what we are doing is enough. We need to question what we read. By limiting our vocabulary to the terms featured prominently in the media, we risk losing a broader picture of the

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According to Ecotricity, a company selling clean energy sources, climate change will be irreversible by 2030 – it knows no boundaries in impact. Around half of global carbon emissions are released by the richest 10% of countries; these effects are seen in international frequent and intense weather events (more hurricanes, flash flooding and wildfires). The impact on humans will be especially felt in developing countries without the resources to combat it. It will exacerbate the refugee crisis, potentially displacing up to 200 million people by 2050.

Expanding our vocabulary and knowledge base to receive a more worldwide picture of climate change, its impacts and its implications is crucial. Whether through listening to panels discussing potential impacts, enacting legislation, attending climate events held in our city or upholding our international climate promises, we must ensure that as citizens of the world, we are properly equipped with both the vocabulary and knowledge to talk about and combat climate change.

all photos taken by Malaika Singh

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