Dear Reader,

On behalf of the editorial board, the University Library, and the supportive academic communities of several undergraduate institutions, we would like to thank you for reading our very first edition of Lady Justice Journal (LJJ). LJJ was founded in 2023 by a handful of undergraduate students with a passion for political science and a desire for a space to celebrate student research. Through the help from the University of Illinois's Political Science Department, Prof. Merinda Kaye Hensley, and the support of students both submitting their research and encouraging others to do so, we have compiled papers from eleven incredible undergraduate authors from three different universities.

You will find that this first edition spans a myriad of topics related to political behavior, religion, immigration, feminist theory, economics, constitutional review, and more. Through quantitative, quantitative, and literary analyses, these authors have taken the time and care to speak meticulously and passionately about issues at the forefront of their political thought.

When conducting editorial review, we were genuinely excited by the evident love and care that these submissions conveyed. We wanted to create a journal for this very love and care to shine through, and we hope you enjoy reading the findings and thoughts of our authors in this edition. Thank you for celebrating this inaugural journey with us!

Sincerely,

Vindhya Kalipi, Editor-in-Chief
LJJ Editorial Board

Job Seekers or Job Stealers? The Truth Behind

Immigrants and Employment

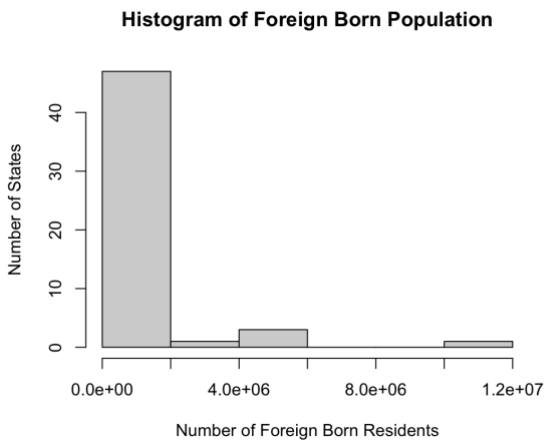Yahya Arastu

Northwestern University

Abstract

This paper delves into the longstanding issue of antipathy towards immigrants and its historical context. The author highlights the recurring theme of fear and distrust towards newcomers in global history, then shifts the focus to the United States, examining the impact of immigration waves, both past and present, on the nation's employment landscape. The central objective is to address the prevailing sentiment that immigrants are responsible for "stealing jobs" from native-born Americans. To achieve this goal, a data-driven approach is employed, utilizing statistical analysis to explore the relationship between the foreign-born population and the unemployment rates of native citizens in different U.S. states. The independent variable, the ratio of foreign-born residents to the total population, is examined alongside the dependent variable, the unemployment rate of native citizens. Through a series of visualizations and regression models, a nuanced perspective is presented on this issue. The analysis acknowledges the presence of a correlation between immigrant population ratios and native unemployment rates but emphasizes the need to consider a multitude of other contributing factors, such as education, age distribution, and labor market policies.

Antipathy towards foreigners is nothing new, and has been a common sentiment among the countries of the world throughout history. Whether it was fear and hatred of Muslims in the minds of Europeans during the Crusades, or the distaste towards Europeans in Imperial Japan, there are no shortage of examples that exhibit this fault in humanity. Over the past 200 years in America, these same issues have come into the spotlight at various points in our history. Whether it was the influx of Chinese during the gold-rush, Irish immigrants during the Irish potato famine, or more recently, the large influx of Hispanic and Latino immigrants, there has always been a fear that these new populations would disrupt the status quo. In doing so, they would negatively affect the lives of those already settled in these regions. The sources for this fear and distrust come from a variety of reasons; the fear for national security and crime rates, limited resources and strain on public services, cultural differences, and finally economic concerns. The degree to which these concerns are based on facts and empirical evidence varies significantly, but one of the most common rhetorics promoted in today's society is the fear that immigrants will "steal our jobs" and take away opportunities from "hard working Americans." The objective of this paper is to analyze the extent to which this sentiment is true using real data and analysis. In doing so, the situation can be better understood, and government policies can be adjusted if necessary. To put it in clear terms, the question to be answered is as follows: *How does an increase in skilled immigrant workers impact the unemployment rates of native-born workers in the US?*

Let's start with defining some of the parameters for this analysis:

**Independent variable**: Foreign Born Population

Initially I just graphed the total number of foreign born residents from each state. However, as shown below, the original chart makes it difficult to visualize the information. The numbers are very large and use scientific notation, and a single outlier throws off the shape of the rest of the chart making it heavily skewed to the right. As a result, I divided the foreign born population by the total population in each state to get a ratio rather than a raw number. This turned out to be much more manageable, and produced the image seen in the second chart below. This data is still skewed to the right somewhat. This makes sense because the majority of immigrants are concentrated in urban areas in a few states, and the rest have relatively low immigrant populations compared to their total population. There is a single peak between 5% and 10%, and each
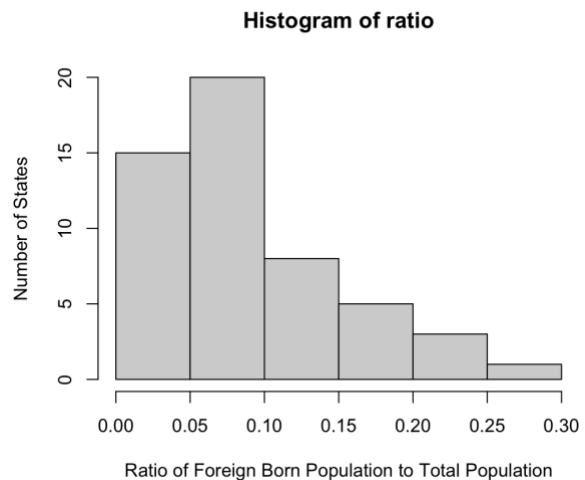
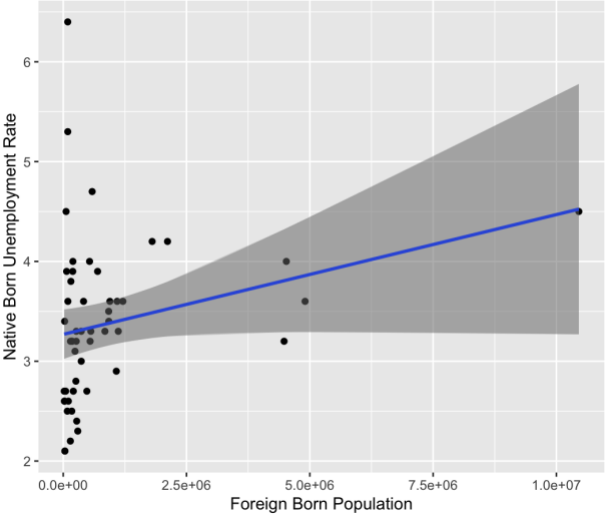successive 5% increase sees a decrease in frequency among states.

Histogram of Native Born Unemployment
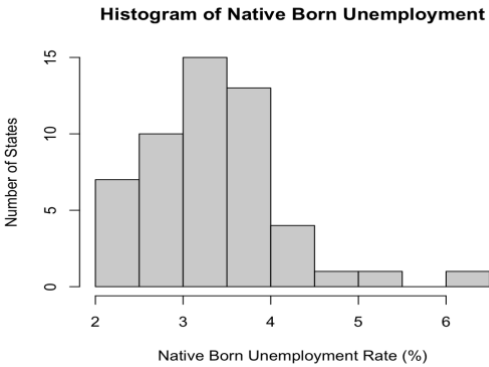
Dependent variable: Unemployment rate of native citizens

While the data isn't normally distributed, it does have some similarities to a normal curve. It is slightly skewed to the right with few data points greater than 4%. There is a potential outlier just over 6%, and it causes a gap in the chart. The unemployment rate for most states hovers right around 3-4% which is in accordance with the national average.

Before conducting any statistical analysis, it's a good idea to graph the two variables against each other and see if there is any relationship visible just for a simple scatterplot. The first graph reflects the original dataset I was going with–total foreign born population in each state. As I mentioned earlier, this data was unwieldy so I chose to adjust it. Part of the reason was because the confidence interval was so large that it wasn't clear whether or not there was a

positive or negative relationship between the two variables. It also clusters a lot of the data points close together which makes it difficult to make accurate visual observations.

In this second graph, the scatter plot shows a much more easily visible relationship between the two variables. It does not seem conclusive, but the general trend is: As the ratio of the foreign born population to total population increases, there is an increase in the unemployment rate of native born citizens. In terms of answering my original research question, this data definitely suggests that an influx of immigrants can have adverse effects on the economic outlook of citizens. There are definitely plenty of other variables that still have to be taken into consideration, and there are statistical tests that can be done to flesh this out in greater detail, but it seems to support the rhetoric that immigrants (equivalent to the foreign born population) take away jobs that otherwise would be available to native workers. In some ways this seems to be common sense, but it also can cause resentment, especially among those who are employed in low-skilled jobs that have a low barrier to entry and are easily taken by immigrants.
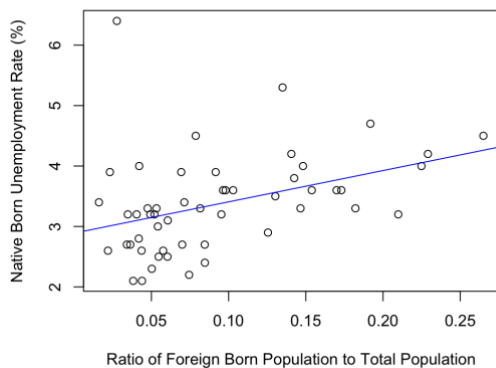
With this basic visualization of the data being dealt with, it'll be useful to look at prior literature that touches on the same topic. Statistics studies on the issue of immigration and unemployment have been done before, and their methodologies and findings can be compared to this one. One article is "The Effect of Immigration on Aggregate Native Unemployment: An across-City Estimation" by Simon. The primary difference in this study is its focus on specific cities rather than entire states. In some ways this is a more accurate model because it eliminates

the bias a single large city has over a whole state by looking at each city in isolation. The regressions used are more technical and are more precise in this article. It's also interesting because it includes a model with a lag in the immigrant population by 0-9 years. This is significant because changes in the independent variable do not always take effect immediately. This was difficult to do with the data from the Census Bureau because the data is updated only every 10 years. The data from this article on the other hand was from the BLS which conducts much more frequent reports on unemployment rates (the dependent variable). From his analyses, Sumon comes to the conclusion that "there is little or no observed increase in aggregate native unemployment due to immigration, even in the short run during which adjustment frictions should be most severe." (312). He emphasizes the relative insignificance of immigration to the total labor force, comprising less than half of one percent of the civilian labor force. As a result, "it is almost impossible that immigration could explain a large proportion of the differences in unemployment" (Simon 310).

The article by Bonin takes a much more econometric approach to answering the question and analyzes the influx of immigrants as a labor supply shock rather than a social or cultural shock. He also has a methodological approach that segments immigrant labor into different groups by skill. I was unable to do this due to the limitations in the data I was using. In addition to looking at the effects of immigration on unemployment, he also looked at the effects they had on wages, which I think is very perceptive because it is a metric of the economy that provides a different perspective than unemployment. In particular, he zeroes in on the employment conditions in Germany and came to the conclusion "that the massive influx of foreign immigrants following German reunification had indeed a significant negative impact on the employment outcomes of native men." To put it in exact numbers, "A 10 percent immigrant

supply shock from immigration would raise the unemployment rate in a skill group by about 1.5 percent." (13). This is in contrast with the findings that Simon came to, and there seems to be an explanation for that. Bonin was analyzing statistics in Germany, while Simon was looking at a country with almost four times the population–the United States. It would make sense that a smaller country is more sensitive to population shocks compared to the larger United States which is more easily able to absorb the effects of a similar number of immigrants.

As in any comprehensive analysis of two variables, analyzing a regression model is a useful tool for seeing the impact the treatment variable has on the dependent variable. I first ran a bivariate regression using just the original treatment of "ratio" (ratio of foreign born residents to total population). The above graphic shows the output, which indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. A unit increase in "ratio" accounts for an increase of 5.178 percentage points in the unemployment rate of citizens. The p-value associated with the "ratio" variable is 0.00432. This indicates that there is statistically significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficient for the "ratio" variable is zero. In other words, the variable for the ratio of foreign born population to the total population in a state has a significant effect on the native unemployment variable. As can be seen from the R-squared value, only about 15.17% of the variability "native_unemployment_numeric" can be explained by the "ratio" variable alone. Essentially, there are many other variables that need to be taken into consideration and the "ratio" variable is only one among many that contributes to the unemployment rate. These factors include differences in education level. The disparity in educational attainment between native citizens and foreign-born individuals can affect both their employment opportunities and unemployment rates. Higher education levels among the foreign-born population may directly impact their job competition with native citizens. If foreign-born individuals have higher

```
Residuals:
    Min       1Q  Median      3Q      Max
Residuals:
    Min     1Q  Median     3Q     Max
-1.0561 -0.3576 -0.1190  0.2003  3.4151

Coefficients:
             Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)     4.304      0.689   6.247 9.74e-08 ***
college_stats  -7.748      3.635  -2.131 0.038107 *
ratio           7.230      1.931   3.745 0.000476 ***
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 0.7327 on 49 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared:  0.2236,    Adjusted R-squared:  0.1919
F-statistic: 7.057 on 2 and 49 DF,  p-value: 0.002027
```

educational attainment, they might compete for higher-skilled jobs that are also sought after by native citizens. Another potential factor is age distribution This can impact both the foreign-born population and native citizen unemployment rates. For example, if the foreign-born population is composed mainly of working-age individuals, it could have a different effect on unemployment rates compared to native citizens. Controlling for age structure variables, such as the proportion of the population in different age groups, can help address this confounding factor. A third confounder could be labor market policies. Examples such as regulations around hiring practices, employment protections, or affirmative action measures, may directly influence job competition between the foreign-born population and native citizens. Different labor market policies can create varying degrees of competition, potentially affecting unemployment rates.

With these factors in mind, I conducted a multivariate regression that adds in the variable "college_stats." This is the percentage of native born citizens who have attained a Bachelor's degree in each state. Education has the potential to significantly impact unemployment rates because better educated citizens tend to be employed at a higher rate. The multiple regression analysis aimed to predict the "native_unemployment_numeric" based on the `college_stats` and `ratio` predictors. The results showed a statistically significant relationship between the predictors and the response variable. The coefficient for `college_stats` was estimated to be -7.748, suggesting a negative association. For every unit increase in `college_stats`, the predicted

`native_unemployment_numeric` value decreased by 7.748, on average. Comparing this with the original bivariate model, the multiple regression model including both predictors provided a better fit (higher R-squared value). This means that both variables, in conjunction, are better able to explain unemployment rates than either one their own. The negative coefficient for `college_stats` in the multiple regression model is intuitive because as the number of college-educated citizens goes up, the unemployment rate should conversely go down. More independent variables can also be added such as race or age, for an even more accurate analysis of the data. With this in mind, I ran another multivariate regression using the same variables as before. This time however, I included a new metric–the percentage of households with food stamps/SNAP benefits for native citizens. This seems to have been the most accurate predictor by far of the lot, and raised the R-squared value all the way to 71%, a very significant increase. For each unit increase in "percentage_snap", the dependent variable (unemployment_rate_numeric) increased by 11.115 percentage points. This is very significant and provides a much more accurate understanding of the factors behind unemployment.

The regression analysis aimed to examine the relationship between the ratio of foreign-born population to total population and the unemployment rate of native citizens in the United States. The bivariate regression indicated a positive relationship between the two variables. The

```
Residuals:
     Min      1Q   Median      3Q     Max
-1.03611 -0.23995 -0.06379  0.16929  1.54609

Coefficients:
            Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)    1.877      0.499   3.761  0.00046 ***
ratio          7.243      1.182   6.128 1.60e-07 ***
percent_snap  11.115      1.222   9.099 5.07e-12 ***
college_stats -2.117      2.310  -0.916  0.36402
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 0.4485 on 48 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared:  0.7151,    Adjusted R-squared:  0.6973
F-statistic: 40.16 on 3 and 48 DF,  p-value: 3.916e-13
```

multivariate regression expanded on this by incorporating both the ratio and the percentage of native-born citizens with a Bachelor's degree as predictors, providing a better fit to the data. The coefficient for the percentage of native-born citizens with a

Bachelor's degree was estimated to be -7.748, suggesting a negative association. Lastly, the inclusion of the percentage of households receiving food stamps/SNAP benefits as a predictor significantly improved the model. This variable had the most substantial impact on the unemployment rate, with each unit increase corresponding to an 11.115 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate. The model incorporating this variable achieved a high R-squared value of 71%, indicating its strong explanatory power. Interpreting the regression results, it can be concluded that while there is a relationship between the ratio of immigrants and unemployment, there is no conclusive evidence to go beyond simple correlation. In conjunction with the other variables analyzed, it became clear that there are many economic and structural factors that affect unemployment, and it definitely doesn't come down to a single detail like immigration numbers. The findings support the rhetoric that an influx of immigrants can be correlated with adverse effects on the economic outlook of native-born citizens. However, like the conclusions made by Simon and Bonin, the effect isn't large enough to be of significance. It is also important to recognize the limitations of this data and the analysis of it. One limitation of the analysis is the reliance on aggregate data at the state level. The use of state-level data may overlook regional variations and specific dynamics within cities or localities. A more granular analysis at the city or metropolitan level could provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between immigration and unemployment, as Simon did in his study. Another limitation is the omission of other potentially influential variables. While the analysis included the percentage of native-born citizens with a Bachelor's degree and the percentage of households receiving food stamps/SNAP benefits, other factors such as race, age, and labor market policies were not considered. These additional variables could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding immigration and its impact on unemployment.

It is never justifiable to tolerate hateful or bigoted policies toward immigrants, regardless of their impact on the country they're settling in. However, the prosperity of the native citizens in a country should come first, and if there is sufficient evidence that their job prospects are being harmed by immigrants, then there should be some consideration about limiting the number of immigrants across borders. In any case, incorporating the results of studies like this into public policy and law can be used to work toward a more equitable economy and society in years to come.

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Estimates, Table S0502; using data.census.gov; <https://data.census.gov/immigration/>

One People, One Goal:

Senegalese Development and Self-Determination under United Nations Paradigms

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Abstract

Developed by a team of international experts, the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) intend to set universal paradigms for global development before the year 2030. While these paradigms of development are widely accepted as desired outcomes, special care must be taken in analyzing their ascertainment by Global South countries who did not have a prominent part in defining the goals in the first place. In the case of Senegal, development prospects can be better ascertained by examining the SDGs in tandem with nation-level development plans that better represent the country's past and present development goals. This article aims to analyze Senegalese development in context of the SDGs while also evaluating African expert perspectives on the relevance of the SDGs themselves in Senegalese development paradigms. In doing so, it paints a more comprehensive picture of Senegal's path to progress.

Keywords: Senegal, International Development, SDGs, Decolonial Epistemology

Introduction

One of the few African countries to maintain peaceful transitions of political power since its independence in 1960, Senegal has historically drawn international attention as a promising hub for development and as an exemplar of African sociopolitical progress. However, despite its recognition as one of the most well-anchored African democracies, Senegal continues to struggle with socioeconomic stability. Massive fiscal consequences from structural adjustment programs of the 1970s and 80s continue to ripple out into the population, with significant impacts on women and the rural poor (Randle 2004). And with 35.6% of Senegalese citizens living below the poverty line as of 2017 (Hughes 2020), the nation still requires significant progress in multitudinous sectors if it is to become on track to achieving the United Nations SDGs by 2030. When discussing Senegal's development trajectory, it is critical to avoid common pitfalls such as assuming development systems are universally applicable across the African continent. These general indiscretions and imperial perspectives were what rendered the everyday consequences of structural adjustment programs and other top-down development systems so devastating for ordinary folks across the African continent in the first place.

While the seventeen United Nations SDGs were sourced from experts across the globe, one must consider that it is unlikely for an international foreign body historically dominated by the Global North to pinpoint the best interests or needs of each country in the Global South (Malone & Hagman 2002). In ascertaining Senegal's development prospects, it is therefore crucial to not only assess the nation's progress towards the UN SDGs, but also to discern the respective relevancy of those goals to Senegal according to native African expert perspectives. This paper presents both an evaluation of Senegal's progress towards sustainable development as outlined by the United Nations paradigms, as well as several African perspectives on the

relevancy of these development paradigms themselves. It contributes to the literature by taking a two-pronged approach to development that both evaluates Senegalese development against the SDGs and elevates African expert opinions in an attempt to avoid imperial epistemology. By combining an assessment of development with an identification of the most and least important Sustainable Development Goals for Senegal, this paper paints a more comprehensive picture of the country's practical path to progress.

Progress towards United Nations Goals

Before exploring the relative importance of the 17 SDGs in the context of Senegalese development and national interest, this paper presents a discussion of Senegal's progress towards them. The following evaluation combines data sourced from international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank with perspectives from within Senegal to create a more holistic overview of development as we approach 2030. The United Nations goals are grouped into seven clusters for evaluation: economic growth, health and wellbeing, education, infrastructure, environmental action, institutional strength, and equality. Special attention is paid to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Senegal's trajectory toward each goal cluster.

As some of the most fundamental aspects of socioeconomic progress, poverty alleviation, job creation, and economic growth constitute the first and eighth Sustainable Development Goals outlined by the United Nations. As previously mentioned, over one-third of Senegalese citizens were living below the poverty line in 2017. While this marks a decrease from 46.7% in 2011 (UN 2021), over one-fourth of the population will still be living in poverty by 2030 if that rate of decrease remains stagnant. Amadou Hott, the Senegalese Minister of Economy, Planning, and Cooperation, was interviewed about Senegal's economic prospects by the OPEC Fund months

before the COVID-19 pandemic began. In the interview, Hott stresses the importance of national programs such as the 2014 Plan for an Emerging Senegal (PES) in job creation and economic growth. In the four years after Phase I of the PES began in 2014, average annual GDP growth more than doubled from 3% to 6.6%. Additionally, looking ahead to the 2020-2024 period, Hott states that with a projected growth rate of 8%, he expects the nation to generate over 200,000 new jobs annually (Hughes 2020).

While these calculations from early 2020 seem promising, COVID-19 posed a notable burden on Senegal's economic development. From the beginning of 2019 to the end of 2020, the GDP growth rate plummeted from 5.3% to negative 0.7%, and over 235,000 formal jobs were lost (Mbaye et al. 2021). The pandemic-generated economic downturn certainly renders Hott's projections of growth less achievable within a four-year window. However, with the emergence of national COVID-19 response programs such as the Program for Economic and Social Resilience, Mbyae et al. predict that the downturn will only be a temporary hindrance for Senegal's economic development trajectory.

Along with fiscal growth, another foundational aspect of development is national health. The topic of health encompasses UN goals two and three: zero hunger and good health and well-being. Senegal has demonstrated promising development in the area of hunger alleviation; it cut its proportion of malnourished inhabitants from 24.2% in 2001 to 9.4% in 2018 (UN 2021). The nation made similarly significant strides against mortality and communicable illness in the new millennium; between 2001 and 2018, Senegal cut its infant mortality rate in half, decreased the rate of malaria incidence by over 78%, and decreased the rate of new HIV infections by over 85% (UN 2021).

Clearly, the event with the most pressing implications for this goal cluster is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As of August 2021, Senegal has been home to over 64,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with its average fatality rate of around 2% slightly below global averages (Hasan et al. 2021). Despite being among the first African countries to implement the United Nations' COVAX vaccination program, only 5.38% of the population was at least partially vaccinated as of August 2021. Additionally, the country began experiencing its most exponential spike in cases as the delta variant spread in July 2021 (Ritchie 2021). While the government continued to implement mask requirements and offer COVID testing, the spread of new variants has highlighted the lackluster efficacy of Senegal's vaccination program. Without an influx of vaccines and a better-structured national vaccination initiative, the pandemic will continue to derail prospects for improved Senegalese national health.

Another crucial frontier in the path to development is education; without an informed citizenry, Senegalese progress in health, infrastructure, equality, and myriad other sectors would be rendered impossible. The nation has made steady progress towards educational development in the 21st century, but primary education and higher levels of learning still remain inaccessible to considerable portions of the Senegalese public. The national completion rate for the equivalent of middle-school education rested at 50.1% in 2018, up from only 32.8% in 2001. Pre-primary education is even less accessible, with only 15.5% of children attending some form of preschool education before they enroll in primary school. (UN 2021). Despite these shortcomings, Senegal has implemented decisive plans for future development. The Education and Training Quality, Equity, and Transparency Act implemented in 2013 has put the nation on track to develop more accessible curricula and form effective school boards at the regional level (Global Partnership for Education 2020).

Much like other regions of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic presented both consequences and opportunities for national education in Senegal. Beginning in 2020, many Senegalese primary and secondary schools were shut down due to national COVID-19 policies and a lack of access to personal protective equipment and sanitary infrastructure for teachers and students (Ritchie 2021). However, coordination amongst the Senegalese Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and local education NGOs generated funding for the development of national TV and radio education materials that increased access to learning at home (Global Partnership for Education 2020). While the sharp decline in physical schooling certainly inhibited student progress, the creation of distance learning materials presents an opportunity for some Senegalese communities to obtain education that had previously remained inaccessible to them.

When one thinks of development, a common topic that comes to mind is infrastructure; not only does physical infrastructure materially improve the lives of everyday people, but the presence of good infrastructure reinforces citizens' belief in the legitimacy of their government. For the purposes of this evaluation, infrastructure includes technological as well as physical systems accessible to Senegalese citizens. Overall, Senegal continues to struggle in the realm of physical infrastructure and sanitation systems; the proportion of the population with access to basic hand-washing facilities has rested at approximately 20.85% since 2013. In response, Senegalese conferences such as the Dakar World Water Forum 2021 are geared towards finding diplomatic solutions to the water accessibility crisis that is "a major concern" for West Africa, according to co-president Abdoulaye Sene (Défis Humanitaires 2020). Senegal has also made significant strides in electricity systems, with 61.7% of the population able to access electricity in 2017 as opposed to 26% in 1993 (UN 2021).

As with the education development goal, COVID-19 entailed multifaceted results in the realm of sanitation infrastructure. On one hand, the economic downturn spurred by the pandemic decreased access to clean water as citizens reported longer travel times to access water sources (USAID 2021). As demonstrated in Figure 1,, this difficulty was more prominent in rural areas. On the other hand, however, COVID-19 seems to have set forth a massive social norms change
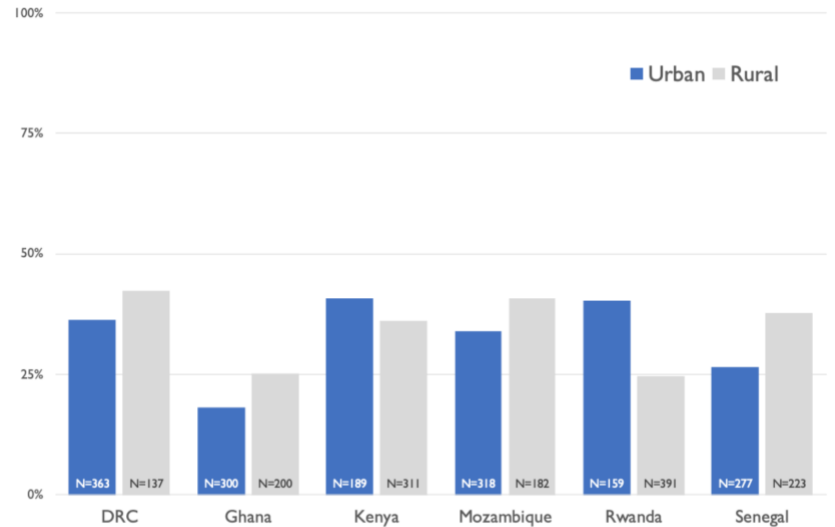

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents answering "Yes" to the question, *"Has Covid-19 made it more difficult to get your drinking water?"* Source: USAID 2021

regarding sanitation that has increased demand for related infrastructure moving forward.

Often marginalized in African development discourse, actions regarding environmental protection and climate change have also played an integral role in Senegalese development. As a grounds for placing land space under governmental protection and implementing plans for long-term harvesting, climate action has a considerable impact on myriad goals ranging from agricultural production to governmental legitimacy. While Senegal has recently increased the amount of key terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity areas protected from exploitation, deforestation presents a difficult challenge for the government to control. The land area covered by forest has steadily declined since 2000, reaching an annual net change in forest area of negative 0.5% in 2020. In response, the country has made progress in developing plans for its national forests; the proportion of forest area under long-term management skyrocketed from 18.1% in 2000 to 70.4% twenty years later (UN 2021).

While COVID-19 did not present immediate consequences for deforestation or sustainability practices in Senegal, the pandemic may have indirectly stressed the importance of national climate action. First, the pandemic-related economic downturn and supply chain disruption in Senegal uncovered the fragility of the nation's critical agricultural sector. This highlighted the need for increased governmental controls on agricultural production, including the sustainable management of agricultural lands (International Organization for Migration 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 acted as a reminder of the importance of proactive disaster-mitigation policies and the devastating consequences of unmanaged risk - two topics that are similarly pertinent in the national discussion on climate policy (Tall 2020).

As a penultimate goal cluster, institutional strength marks a stepping stone to the achievement of all other Sustainable Development Goals. Not only do strong governmental institutions and partnerships spur progress towards development paradigms, but said progress gives credence to the legitimacy of the government's ability to benefit Senegalese people. On an administrative level, Senegal has increased the universality of national institutions, with 77.4% of children under five having been registered with a civil entity at birth as of 2017. Additionally, Senegal has progressively obtained more politico-economic sovereignty on the international stage, with national debt to foreign entities decreasing from 18.3% of export revenues in 1990 to 9.7% in 2017. However, despite stable and participatory national institutions, Senegal still struggles to deliver justice to its population; 37.8% of its 2018 prison population consisted of unsentenced detainees (UN 2021), demonstrating high rates of extra-judicial arrests.

As with education and infrastructure, Senegal's trajectory towards strong institutions was both progressed and inhibited by the pandemic. On an encouraging note, the pandemic underscored the ability of the national government to quickly respond to national dilemmas and

prevent civilian deaths by mandating mask usage and suggesting school closures (Ritchie 2021). Additionally, it showcased the effectiveness of partnerships between government, local NGOs, and international organizations in creating helpful pandemic responses such as the aforementioned national TV and radio learning materials. However, other partnerships such as the COVAX program initiated by the UN and implemented by the Senegalese government quickly uncovered the national government's inability to both promote prosocial behavior amongst its own population as well as to exert enough global power to demand adequate vaccines from the Global North (Ritchie 2021).

One final development cluster that underlies all 17 development goals is that of equality. Similar to several surrounding nations, Senegal suffers from significant gaps in wealth, opportunity, education, and safety for different genders and different regions. United Nations development goals five and ten specifically aim to eliminate these inequalities. The rural-urban opportunity gap exists in many sectors, but especially in wealth and access to education; most national wealth is concentrated in the capital of Dakar, and primary school enrollment rates for Dakar and urban Ziguinchor are more than double that of the rural region of Kaffrine (Diene 2014). While Senegal has made impressive progress towards equal gender representation in government after the Gender Parity Law increased the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women from 19.2% in 2001 to 43% in 2017 (UN Women 2021), many women still experience dangerous consequences of misogyny every day. Over 12% of Senegalese women and girls ages 15-49 have experienced sexual assault in the past year, 8.4% of girls aged 20-24 years old in 2017 were married before they turned 15, and 24% of women and girls ages 15-49 have experienced female genital mutilation in the past year (UN 2021). The nation continues to have a

long way to go in regard to ending the epidemic of gender-based violence that still plagues the lives of its women and girls.

Much like other developmental goals, the COVID-19 pandemic only worsened gender-based and regional gaps in wealth and wellbeing. Senegalese women make up the majority of the national healthcare force and the majority of homemakers (Ba 2020); not only were women in the formal workforce disproportionately exposed to COVID-19 because of their presence in the healthcare sector, but school closures and lack of childcare access increased the disproportionate burden on women at home. And while Senegal has made progress in the realm of increasing formal women-run businesses, the pandemic will likely erase this promising development. According to Nicole Gakou, President of the Union of Women Entrepreneurs in Senegal, female business owners are less likely to receive crucial loans, and many have been forced to choose between keeping their company or their household afloat (UN Women 2020). Additionally, COVID-19 promises to perpetuate the feminization of poverty in Senegal. Senegalese women constitute the majority of informal workers, a group that often lacks access to veritable health insurance and paid leave. During the pandemic, many such women were forced to choose between an income or protecting their own health. Similar gaps were exacerbated for Senegal's rural populations; the majority of rural work lies in the informal sector, and access to health centers is sparse outside metropolitan areas (Diene 2014).

Overall, while Senegal has made impressive strides towards some goals such as economic growth and hunger eradication, there is still a long path ahead toward achieving goals such as universal infrastructure access and gender parity. The emergence of COVID-19 presented an unexpected barrier to development, but projections characterize it as a temporary

barrier that may have in fact engendered a handful of surprising benefits in the realms of education, infrastructure, and climate action.

SDG Relevance to Senegalese National Interests

When discussing national development in Global South countries, it is common to use a comparison between national statistics and international expectations not only as a marker of current progress but also as an indication for the future. Sectors with the least development according to foreign guidelines are suggested for prioritization, while others disappear from international discourse after being deemed satisfactory. While this approach certainly has merit in that it presents a standardized method of measuring a nation's development against global standards such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, it omits consideration of what the nation itself deems the most important development areas for prioritization. Therefore, in analyzing which development goals are most and least important, it is critical to center the opinions of people from the nation being analyzed. In doing so, one avoids the status-quo Western development notion that countries in the Global South do not know what is best for themselves. After decades of structural adjustment programs that failed to give global legitimacy to African governments, much less African citizens, as well as multiple instances of the United Nations ignoring appeals for African independence, it is time to seriously prioritize the African Union mantra: "African solutions to African problems." Thus, when deciding which goals are most and least important from the perspective of Senegalese development, the answer must be those goals that most closely align with Senegalese-generated development paradigms.

The 2014 Plan for an Emerging Senegal (PES) facilitates the identification of the three most important Sustainable Development Goals for Senegal, seeing as the PES is in fact

organized into three distinct pillars: bringing about structural transformation of the economy, promoting human capital, and enabling good governance (Presidency of Senegal 2021). In order to identify the most important Sustainable Development Goals, one must simply identify which ones are most relevant to the PES pillars.

The match between the first PES pillar and its corresponding Sustainable Development Goal is fairly clear-cut; out of the seventeen goals, "decent jobs and economic growth" best matches the paradigm of structural economic transformation. It is crucial to note that the development paradigm as authored by Senegal transcends the Sustainable Development Goal of economic growth to discuss structural transformation; clearly, the structural adjustment programs from the World Bank and IMF left much to be desired in terms of Senegalese autonomy and socioeconomic wellbeing. Presently, the development goal of economic transformation is crucial because it presents a chance for Senegal to create a sustainably healthy economy that is not as reliant on exports and foreign aid as in the past (Randle 2004). In her essay "Six Questions African Policymakers Must Answer Now" (2016), development scholar Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala highlights this crucial opportunity by asserting that economic diversification is a "vital part of the long-run challenge in Africa" that must be financed in large part by domestically mobilized resources instead of funds from abroad in order to be sustainable.

A 2021 report on economic diversification by researchers at Dakar's University Cheikh Anta Diop expounds upon the extensive benefits of pivoting away from reliance on manufacturing exports and incorporating tradable, moderately skilled industries in Senegal. These industries are known as industries without smokestacks (IWOSS) and include transportation, arts and entertainment, horticulture, and tourism (Mbaye et al. 2021). In addition to helping restructure the Senegalese economy, IWOSS show promise for closing the gender

gap; Figure 2 highlights how IWOSS have shown incredible employment growth for Senegalese women compared to the overall economy. Overall, the SDG of economic growth is crucial to Senegal because it both aligns with national priorities and provides an opportunity for unprecedented native-led structural adjustment.

The second PES pillar of promoting human capital is more difficult to

	Total	Male	Female
Overall economy	0.55	0.43	0.76
Total IWOSS	0.77	0.65	0.97

Figure 2. Senegalese employment elasticity (ability for economy to provide jobs as it grows) in 202l. Source: Mbaye et al. 2021

match to a specific SDG, seeing as it touches on many sectors of development. However, given the Presidency of Senegal's (2021) description of the pillar involving "a significant improvement of people's living conditions and a more sustained fight against social inequalities," it seems that the SDG of reduced inequalities best matches the Senegalese paradigm. While the reduction of socioeconomic inequalities such as rural-urban healthcare disparities or the gender pay gap is commonly perceived as the end result of a successfully developing state, equality is in fact a crucial catalyst for development. Globally, women currently earn slightly more than half of what men make on average (Ba 2020). This gender pay gap persists even in countries where women have the opportunity to work the exact same jobs as their male counterparts. However, if women were invited to play an identical role to men in labor markets, global annual GDP could increase by 26% over a period of ten years (Woetzel et al. 2015). In Senegal, progress towards gender parity would also likely catalyze sustainable economic diversification, because unemployed

Senegalese women tend to find formal work in IWOSS sectors such as human services and horticulture (Mbaye et al. 2021). Increased economic diversification would in turn lead to more abundant formal job options for those living in rural areas, which would then also decrease the significant Senegalese rural-urban wealth gap. Clearly, equality is a crucial paradigm for Senegal. Instead of following a merely linear trajectory, the path toward parity involves a cyclical process in which sustainably creates new opportunities for the Senegalese people and their socioeconomic stability. When it comes to equality, there is no finish line - only a continuum of self-perpetuating improvements. In other words, the end result of equality is sustainable development.

The third PES pillar, enabling good governance, is less general than its predecessor and thus more easily mappable to one specific Sustainable Development Goal: institutional strength, peace, and justice. In the description for its third development paradigm, the Presidency of Senegal (2021) explains that enabling good governance exists to "strengthen security and stability, protect rights and liberties, consolidate the rule of law and create a setting more conducive to social peace." While one may read this and wonder why institutional strength should be heavily prioritized given the historical stability of Senegal's democracy, it is important to remember that Senegal would have fallen into patterns of dictatorship and other forms of undemocratic rule without the intervention of civil society groups (Maguchu 2019). Furthermore, the only reason such civil society groups were allowed to exist and protest as much as they did was because of institutional civil liberties. Strong institutions and civil justice are generationally reinforcing; if civil liberties are taken away at one point in time, the citizenry's ability to take back its rights from undemocratic governance is dampened significantly. Additionally, good governance in Senegal is essential for economic stability. Since democratization became a

popular aid conditionality in the 1990s (Rijnierse 1993), the maintenance of good governance facilitates the continuation of foreign aid on which Senegal remains partially dependent.

None of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are irrelevant to Senegal, but some goals are certainly more immediate and relevant to both macro-level national interests and everyday citizens than others. Considering this, if forced to identify the least important development goal for Senegal, it would be responsible consumption and production. While this goal is certainly crucial to the longevity of national and global environmental health, several other countries including the United States are much farther from achieving it. For example, the United States' domestic material consumption was 20.3 metric tons per capita in 2017, as compared to Senegal's 3.2 metric tons per capita in the same year (UN 2021). Additionally, Senegal has been demonstrating steady decreases in material footprint and consumption per capita since 2010. Considering the absence of explicit goals regarding consumption and production in the key PES pillars and the nation's relative success at achieving them already, responsible consumption and production can be classified as least relevant to contemporary Senegal.

Reimagining SDGs in a Decolonial Context

While the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals were designed to be comprehensive, the list could benefit from the addition of one more goal geared specifically toward previously colonized countries, including Senegal: regaining sovereignty on the global stage amidst globalization. Even though most African nations gained independence in the 1960s, most have remained trapped in cycles of debt, structural adjustment, and recession that have rendered them vulnerable to predatory imperial policies and the negative consequences of globalization

(Ibrahim 2013). Without national sovereignty, Global South countries miss out on opportunities to create their own practical goals and innovations.

During the beginning of structural adjustment programs in the 1970s, international fiscal organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund saw African debt as the result of irresponsible governance. Consequently, these programs depleted resources from federal governments across the continent, forcing them to privatize formerly state-owned organizations (Logan & Mengisteab 1993). But after the end of the Cold War spurred a newfound idealization of multiparty democracy, democratization became not only an expectation of African governments but a conditionality for aid (Rijnierse 1993). Simply put, the expectations suddenly imposed on Africa from foreign investors were completely disconnected from previous paradigms and incongruent with the state of African government. In the process of being held accountable to unrealistic foreign paradigms, former colonies were unable to pioneer their own unique paths to sustainable development.

And as highlighted by Ibrahim (2013), this pattern continues today: "Some demands from international circles [including those for democracy, gender equality, poverty eradication, etc.] are not in line with contextual realities in Africa." Managing globalization and international expectations such as the Sustainable Development Goals demands stronger leadership and resource allocations to national governments so that formerly colonized regions such as Senegal may finally act in their own interests, with no strings attached.

Conclusion

In discussing the development trajectory of Global South countries such as Senegal, some quickly slip into an imperial epistemology that views any development as the product of foreign

influence and regression as the product of native incompetence. Under this method of thought, countries are often measured against international standards that are entirely incongruent with their domestic socioeconomic realities. In order to avoid this method of thought, one must take care to couple comparisons between national performance and international paradigms with native evaluations on the relevance of the paradigms themselves. It is highly likely that Global South countries have a clearer picture of their practical development trajectory than international circles that remain dominated by the Global North.

This paper attempted to apply this two-pronged approach to the topic of development in Senegal, pairing an evaluation of the nation's progress towards the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals with a discussion of the goals' relevance to preexisting Senegalese development projects and national interests. After evaluating Senegalese progress in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is clear that while Senegal has made considerable improvement in economic growth, poverty reduction, and hunger eradication, the country fails to progress towards gender parity and sustainable sanitation infrastructure. When pairing the results of this evaluation with the pillars of the native-directed Plan for an Emerging Senegal, one sees that the three Sustainable Development Goals most integral for contemporary Senegalese development are economic growth, reduced inequalities, and institutional strength. Keeping the same considerations in mind, the goal that emerged as least relevant to modern Senegal was responsible production and consumption.

However, among the multitude of UN Sustainable Development Goals, one measure of development was left to be desired for former colonies: gaining enough sovereignty to act purely out of national interest. While this at first may not seem conducive to global progress, it is important to remember that all Global North countries have had the option of acting entirely out

of national interest for decades, and have historically even disguised self-serving foreign policy as benevolent actions for global improvement. Meanwhile, most Global South countries are too dependent on foreign aid to ever have the option of acting completely out of national interest, an option that may well lead to more sustainable improvement than if the countries were to work only towards foreign-imposed standards. Ultimately, while the 17 SDGs provide important standards for global development, Senegal must strive to reach a point at which it has the same power as other countries to act as specified by its own national motto. With "one nation, one goal" at heart, truly sustainable development is sure to follow.

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The Path to Liberation: From Jainism to Secular Contexts

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Abstract

Jainism is an ancient faith tradition from the South Asian region that is practiced around the world. Jainism rests on the doctrine of non-violence (*ahimsa*) which makes up the most important belief for Jains to practice. Per the teachings of their Thirthankar Mahavira, Jains also place great importance on the ideas of the multiplicity of views (*anekantavada*) and non-possessiveness (*aparigraha*) in attempting to emulate his way of life that led him to moksha, the final release to liberation. While Jainism has the concept of liberation as an ultimate goal, it does differ from the idea of liberation in social justice movements and secular, nonreligious spaces. This examination, however, is to compare how similar the paths taken for each kind of liberation are, be it the one in Jainism or one toward secular social justice.

Introduction

The spiritual goal in the Jain tradition is the liberation from *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth

and death, that a soul otherwise continues in as a result of their actions, their *karma*. The twenty-

four tirthankaras, including Mahavira, ridded themselves of such karma, actions, to break from

the cycle of birth and death. As *jinas* (literally meaning "conquerors", the word refers to

liberated souls) like Mahavira have liberated themselves, the path he took in 427 BCE to reach

this state of *moksha*, infinite bliss, is a prescribed one for Jains that can be seen in the practices

and views of Jain ascetics and laypeople, alike.

In a western, nonreligious sense, liberation is perceived as the attainment of equal

freedoms, broken away from oppression (Merriam-Webster). Social justice, precisely "the

distribution of equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities to everyone," would

be a medium for people to attain equal freedoms and dismantle forms of oppression (Merriam-

Webster). Thus, the nonreligious path to liberation in a western sense is this dismantling of

oppressive systems that leave people disenfranchised, whether it is because of their gender,

economic class, or the place they live. As a result of dismantling oppressive systems through

social justice, people are enfranchised with equal distributions of rights and freedoms.

There are distinctions in how liberation is defined in nonreligous contexts and Jainism..

In Jainism, it is an emancipation from the cycle of rebirth and the attainment of ultimate bliss. In

a nonreligious sense, liberation is like an emancipation from oppression and attainment of

freedom. The differences lie in the Jain tradition's importance of achieving *moksha* as the end

goal of salvation, also characterized as "liberation" although different from the secular meaning.

In the modern sense, striving for social justice is a path for a nonreligious liberation.

Through examining the practices and beliefs held by the Jain tradition, the path to liberation in the Jain sense can be further dissected to understand: *How the Jain path to liberation compares to the nonreligious path to liberation?* To answer this question, examples of peace resolution, sustainability, expression, and equity, as seen in Jain practices, scriptures, and in stories of Thirthankar Mahavira's life, show the path to a liberation in *moksha* that Jains follow. These findings will be compared to modern social justice ideas that lead to a nonreligious liberation that is defined differently from its meaning in Jainism.

I. **Resolution & Peace**

The Jain tradition's non-violent teachings and practices work to establish peace, whether it is punishment and repentance or cessation of violent conflict. These practices in Jainism are also prevalent in modern social justice efforts to democratize social and political rights, irrespective of proximity to the Jain faith. Modern efforts to bring about peaceful solutions in criminal justice reform and foreign diplomacy prove similar in many ways to Jain practices. There can be many similarities drawn with and without a Jain lens on these issues.

The idea of criminal justice reform has made its way through modern discourse for a variety of purposes, be it legal proceedings or events of high magnitude. The *Black Lives Matter* movement is one example of a call for social justice and reform. Following disparate mass incarceration and failed public safety schemes, many organizations like *Black Lives Matter* lead calls to implement restorative justice, an effort to dismantle oppression caused by policing and reform the idea of punishment in seeking public safety (Hines et al, 2020). Restorative justice is a form of punishment centered around self-reflection and cognizance. In a restorative justice system, offenders are to take accountability for their actions, understand the harm caused by their actions, and attempt opportunities to rehabilitate themselves from offenders to equal citizens

(Pangandian, 2018). In Jainism, the practice of *pratikraman* also puts repentance and rehabilitation at its forefront. *Pratikraman*, directly meaning "ritual repentance," takes accountability for a wide variety of faults one has committed in the past (Dundas 171). Pratikraman is often a mode of repenting any forms of violence one may have caused to other souls. While restorative justice is seen as a method of bettering the path to an emancipating liberation of oppressed people, *pratikraman* is a method for Jains to better their path to liberation from the cycle of samsara. Restorative justice, and the repentance model, maintains humanity to those who have wronged, and it has proven to be more effective than traditional incarceration practices (Saulnier et al, 2005). Similarly, the importance of repentance in *pratikraman* is said to shed karmic accumulation and bring a soul further in their path to liberation. Even Thirthankar Mahavir prescribed the importance of confession, repentance and redemptive penance in the *Acharanga Sutra*. Hence, the idea of punishment resolution under both, a social justice lens and a Jain lens, is of repentance and redemption.

Another facet of resolution in modern conflicts is the arising of war and global violence. Jainism has a very clear focus on the idea of nonviolence, *ahimsa*, that is to be practiced amongst humans, but even to the minutest of life forms. Hence, Jains abstain from meat, dairy, and even root vegetables due to the high density of microorganism cells present in them. This importance on non-violence does also transfer to the Jain discussion on war. The *Acharanga Sutra* does forbid ascetics from adopting war activity. Similarly, the *Tattvartha Sutra* prescribes lay people to adhere to unlimited nonviolence, tolerance and reverence of life (Sethia, 2004, page 5). Commentary by two scholars on this topic, Kim Scoog and Padmanand Jaini, differ from each other in the Jain view of war. Scoog believes lay people are allowed to partake in warfare as a last resort, with detachment from the actions and assurance that innocent lives remain protected.

Jaini opines that warfare cannot be allowed as any entertainment of violence halts a soul's

spiritual progress to liberation (Sethia, 2004, page 5). Regardless of the two opinions, both of

their definitions contradict modern warfare. In modern wars following September 11, 2001 in

Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, and Pakistan, it is estimated that more than 4.5 million innocent

civilians have succumbed due to war (Brown University, 2023). That number does not include

wars, unrelated to the 9/11 retributions, in Vietnam, Africa, Ukraine, Palestine and many more.

In recent social justice, anti-war activism has also been prevalent in fighting for political

liberation. Anti-war movements have long-pushed, and continue to push, for ceasefires in war

zones as a prescription to ensure a lasting political liberation and resolution to conflict (Gillan,

2008). Furthermore, studies have in fact shown for cessation of hostilities and war to in fact

foster political liberation and lasting peace (Karakus et al, 2023). Hence, there is a shared view

on the path to liberation, depending on how that is defined, when it comes to the idea of war and

retribution.

Whether conflict resolution, at a micro-level with the idea of punishment and criminal

justice or at a macro-view of warfare and global peace, the Jain view and the social justice view

do align. The path to liberation in moksha is one of repentance and non-violence, as is also the

path to a civil and political liberation in the case made by social justice movements. Thus, there

are similarities in how both paths stray from practices of retribution, and rather see the idea of

rehabilitative conflict resolution as part of the paths to their respective forms of liberation.

II. **Sustainability**

Non-possessiveness is another core basic principle of the Jain tradition that leads lay

people and ascetics to remove themselves from capitalism and material wealth, to focus on a

minimalistic lifestyle as they progress on their path to a spiritual liberation. These minimalistic

practices have also been popularized in modern society with ideas of sustainability as a medium of social justice in achieving better equality and social liberation for people facing negative impacts of capitalistic materialism. This regard for non-possessiveness in the Jain tradition can be seen in the lifestyles of ascetics and the practices of lay people.

Asceticism in Jainism is heavily reliant on forgoing all materialism, removing one's self from a world of capitalism, and adopting more sustainable practices. The process in which one becomes an ascetic includes forgoing all of one's belongings. As seen in *Vihara: A Path to Salvation* the life of ascetics can be seen vividly. Jain asceticism forgoes use of motor transportation and relies on walking. They also limit how much they own, as seen in *Objects of Asceticism.* Furthermore, *The Outfit of Jain Nuns* highlights the garb of monastics, and how it is limited to just a few garments, with Digambara male monks not even adorning any clothing. The lifestyles of Jain monastics is very minimalistic, and even focuses on taking actions that cause the least impact. The *Acharanga Sutra* prescribes ascetics to only consume food and water that is of excess, rather than anything specially prepared for them. As seen in *A Day in the Life of a Jain Ascetic,* Jain monks and nuns are rather removed from a capitalistic materialism. They live extremely environmentally-conscious lives in making the least impact with their actions. That lifestyle is a part of their paths to liberation as Jain ascetics. In the nonreligious sense where Jainism and asceticism are absent, these beliefs in minimalism and dissolution of capitalism are still prevalent. There are social justice movements occuring to increase walkability so that people can abandon motor vehicles and benefit their environment (Al-Ghamdi et al, 2021). People, regardless of faith belief, are choosing to walk more, instead of driving, without having any knowledge of Jain ascetics, to lower their impact on their environment. Additionally, scholars

define a "lifestyle against accumulation" that people adopt with their lifestyle choices like the clothes they wear and food they eat to limit possessions (Meissner, 2019).

The Jain way of life also has a deep focus on vegetarianism and veganism, as they are also popularized ways of life in the modern world. Jains value the importance of life as part of belief in *ahimsa*, and thus are forbidden from consuming any form of meat (Dundas 176). Many Jains often go vegan to avoid animal cruelty and other impacts caused by the production of animal products (Dickstein et al, 2021). Any form of violence committed is a hindrance in the path of a Jain to liberation, which is why many forgo meat and dairy to avoid violence committed toward animals. While the drive of the change varies, transition to vegan and plant-based lifestyles has popularized. A lot of this shift to veganism is credited to environmental concerns of dairy and meat production (Pendergrast, 2016). Between 2005 and 2007, meat and dairy production led to nearly 75% of food-related greenhouse gas emissions (Aveyard et al, 2018). These impacts alarm environmental justice efforts to also subscribe to vegetarian and vegan ways of life, as Jains do.

Although the path to a Jain liberation has been made clear with the practices of minimalism and vegetarianism, there is also a path to liberation when it comes to environmentalism. The strive for environmental justice is also a matter of social justice, in democratizing equal rights to a clean and sustainable environment for all. With environmental issues that exist, the impacts of them are not equal (Begun et al, 2016). Environmental impacts are disparate in affecting some people over others, which is why environmental work is done to ensure liberation of those people more impacted. Jains and environmental advocates continue practicing both in an effort to achieve their respective forms of liberation.

III.   Speech & Expression

. The freedom of speech and expression has been critical to the founding of American democracy, in being the United States very first amendment. It is also a method Jains have used in order to practice their religion as they progress on a path to spiritual liberation. The idea of protest and freedom of expression is a fundamental mechanism for political liberation, and a tool many social justice movements employ. The value of free expression and speech relies on the sharing of viewpoints and being non-absolute, which Jainism characterizes as *anekantavada*.

The Jain way of life in a present sense has faced various political battles in preserving many of its practices. *Sallekhana*, or fast until death, is a popular end-of-life practice amongst Jains that is continuously threatened. Although it has been viewed by critics as a form of murder or self-harm, the film *The Crow and the Palm Fruit* depicts the practice up close in an effort to disapprove these misconceptions. The film also shows the protests that Jains participated in to defend this practice and keep it legal. Jains partook in many acts of nonviolent civil disobedience and protest in order to challenge petitions aiming to rule *sallekhana* unconstitutional in India (Chase, 2022). Another prominent practice by Jains, as seen in *Vihara: A Path to Salvation* is pilgrimage to various sites, including the *Shatrunjaya* in Gujarat, India. When there were issues with the Indian government in protecting these sites from avoidable destruction, the Jain community protested to protect these pilgrimage sites. It still remained nonviolent, but also made an impact in shutting down national landmarks and busy roads. Jains have employed their speech, expression, and civil disobedience to protect practices that put them on a path to spiritual liberation like *sallekhana* and pilgrimage.

In the modern, western, sense, the idea of free speech and protest is a cornerstone of democracy and a tool employed for political liberation. In the United States, the founders

enabled a right to expression as the very first amendment in the Constitution, protecting speech, religious practice, and nonviolent protest (National Constitution Center). When various forms of oppression have continued, civil disobedience has been a primary tool to liberation. In the American Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King in the United States employed the right to nonviolent protest in order to emancipate people of color from unjust segregation and other kinds of oppression (Fairclough, 1986). The use of nonviolent expression was part of the path to political liberation for people of color.

The nonreligious path to liberation, as the Jain path to liberation, relies on the exchange of viewpoints, through free speech, open expression, to be voiced. Jains, as have modern activists like Dr. King, have enabled the exchange of their own viewpoint in order to be on a path to their respective liberations.

IV.   Equality

Through the life of the twenty-fourth tirthankara Mahavira, along with Jain scripture, there is a case made as to the importance of establishing equality to be on the path to a spiritual liberation. The idea of equality is, in itself, defining the meaning of nonreligious liberation that modern social justice movements strive for. In the Jain sense, there are specific examples from gender to caste that show the importance of maintaining equality in one's path to liberation in *moksha*.

Mahavira lived in the 6th Century BCE, and attained liberation upon emancipating himself from the cycle of rebirth. His life is one revered by Jains as an example of a successful path to it. Jainism arose as a rejection to ideas of supremacy over others (Srinivas, 2003). Mahavira, despite being born in the venerated warrior caste, renounced it in seeking liberation (Dundas 21). In addition to refuting the idea of caste and supremacy related to it, Mahavira also

ordained a woman, Chandanbala, as one of his first disciples, in paving the way for gender

equality (Sethi, 2009). Mahavira was mainly concerned with his own path to salvation, however

part of that path was the renouncal of caste and acceptance of gender equality. Social justice

movements have also strived for equality of women, those in poverty, and other oppressed

groups in an effort to liberate them in a nonreligious sense. While Mahavira brought about these

reforms in his life to ultimately reach liberation in *moksha*, nonreligious liberation of women and

castes is to ultimately expand and equalize the rights of these groups.

The idea of discrimination is also one that is directly addressed in Jain scriptures. The

Dasavaikalik Sutra, transcribed by one of Mahavira's early disciples, offers an outline on the

path to spiritual liberation and attainment of *moksha*. An important line from this scripture is

"Asamvibhagi Nahu Tassa Mokkho" (Dasavaikalika Sutra 9.2.22). Jain ascetic Samani Rohini

Pragya translates this to "liberation is impossible for those who discriminate" (Samani Rohini

Pragya, 2019). This excerpt of scripture synthesizes how critical the dismantlement of

discrimination is for the path to liberation, that that path is impossible with continued

discrimination. A dismantling of discrimination and unequal distribution of rights is exactly what

movements of social justice strive for as nonreligious liberation, per its definition, is impossible

when the political, economic, and social rights of people are discriminately distributed.

Conclusion

Through examples of conflict resolution, sustainability, free expression, and equity, there

are a lot of similarities in the practices and beliefs of social justice movements and the Jain

tradition. The idea of liberation is very different amongst both, where it is a form of an end in

Jainism, and rather a goal that continues in a nonreligious context. However, examining the four

areas show that the path to both kinds of liberation has alignment in being: non-violent, non-

possessive, non-absolute, and equitable. Jain scriptures, practices, beliefs, and the life of their most prominent fordmaker Thirthankara Mahavir show this path to *moksha*. That path is able to be compared with the idea of a modern, nonreligious liberation that emancipates people that are oppressed through various social justice movements related to criminal justice, pacifism, environmental justice, civil rights, and equality. There is lots of overlap suggested between Jainism and movements of social justice showing lots of similarity. Although the idea of liberation may differ as to whether it is attainment of moksha or attainment of equal freedoms, it is clear that there is definite alignment on the path one takes for both kinds of them.

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Glossary

- **Liberation (Jainism):** Transcendence of a soul to moksha by exiting the cycle of rebirth through removal of karma

- **Liberation (Secular, Nonreligious):** attainment of equal freedoms, broken away from oppression

- **Social Justice:** distribution of equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities to everyone

A Glimpse into America's Liberal Democracy – Stunting Womens' Personhood

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INTRODUCTION

Personhood, as examined by Martha Nussbaum, is defined as "autonomy, self respect, and a sense of fulfillment and achievement" (Nussbaum 56). In this paper, we extrapolate this definition of personhood to modern conceptions of democracy. Hence, democratic personhood would be defined as autonomy, self-respect, and sense of fulfillment through the representative means of political representation and equal economic opportunity. With a liberal feminist lens, ideally, democratic personhood can be achieved. But is this the reality of our current political and social institutions?

In this paper, we contend that without full political and equality of economic opportunity, women cannot achieve the full sense of personhood that is championed in liberal democracy. Rooted in philosophical ideals and current events, we will examine the link between women and democracy through an economic, political, and philosophical lens. Along with other relevant data, we will use the recently passed *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision, which overturned the landmark case *Roe v. Wade*, to examine how this case adversely affects and hinders women economically. For the political lens, we will examine the role that women of color and Black women in particular play despite targeted voter oppression, since voting is a quintessential part of democracy. Finally, we will run through philosophical assumptions this paper is built upon and examine their potential objections. Ultimately, through this exploration

with an economic, political, and philosophical framework, we aim to demonstrate how women's personhood within the scope of American democracy is significantly limited.

ECONOMIC LENS

Abortion is largely a personal choice but has political, economic, and social ramifications. While economic opportunity need not account for 'choices,' abortion is a unique case in which it unjustly burdens the women rather than the men involved in conception, spurring the need for a critical eye. With the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* through *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization,* Justice Stephen Breyer pointed out in his dissenting opinion of the *Dobbs* case that "respecting a woman as an autonomous being, and granting her full equality, meant giving her a substantial choice over this most personal and most consequential of all life decisions," (Supreme Court). Here, Justice Breyer is echoing the idea of democratic personhood, or that in order to be a fully 'autonomous being in society,' abortion is necessary. Since the definition posed of democratic personhood is "autonomy, self respect, and a sense of fulfillment and achievement," we will explore how the violation of equality of economic opportunity that restricting abortion access provides consequently violates the autonomy needed for democratic personhood.

The quantifiable aspects of this decision are its economic consequences. *The Turnaway Study* is an unparalleled longitudinal study that focused on the effects of abortion on women's finances and can provide key data on why restricting abortion hinders economic opportunity. In this study, Dr. Diane Greene Foster, a professor and researcher in reproductive health, collaborated with abortion clinics to create two groups. These clinics were chosen because they had the latest gestational limit, or the time within abortion is permitted, within a 150-mile. Women who were up to 3 weeks over the gestational period were called the "Turnaway group,"

as they were 'turned away' when seeking an abortion. Women who were within 2 weeks before the limit were the "Near Limit"' group. The Near Limit group acted as the control, while the Turnaway group was the experimental. They surveyed these women over a period of five years and through a further study, "The Economic Consequences of Being Denied an Abortion," by Dr. Sarah Miller, Dr. Laura Wherry and Dr. Diane Greene Foster, the authors linked the results of the study to credit report data.

      "The Economic Consequences" found that "being denied an abortion has large and persistent negative effects on a woman's financial well-being" (Miller et al). For the women as analyzed through credit scores "unpaid debts that are 20 or more days past due more than double in size, and…negative events such as evictions and bankruptcies increases substantially" for the Turnaway group (Miller et al). Below, this can be seen graphically. With zero on the x-axis representing the moment the Near Limit group got an abortion, or the Turnaway group being denied one, the effects on the financial statuses over the next 5 years are displayed. In graph D for example, it seems that the Turnaway group, who is already in a worse financial situation than the Near Limit group, has past due debts that are exacerbated when being denied an abortion.

Figure A4: Financial Distress Component Outcomes Relative to Event Time, for the Turnaway Group (Green) and Near Limit Group (Blue)

(a) Subprime

(b) Collections

(c) Public Records

(d) Past Due
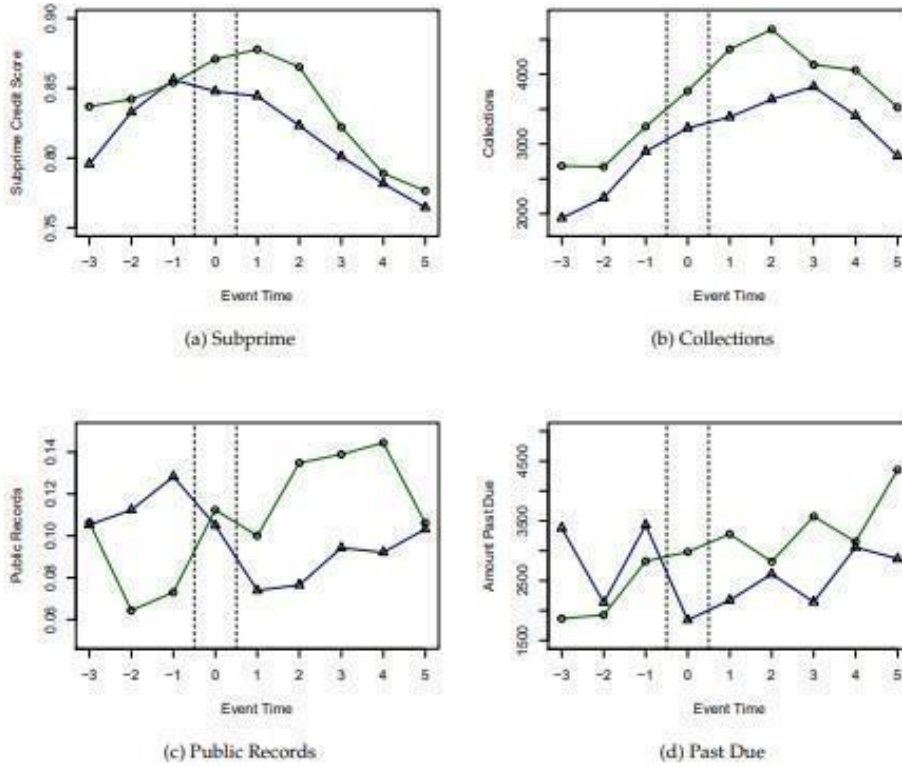
Note: This figure plots average outcomes relative to event time for the Turnaway group (green with circle points) and the Near Limit group (blue with triangle points).

The Economist took these results shown above, and but them succinctly put it in a visual:

Very distressing

United States, financial distress on women who were denied an abortion*

Standard deviation

↑ Increase in financial distress

Confidence interval

Years before/after birth
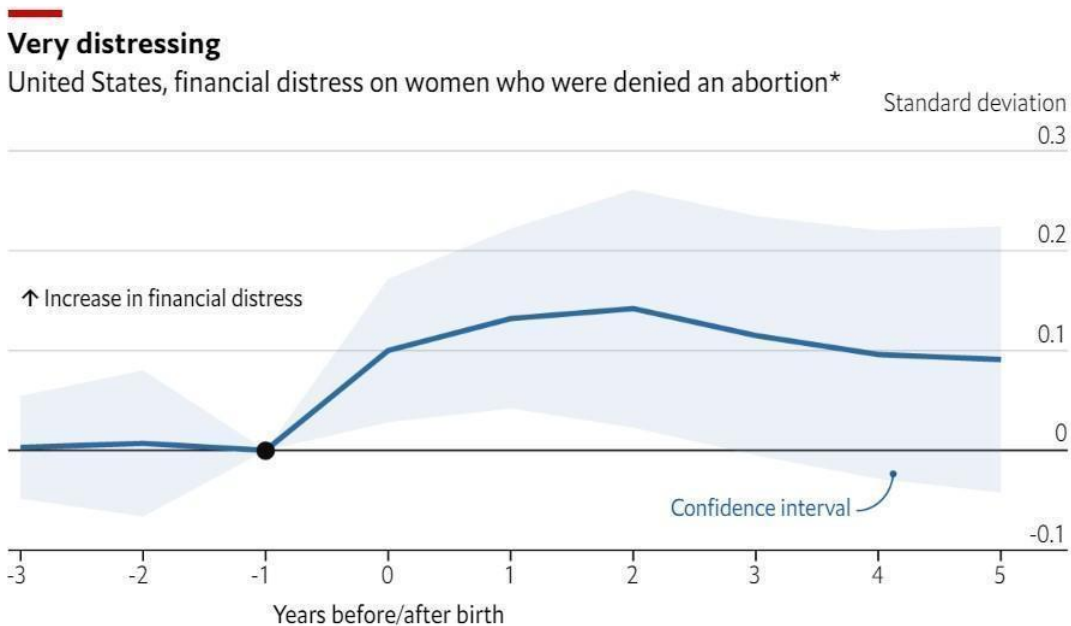
Source: "The economic consequences of being denied an abortion", by S. Miller, L. R. Wherry and D. G. Foster, *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*

*Compared to the year immediately prior to birth

Prominent economists, such as Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen, have already spoken out about the lack of economic equality women face as a result of this study. Secretary Yellen commented that " 'eliminating the right of women to make decisions about and when and whether to have children would have very damaging effects on the economy,' " ("Being Denied"). Wherry, one of the authors of the study, said that America " 'should expect to see more women in financial distress' " should *Roe* get overturned ("Being Denied"). Two weeks later, it did. While some economic disparities are closing for women, abortion is just one of many barriers that are remaining unchanged or getting worse for women in having full economic opportunity, and therefore personhood, in American democracy.

There is also a plethora of data outlining the continuing economic challenges for women that are integral to their autonomy needed to achieve full democratic personhood. More women are enrolled in four-year colleges, yet they disproportionately share less of the income wealth (Kochhar). Additionally, an intersectional perspective must be kept in this discussion, as Black

and Indigenous women make significantly less than White and Asian women, but all groups make less than white men (Kochhar). Further, many 'pink collar' jobs, or jobs traditionally worked by women such as teaching or nursing are vastly underpaid for their work (Ranciere).

Outside of the workplace, familial responsibilities upon women also result in what is known as the "child penalty," or the amount of income lost due to women having children. This phenomenon largely does not affect men, as shown below. Showing both incomes for men and women in the United States and United Kingdom, it is evident that the gap between the lines representing men and women exemplifies the gender gap.

Figure 2: Child Penalties in Earnings in English-Speaking Countries
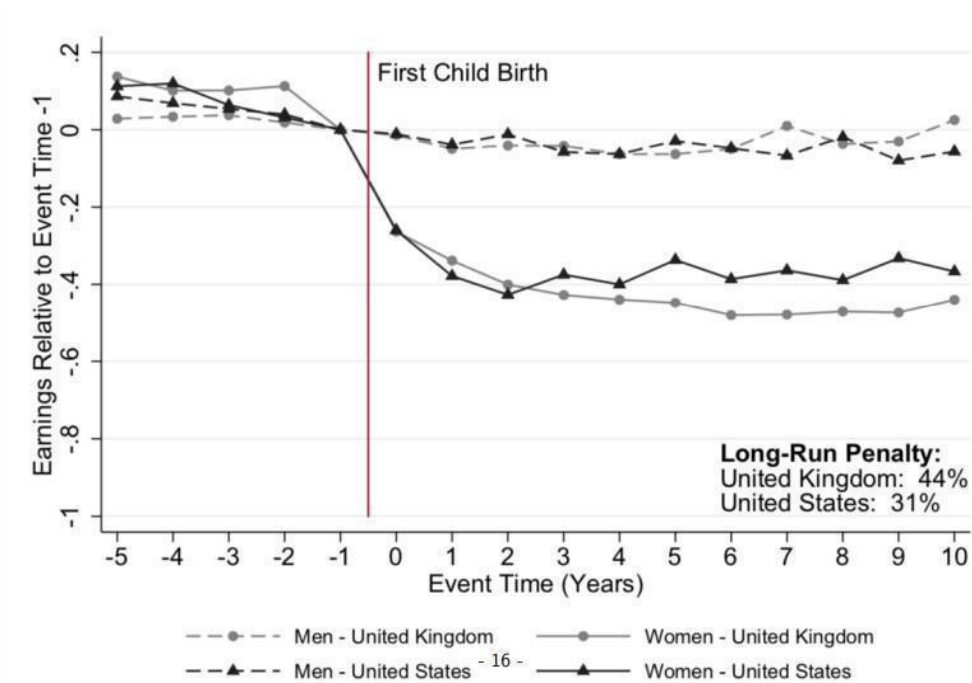
Unless women's work can be valued to the same amount as their male counterparts, women will not have the equal economic opportunity needed to achieve personhood in a healthy democracy. Without having the same economic opportunity as men, women cannot fully achieve the

autonomy needed for personhood, but could also contribute to other aspects of personhood as defined by Nussbaum, such as self respect or sense of achievement.

There are policy solutions that are proposed to combat these disappointing data points. Some countries have introduced a 'paternity leave' in addition to maternity leave to encourage men to have a more active role as fathers and improve the chances of mothers returning to the labor market (Canaan).

The authors of *The Turnaway Study* also suggest other actions by policymakers. Before the overturning of *Roe*, the authors suggested relaxing the gestational limits already in place. Now, they may need to advocate for the allowance of abortion at all first. Other common barriers include travel and procedure costs. Making care more available by increasing the number of clinicians or having insurance cover the cost of the procedure could minimize these obstacles. The challenge of cost is furthered by legislation such as the Hyde Amendment, which dictates medical funds, like Medicaid, cannot be used on abortion. Thus, those that need federal healthcare and cannot afford an abortion are expected to be able to afford a child ("Access Denied"). Lastly, policymakers can craft legislation that are preventative in nature, such as quality sex education and widespread access to healthcare resources and contraceptives.

Justice Stephen Breyer once again writes in the dissenting opinion of the *Dobbs* case that "at the moment of fertilization, a woman has no right to speak of " (Supreme Court). His quote shows the saliency of policymakers following the prescriptions made in this paper to remedy the gap between the economic opportunity between men and women, and uphold their commitments to democracy to ensure full democratic personhood for women.

POLITICAL LENS

Women stand as a key interest group within the context of liberal democracy. The legislative and judicial system can be utilized as instruments to subvert incremental reform that favors women, like those already discussed in the *Dobbs* case. Catherine MacKinnon, a prominent feminist and political activist, poses further questions about the role of the state and their respective powers within the realm of feminism. Are women fairly represented in legislative and judicial decisions? How, if at all, are certain voting policies curtailing personhood among women of color? With an intersectional frame in mind, we aim to show how social and political structures reduce personhood and the dynamic role that women of color play in supporting a liberal democratic system.

MacKinnon answers some of these questions on her own. She observes that women share problems of "mobilization and representation, exit and voice, and sustaining incremental gains and losses" (MacKinnon 642). She attributes this to the design of the state and law which becomes a "legitimi[zes] ideology, [and the] use of the legal system [as] a form of utopian idealism or gradualist reform, each apparent gain deceptive or co-optive, and each loss is inevitable" (MacKinnon 642). When a legal system does not embody an ideology that is cognizant of intersectional feminist concerns, it can impinge on the democratic personhood of women. Recalling Nussbaum's definition of 'autonomy, self respect, and sense of achievement and fulfillment,' if the legal and electoral system does not fairly account for women's votes, it deteriorates their autonomy and self respect as a voter, and their sense of fulfillment in regards to the efficacy of their vote.

One example of how the current electoral system is not cognizant of women's votes is through the election of and by women, especially Black women, who are leading the fight in

democracy and liberalism to ultimately provide a comprehensive space to develop personhood. Despite the United States's legacy of discriminatory voting practices, Black women and other women of color consistently mobilize to vote in their own self interest, unlike their white counterparts; they are an electoral powerhouse. Black women are one of the most active voting blocs in the electorate (Solomon et al 2019). Black women also continue to vote at some of the highest rates and are the "largest and most politically active demographic of women of color voters" (ibid). They are more likely than any other ethnic group of women to encourage paths of legal status and favor stricter gun violence prevention measures (ibid). Despite voter turnout and organizing, we must ask: Why are the results consistently not favoring women of color, and what dominating structures in place perpetuate the losses?

Data points to high voter suppression or gerrymandering that hinders the representative Black vote. At the local and state legislative levels, "under-representation of [black people] is almost entirely due to the under-representation of black women (Darcy 2008). Remnants of voter suppression tactics remain, from social and political institutions based in white supremacist culture: pay-to-vote, long waiting periods, photo ID enforcement, provisional ballots, or even the electoral college process (Laroche 2022). The vast majority of twenty-seven states with voter ID laws have "Republican-controlled state legislatures that have argued for stricter laws [have the] intent and effect of diluting minority votes and weakening minority political power (Shah et al. 2021). The barriers to entry especially for individuals with an incarcerated history perpetuate the challenges to accessing voting. Black women make up about 29 percent of incarcerated women, despite only making up 13 percent of women in the United States (Mason). With these statistics in mind, the policies of these political institutions are disenfranchising rather than protective.

Finally, the erosion of voter confidence points to the cultural distrust in the legal system, political process, voting, and government aid (Laroche 2022). The outcome of distrust and suppression develops a sense of legal estrangement where the law and its enforcement "signals to marginalized groups that they are not fully part of American society– that they are not imbued with all the freedoms and entitlements that flow to other Americans, such as dignity, safety, dreams, health, and a political voice" (Laroche 2022).

With an intersectional and political lens in mind, it is clear that women, black women in particular, have a stunted representative voice due to current biased frameworks and policies in place. Because the Black vote, and therefore women's vote is often stunted from antiquated policies, they do not enjoy the same and equal political power that is promised in a democracy. Consequently, the conception of democratic personhood, or 'autonomy, self-respect, and sense of achievement and fulfillment' is eroded. There is no autonomy when a vote is deliberately erased, and there is no self-respect or achievement when efforts to mobilize, voter, and policymakers are intentionally stunted.

PHILOSOPHICAL OBJECTIONS

While this paper functions under the assumption that changing detrimental policies may start remedying the discrimination in the political and economic opportunity that is essential to the concept of democratic personhood, some feminist philosophers believe that it may not be the panacea that some make it out to be.

The radical feminist ideology believes that institutions themselves are too entrenched in patriarchal notions, so that any reform short of redoing the bases of these institutions would be ineffective. So, suggestions such as paternity leave, for example, would not solve the question of

women in the labor market so long as the market is held up by social and cultural standards and the subsequent laws that are made through those standards.

Others critique the idea of liberalism itself, and whether it is compatible with feminism. One challenge against liberalism is that it is too individualistic and "unfairly subordinates the value to be attached to community and to collective social entities such as families, groups, and classes" (Nussbaum 58). In an ideal situation, individualism along with liberalism would be a positive for feminists; it would advocate for self-sufficiency and agency. Instead, the tenets of liberal democracies are being used for valuing women "primarily for their contribution as reproducers and caregivers rather than as sources of agency and worth in their own right women are valued" (63). This is shown as the act of choice is removed for women and a state regulation of the body is implemented as demonstrated by the *Dobbs* decision.

These confrontations against liberalism are inherently connected to the defects of liberalism promoting women's issues. In the interest of progress, can liberalism and democracy actualize the goals of personhood and feminism? It appears that the response can arguably be negative, and would contend that the challenges against liberalism as explored in Nussbaum hold validity.

CONCLUSION

Through analyses of personhood in democracy, it is clear from a political and economic lens that current policies do not honor the expectations in a full democracy like the United States. Additionally, not all discrimination is equal. Through the lens of intersectionality, it is clear that some, like Black and Indigenous women, are more disadvantaged than others due lived experiences. In the political right to vote in a democracy, voter suppression occurs, targeting women of color disproportionately. Further, while abortions and other economic policies affect

all women, studies document increased rates of high school graduation, college attendance and employment for Black women during times of increased abortion access (Miller et al). It thus stands to reason that with the recession of these policies, they would also stand much to lose.

The ideology of liberal feminism is one that advocates for political activism in order to make democracies be more equitable between all people. Of course, liberal feminism is just one of many branches of feminism, some of which disparage the institutions that liberal feminists want to use to inspire change. As this paper is in support of democracy and ensuring that feminism has a role, it utilizes the ideals of liberal feminism when recognizing the inequities in policy today and suggesting remedies for a more equitable future. But perhaps it is naive to think that one day American democracy can actually deliver on its promises of the right for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for all. Or perhaps Mill is correct when he states that "the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal" (Mill 67).

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How Much Are You Paying? Grocery Store Price Disparities and Potential Solutions at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

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Abstract

In the perfect competition economic model, all firms in a market sell their goods for the same price at which the average cost to produce the goods is minimized. Consumers would not buy from any firm selling above this price point as other firms would be selling at the lower price, and firms would not operate below this price as doing so would result in an economic loss. While this model is helpful, it relies on assumptions that simplify real-world conditions, one of which is the absence of transaction costs: consumers know the prices at all firms and can switch buying between firms at no cost. This paper examines how transaction costs create price disparities in grocery stores in the Urbana-Champaign area. The results find that local grocery stores set prices at statistically significantly higher levels than their non-local competitors, most likely due to consumer transaction costs. This study considers how this disparity could be remedied through local government intervention as a means to increase incentive in the market and how new policy can be implemented effectively.

Introduction

For many University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign students, shopping is a local endeavor: some do not have a car to drive elsewhere, while others do not have the time. This paper will explore how this consumer trait affects the grocery market in the Urbana-Champaign area. The analysis will consider one non-local and two local grocery stores and their pricing for a specific basket of common food goods. The researcher of this paper believes that local firms in this market charge higher prices than non-local firms due to considerable consumer transaction costs, and this paper seeks to find out the validity of this belief via a statistical analysis. What can be done should there be a disparity is then discussed.

Research Methodology

The test for this belief requires proof of significant price differences in the market for food, along with reasoning for transaction costs being the source of said price differences.

To test for significant price differences, 30 goods that represent a broad selection of grocery store items that students would reasonably expect firms to sell in this market (common goods) were analyzed. Given this, the selection process for these goods was not entirely random, which is necessary for conducting statistical analyses with a normal distribution model. However, normal probability plots of these data (see fig. 1 and fig. 2) imply a normal enough set with which one can conduct statistical analyses.[1] Similarly, although the data all fit the category of "common goods," this should not impact independence in the statistical analysis; each

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[1] A normal probability plot is an informal way to test for the assumption of normality before running statistical tests. In general, a plot that follows a positive, roughly linear path implies a normal distribution. Fig. 1 and fig. 2 show slight curves, but ones not extreme enough to prevent statistical analyses in the opinion of the researcher.

observation of price is not influenced by, nor does it influence the sampling of, any other observation of price. Another assumption is that the 30 goods make up less than 10% of all goods sold at these firms. There are also no extreme outliers. With these assumptions met, a hypothesis test is appropriate. The prices for all goods from all firms were checked on the same day to avoid confounding factors. The sale or temporary discount prices were collected. However, to measure prices consumers generally pay, only the lowest non-sale prices of these goods were used for statistical tests. A list of these goods and their lowest prices is in table 1.

The Campustown Target on Green Street (Target), the County Market on Stoughton Street (County Market), and the Meijer on Prospect Avenue (Meijer) are the firms analyzed in this paper. Target and County Market are close to the UIUC campus, in residential zones, and within walking or biking distance for many students; therefore, they are considered local in this analysis. Meijer is further away from campus, serves the broader Champaign community, and is situated in a commercial district; it is therefore considered non-local. These three firms were selected because they offer representation for local and non-local firms, are all in Champaign, and are all relatively well-known by students based on interpersonal interactions.[2]

<div align="center">

Results

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The raw data and normal probability plots are provided in this section. Table 1 provides the goods and the lowest prices from each firm. Table 2 shows the difference in prices as a percent increase in decimal form between the firms listed in said table. Figure 1 and figure 2 are the normal probability plots associated with the data from table 2.

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[2] These traits are important in keeping independence and limiting confounding variables.

Table 1

Goods and Lowest Prices: Collected November 15th, 2023[a]

Good (Qualifiers)	County Market	Target	Meijer
Bananas (1 lb.)	0.59	0.56	0.56
Bread (White, 20 oz.)	1.69	1.39	1.39
Buns (Hamburger, 8)	1.59	1.49	1.39
Buns (Hot Dog, 8)	1.59	1.49	1.39
Butter (Any, 1 lb.)	6.49	4.39	3.99
Cheese (Any Block, 8oz)	3.79	2.19	2.29
Chicken Noodle Soup (Condensed, Not Family Size)	0.79	1.39	0.79
Eggs (Large, Dozen)	1.99	1.19	1.19
Flour (All Purpose, 5 lb.)	3.09	2.49	2.49
Fries (Steak, 28 oz.)	3.69	4.69	3.99
Ground Beef (73/27, 1 lb.)	4.79	5.79	4.79
Hot Dogs (Any, 8)	2.49	1.49	1.19
Ice Cream (Vanilla, 48 oz.)	5.49	3.49	2.99
Jelly (Grape, 18 oz.)	2.79	2.19	1.99
Ketchup (20 oz.)	1.99	1.49	1.79
Marinara Sauce (24 oz.)	2.29	1.79	1.59
Milk (Any, Gallon)	2.99	2.59	2.62
Mustard (Yellow, 8 oz.)	1.59	0.85	0.69
Onion (White, 1 lb.)	1.49	1.59	1.19

Good (Qualifiers)	County Market	Target	Meijer
Oranges (1)	1.39	0.99	1.09
Pancake Mix (Plain, 32 oz.)	2.59	3.19	2.19
Peanut Butter (16 oz.)	1.89	2.19	2.15
Pepper (Ground Black, 3 oz.)	3.99	3.69	3.59
Pizza (Cheese, Not Single Serve)	3.99	3.99	3.49
Potatoes (Russet, 1 lb.)	0.99	1.98	1.4
Salt (Iodized, 26 oz.)	0.89	0.69	0.79
Spaghetti (Regular, 16 oz.)	1.25	0.99	1.09
Strawberries (1 lb.)	5.99	4.99	4.49
Sugar (White Granulated, 4 lb.)	3.39	3.69	3.29
Syrup (Any, 24 oz.)	3.19	2.29	2.39

a. Note: All data collected via in-person observations from Target, County Market, and Meijer.

Table 2

Percent Increase Between Local and Non-Local Firms

Good (Qualifiers)	Meijer, County Market[a]	Meijer, Target
Bananas (1 lb.)	0.0536[b]	0.0000
Bread (White, 20 oz.)	0.2158	0.0000
Buns (Hamburger, 8)	0.1439	0.0719
Buns (Hot Dog, 8)	0.1439	0.0719
Butter (Any, 1 lb.)	0.6266	0.1003
Cheese (Any Block, 8oz)	0.6550	-0.0437
Chicken Noodle Soup (Condensed, Not Family Size)	0.0000	0.7595
Eggs (Large, Dozen)	0.6723	0.0000
Flour (All Purpose, 5 lb.)	0.2410	0.0000
Fries (Steak, 28 oz.)	-0.0752	0.1754
Ground Beef (73/27, 1 lb.)	0.0000	0.2088
Hot Dogs (Any, 8)	1.0924	0.2521
Ice Cream (Vanilla, 48 oz.)	0.8361	0.1672
Jelly (Grape, 18 oz.)	0.4020	0.1005
Ketchup (20 oz.)	0.1117	-0.1676
Marinara Sauce (24 oz.)	0.4403	0.1258
Milk (Any, Gallon)	0.1412	-0.0115
Mustard (Yellow, 8 oz.)	1.3043	0.2319
Onion (White, 1 lb.)	0.2521	0.3361
Oranges (1)	0.2752	-0.0917
Pancake Mix (Plain, 32 oz.)	0.1826	0.4566
Peanut Butter (16 oz.)	-0.1209	0.0186
Pepper (Ground Black, 3 oz.)	0.1114	0.0279
Pizza (Cheese, Not Single Serve)	0.1433	0.1433
Potatoes (Russet, 1 lb.)	-0.2929	0.4143
Salt (Iodized, 26 oz.)	0.1266	-0.1266

Spaghetti (Regular, 16 oz.)	0.1468	-0.0917
Strawberries (1 lb.)	0.3341	0.1114
Sugar (White Granulated, 4 lb.)	0.0304	0.1216
Syrup (Any, 24 oz.)	0.3347	-0.0418

a. Note: Headers should be interpreted like this: "Meijer, County Market" as "Percent Increase (in Decimal Form) from Meijer to County Market." For example, a pound of butter at County Market is priced 62.66% higher than a pound of butter at Meijer.

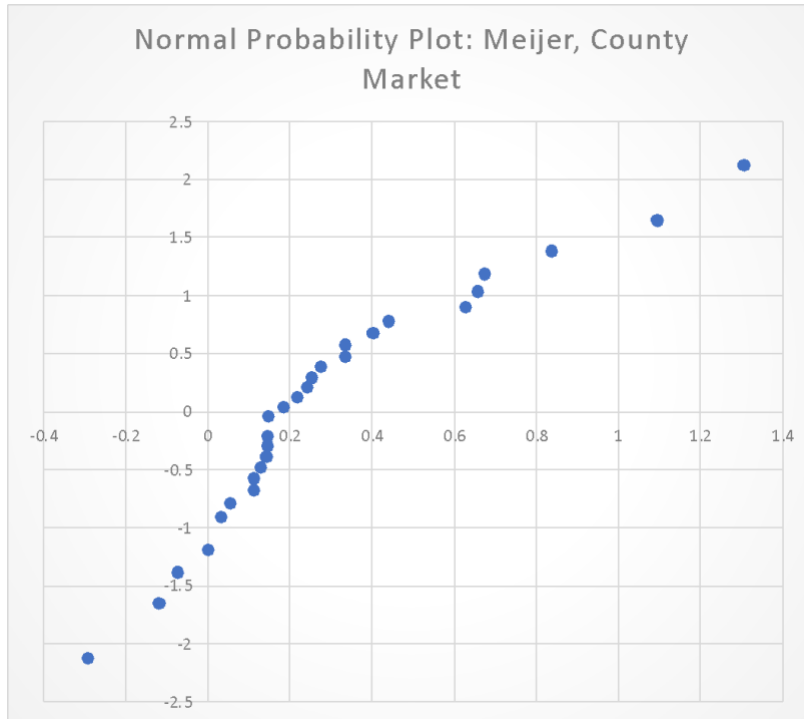b. Note: Values rounded to four decimal points.

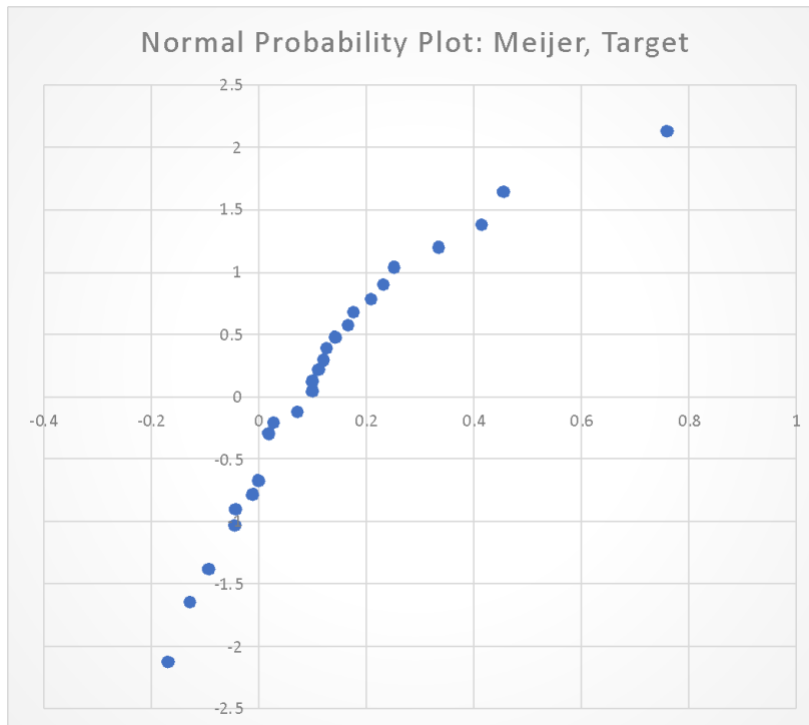Figure 1: Normal probability plot: Meijer, County Market

Figure 2: Normal probability plot: Meijer, Target

Given that the population variance was unknown, the appropriate test statistics were t-statistics and, therefore, hypothesis tests based on t-tests were conducted. One test was for a significant price increase between Meijer and County Market (H-Test$_{CM}$), while the other was for a significant price increase between Meijer and Target (H-Test$_T$).[3] Table 3 includes these hypothesis tests' null and alternative hypotheses, their conclusions, and other relevant statistics.

Table 3

Hypothesis Tests

	H-Test$_{CM}$	H-Test$_T$
Null Hypothesis (H$_0$)	$\mu \leq 0$	$\mu \leq 0$
Alternative Hypothesis (H$_a$)	$\mu > 0$	$\mu > 0$
Significance Level (α)	0.01	0.01
Sample Size (n)	30	30
Sample Variance (s$_x$)	0.3489	0.1932
Sample Mean ($\bar{x}$)	0.2832	0.1107
Test Statistic (t$_{29}$)	4.45	3.14
Critical Value (t$_\alpha$)	2.462	2.462
P-Value	0.0001	0.0019
95% Confidence Interval	(0.158, 0.408)	(0.042, 0.180)
Conclusion	Reject H$_0$	Reject H$_0$

[3] Since we are testing for a positive difference (increase) between firms, one-tail tests were used as opposed to two-tailed tests (used when there may be a positive or negative difference).

Discussion

H-Test$_{CM}$ and H-Test$_T$ found test statistics t_{29} greater than their respective critical values t_α. Accordingly, the p-values found in both tests were smaller than their significance levels α. Given these results, both tests reject the null hypothesis H_0 that prices are the same or lower at County Market and Target than at Meijer. Likewise, the alternative hypotheses H_a are statistically likely and regarded as plausible conclusions of the tests; there are statistically significant price increases at County Market and Target compared to Meijer.

Confidence intervals for H-Test$_{CM}$ and H-Test$_T$ confirm the conclusions made and act as estimates for the mean percent price increase between Meijer and County Market and Target, respectively. Based on the collected data, it can be said with 95% confidence that the mean price increase at County Market compared to Meijer is between 15.8% and 40.8%. Similarly, these results imply with 95% confidence that the mean price increase at Target compared to Meijer is between 4.2% and 18%.

This study could have been performed in ways that would better minimize bias and confounding variables. One possible change for replications of this study is to include a larger sample of goods. Here, 30 goods were chosen as this is the point after which the central limit theorem starts to apply, but a more significant number of goods would further increase the confidence in the study's results. In addition, the selection process for the goods sampled should be more thoroughly randomized. While the common goods selected provide figures of use as they are the items consumers are likely to purchase, they are not random. A truly randomized sample would eliminate any possible bias in the hypothesis tests. Another improvement would be to include more populations (here, firms) in the statistical analysis; a more thorough study could include several other grocery stores in the Urbana-Champaign area to show the difference in

prices in a broader light. If more firms are studied, then the hypothesis test format should also be changed to one that is more effective and applicable when multiple populations exist. All these improvements do not discount this analysis in full, but they are changes that should be implemented in any study replications.

Working under the results of the two hypothesis tests from the last section, the next objective is to consider why there is a difference in prices between local and non-local grocery stores. A strong reason as to why these differences exist is because of consumer transaction costs. In the perfect competition model, an assumption is that there are no transaction costs for consumers. For example, consumers in this model associate no external costs with seeking price information and switching from buying a good from one firm to another. While the model is helpful for market predictions and analysis, this is one of its limitations, as evidenced through this analysis.[4]

Outside the realm of the perfect competition model, transaction costs do exist. Students often opt to travel by foot, bike, or public transit instead of by car out of preference or other limitations.[5] Considering this, local firms like County Market and Target can charge higher prices while keeping their customers. One could imagine a consumer who, even after learning about the lower prices at Meijer, continues shopping at County Market or Target because the costs of traveling to the non-local firm make the more expensive local goods worth it. In other words, the price difference is less than the transaction costs of obtaining the cheaper goods, and shoppers at these local firms still experience consumer surpluses.

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[4] If there were zero consumer transaction costs, the price disparity documented would not be present as consumers could instantly find and buy from the firm with the lowest price.
[5] Parking spot, maintenance, fuel, and leasing/loans are all costs associated with owning a car that deter car ownership.

Although this explanation and reasoning seem the most plausible to explain the price gaps, it is also worth considering other possibilities. For example, it would be equally effortless to imagine a consumer who prefers and trusts the County Market brand more than they do Meijer. The same could be said about Target, both partially explaining the price increases. Another preference might be in selection; a consumer may prefer Target or County Market for their specific selections of goods. An infinitely long list of potential reasons could be made to explain why there are higher average prices for the two local firms – those mentioned here are just a few – but this analysis will not explore these possibilities in depth. Given that the uniting trait of both County Market and Target is that they are local, the most plausible answer still seems to be that consumer transaction costs are the significant reason these local firms have higher prices than their non-local competitor; future replications of this study could include a survey of consumers to further verify this conclusion.

Regardless of the explanation, these tests show a real and statistically significant disparity in prices that primarily impacts college students which opens up a new area for discussion: is this disparity good and, if not, how can it be reduced? As mentioned earlier, this price difference does not exist in the perfect competition model at equilibrium. The fact that it does exist to such an extreme degree strongly implies that this market is not in equilibrium or that firms are not producing efficiently, which, in turn, implies that there are gains not realized from trade (a dead weight loss) that negatively impacts both producers and consumers. It would be better for all parties if this market was more efficient and closer to equilibrium. Therefore, something should be done in order to bring about this change. Doing so would be better for consumers, especially college students that tend to have smaller budgets, and potential new firms that may enter the market. Unfortunately, neither producers nor consumers are omniscient and despite the economic

incentive being there, it is apparent that this alone is not sufficient for eliminating this inefficiency.

To alleviate some of this price difference, one recommendation is for another party to act to increase competition, namely the city of Champaign. More competition would result in firms becoming more efficient, reducing prices for consumers. Accordingly, residents would benefit from resolving this issue, so government action seems appropriate. Although Champaign County and the city of Champaign have already created an Enterprise Zone wherein businesses can claim certain tax benefits – in addition to other districts offering financial incentives[6] – these policies are not enough to draw in new firms in this market. This demonstrates quite well why the study of political economy has taken a shift away from looking at policy alone; the implementation of these policies is equally important, along with the structure of the institutions that create them (Besley, F571). Perhaps the city of Champaign can create a new incentive or district with the specific goal of introducing a new grocer to the impacted community, thereby increasing competition and decreasing prices, and go about implementing this program differently. A more effective launch, possibly one paired with an outreach team to contact firms directly, could make this incentive bear more fruitful results. Alternatively, this team could act in a stand-alone capacity should it be easier on the city, especially considering how other incentives already exist and may just need effective and precise advertisement.[7]

The strategies discussed above are based on microeconomic and political economy theory; they would result in lower prices that would ultimately benefit college students and other

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[6] See the city of Champaign's website for more details on these incentives. ("City Incentives")
[7] The Enterprise Zone reaches close to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's campus. The zone roughly extends westward from the corner of Wright St. and Springfield Ave. which is nearby Target and County Market.

consumers in the Urbana-Champaign area. However, it must be noted that the community should be engaged in any future projects on this matter. These are the people who will ultimately be affected by the actions of their local government and other firms, so keeping their preferences, interests, and behaviors in mind is crucial. A survey or town hall to gauge these factors as they relate to this issue could make future policy more precise, effective, and well-executed.

References

Besley, Timothy. "The New Political Economy." The Economic Journal, vol. 117, no. 524, 2007,

      pp. F570–87. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4625573.

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Gentrification's Effect on Black America

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Abstract

Gentrification is a well-articulated form of segregation that continues to persist throughout our nation today. It is a norm to see a city or parts of a city get "rejuvenated" and many see the process of new businesses and housing renovation as a good thing, as the negatives are clouded by the colorful success that the blind eye can only see. In this essay, I will offer more of an explanation of gentrification and who/where it specifically affects. Additionally, gentrification has heavy effects on perpetuating racially divisive systems of housing, policing, and education. The lack of humanity that occurs as a result of gentrification needs to be acknowledged and tackled rather than overlooked and written-off. Through my research, I have found that this shift can only happen through changing the terminology used, making legal changes in housing and beyond, and fostering cross-racial dialogue as conversation promotes knowledge, and knowledge incentivizes change.

Introduction

It is no secret that our country and institutions thrive on the concept of race. Every institution we see works hand in hand to ensure that White people reach full success and people of color, predominantly Black people in the United States, do not. While these institutions impact all minorities, this paper will particularly highlight how Black communities are affected by the institutions that surround and stem from gentrification. First, gentrification typically occurs in the same pattern of cities to suburbs. Factors such as individuals increasing investment in homes or housing rehabilitation in cities push forward housing displacement as properties continue to get more expensive (Henig, 1980). Additionally, today the legacy of early racist laws, exclusionary zoning laws, discrimination by private actors, and gentrification all work hand in hand to promote the segregation of Black Americans (Dickerson, 2021). Lastly, the prison/policing system and the education system are just two of the many institutions that thrive off of the pattern of gentrification. Policing and education systems ensure that White people succeed while Black people are oppressed. This issue needs to be openly addressed and acknowledged through cross-racial dialogues and a reform of our institutions, and then we can finally move past segregation.

Significance of Topic

Although history teaches us that segregation was a horror of the past, it is still predominant within society. The policies put in place to combat segregation have failed as disparities in wealth, homeownership, incarceration rates, and educational outcomes continue to flourish through the patterns of gentrification (Tempel, 2022). Gentrification is typically looked at as a class issue more than a race issue, however, these two concepts are intertwined due to institutions, such as the education system, that continue to keep White people rich and racial

minorities poor. While gentrification does affect all racial minorities, Black Americans experience a higher percentage of spatial segregation compared to other racial minorities, solidifying that race is a determining factor when considering access to housing (Robinson et al., 2020). This topic is so important because it is clear that society never planned on leaving segregation in the past, instead they just found different, more discrete, ways to ensure that Black Americans never reached true equality. By raising awareness through research, then and only then will real change become a possibility.

Research Questions

For this essay, I plan on focusing my research on answering the following three questions:

1. Why and how does gentrification occur?

2. What institutional factors prevent Black Americans from breaking the housing cycle?

3. In which ways can the issues of gentrification be fixed?

I will organize my paper in the order of these questions. Beginning by answering the broader question of what gentrification is and how it happens will give background to the audience and provide context. Following this, highlighting educational and policing institutions will give two examples of institutions that are in place to keep Black Americans segregated. By ending on possible solutions to this issue, I think the audience will see the problem, and be motivated to fix it.

Trends of Gentrification

Whether it be through media, personal experiences, or friends' experiences, everyone generally has an idea of what gentrification looks like. But why exactly does gentrification happen and how does it happen? In broader terms, gentrification is the process of wealthier

people moving into a poorer urban area (Drew, 2012). In the past, gentrification has always been a class issue more than a race issue, and today it is still marketed as such. However, due to years of segregation, many neighborhoods throughout America are split up based on race. Additionally, many low-income neighborhoods' main demographic is made up of Black people due to institutional practices that force Black people to work ten times harder to get access to the same things White people can. The implications of slavery and segregation are still seen within our current infrastructures and gentrification is a key part in keeping this well-oiled machine of racism going. As a result of gentrification, housing displacement is one of the largest issues seen. Although, many other disparities also arise from gentrification such as food security, education, and businesses. In order to urge wealthier tenants to move into a place, there must be businesses that cater to said people. This results in existing residents being introduced to new food vendors that they cannot afford, and discriminatory practices allow for an increase in the cost of vendor space. Making this process completely exclusionary to the long-term residents in eliminating minority businesses and furthering segregation (Robinson et al., 2020). As long-term residents are forcibly excluded from every aspect of life outside of the home, they are also excluded from housing in itself. There are social policies that respond to the displacement of groups, but not efficiently enough. As new businesses and people come in, housing costs naturally rise.

This issue of displacement has been growing for years and is continuing to worsen. In the past, "white flight" – or white people fleeing minority-populated urban spaces– led white people to move out of cities into a white-picket fence, cul de sac neighborhoods, but that process has transitioned into white people moving into minority-populated areas. In the article Gentrification and displacement within cities: a comparative analysis, author Jeffrey R. Henig analyzes gentrification trends in 1980. It is important to look at articles and studies done in the past to

compare them to trends now. Henig labels the housing displacement in 1980 as being less sudden and visible than the publicly mandated urban renewal of the 1950s and 1960s, however, U.S. cities are losing people, mostly white middle-class people, to the suburbs. This foundation allowed for gentrification to continue to ruin lives quietly, since there were and is no governmental mandates making people do this. The pattern of white-middle class people moving into the suburbs has continued but today areas that were deemed unlikely to gentrify are now being gentrified (Hochstenbach et al., 2021). Companies continue to grow and families continue to want to move out of the city, and space is limited. This results in areas that are lower-income and previously not likely to be gentrified, continuing to push people out of their homes. Businesses and landlords continue to target these low-income neighborhoods because they can buy cheap, and sell expensive, making their profit margin huge.

Demographics

Along with knowing exactly what gentrification is, it is important to know exactly who it affects. As mentioned before, gentrification typically targets low-income Black Americans as middle to high-income white people move into predominately Black neighborhoods. In the article Whitest City in America: A Smaller Black Community's Experience of Gentrification, Displacement, and Aging in Place, author, Raina Croff, studies exactly what demographic of people are affected by gentrification. Croff looks at Portland, Oregon, one of America's fastest gentrifying cities with the smallest metropolitan Black population. The study yielded that the majority of participants within gentrifying historically Black neighborhoods were at least 65 and had lived in their neighborhoods for at least 21 years. Showing that smaller, aging, long-term Black residents are the most susceptible to being impacted by gentrification.

This offers a further issue, in targeting long-term older Black residents, the accessibility to pick up and move is limited. As technology advances, a lot of older generations cannot keep up which prevents many people from accessing the internet to help them find housing, keeping their housing, hiring a lawyer, etc. With age also comes physical restraints. For some people, the idea of packing up one's entire life and moving is physically impossible. Additionally, having long-term residents be faced with this vast of a culture shift is unheard of. Restaurants or businesses these residents may have gone to their whole lives are now stripped away as new businesses take over. Gentrification pushes for a complete lack of familiarity among long-term residents, leaving them practically in the dark.

Education Institution

At this point, it is clear that gentrification is an issue, but it is necessary to highlight institutions that perpetuate this vicious cycle. One of the largest most oppressive and exclusionary systems is the education institution. Today, there are no forms of legal segregation through education, however, it still happens. In looking at school districts, post-Jim Crow laws led to some schools being majority White and some schools majority Black. Efforts were made to desegregate the schools and offer a more diverse community amongst schools, but efforts failed as it is unlikely for people to move neighborhoods to different schools. However, the funding for schools is left in the hands of the district, the districts are often run by white middle-class parents, and the funding then goes to white middle-class schools. Off the bat Black people are set at a disadvantage in accessibility to technology, programs, and the quality of education overall.

This issue continues to fester when looking at higher education. The highest paying jobs today require a bachelor's degree and even after that either a master's degree, Ph.D., law school,

or medical school. In looking at accessibility to college in general, Black people tend to already be at a disadvantage due to the financial aspects. In looking at the article Parents' Financial Assistance for College and black-white Wealth Disparity, author Yunju Nam analyzes the financial disparities of college. Familial wealth is something that White people are more likely to have than Black people. College in itself is not affordable and a lot of the time requires parental assistance. Black people do not receive as much parental financial assistance as their white counterparts, maintaining the Black-White wealth disparity across generations (Nam, 2021). Low socioeconomic students are graduating from college at rates five times less than their high-income peers, and only 52% of low socioeconomic high school students enroll in college as compared to 82% of their high-income peers" (Oleka et al., 2022). Along with this, almost two-thirds of jobs in the United States will require post-secondary education (Oleka et al., 2022). Furthermore, high-school advisors are purposefully swaying Black students away from college. In the article, High School Counselors as Social Capital for Low-Income Students in a Career Academy High School Model: A Case Study, authors Onyejindu Oleka and Donald Mitchell Jr. explore this idea with their study yielding that high school counselors are not giving their students proper information and access to post-secondary options. There is a lack of information about scholarships, schools, and so much more that higher-income students do receive.

When looking at higher education such as medical school, the disparity continues to grow. Standardized tests such as the MCAT and LSAT are expensive at 200 dollars minimum. Along with the price of the test itself, studying tools are needed such as books and classes which can accumulate to over 1,000 dollars, and that's just to have a chance of getting into a medical school or law school. In the article Medical school admission policies disadvantage low-income applicants, authors Briana Christophers, Mollie Marr, and Tricia Pendergrast look at the

application process of medical school to show these disparities. Each aspect of the medical school application asks about a student's financial situation, even though they claim to be need-blind. Many applicants from this do not have an equal opportunity to be qualified because of institutional barriers (Christophers et al., 2022). This process leaves many Black applicants in a position where they cannot succeed, and from there not get one of the highest-paying jobs. When it comes to education, Black students are extremely disadvantaged at every step of the process.

Prison Institution

Alongside the education system disparities, over-policing in predominately Black low-income neighborhoods is another factor continuing this cycle of oppression. Impoverished Black communities fall victim to street-level criminalization (Stuart et al., 2018). Policing is rooted in slavery as its original purpose was to maintain the law, and the law at its creation allowed for slavery. The roots of this system are still in effect. Black people in America are more likely to fall victim to death by police than any other country in the world. The idea that lower-income people are more likely to commit crime carries over to the stereotype that Black people are more likely to commit crime, leaving Black neighborhoods over-policed and Black people over-incarcerated (Hirschfield, 2015; Jones-Brown et al., 2021). Having jail time on your record does no good for success in careers, and that is exactly what is happening to Black people across America. Our prison system and policing system allow for oppression to continue, and it is today's version of segregation. Police reform is becoming a top priority among people in America and 2020 left many people forced to see the problem. Some recommend shifting police training to prevent police violence from continuing (Jones-Brown et al., 2021) whilst others push for some defunding and that funding to be reallocated to community projects. Others want policing to be completely defunded. The defunding movement curated much backlash as it

is a lengthy process to defund police agencies. In the article Defunding police agencies, authors Rick Su, Anthony O'Roukre, and Guyora Binder state that the police budget must be put in the hands of the people policed, or no change will happen (Su et al., 2022).

Solutions

The issues of gentrification, the education institution, and the prison institutions are branded into our nation's history, and there are no fast easy solutions to anything. Gentrification is clearly enabling a more discrete legal form of segregation and through that, there needs to be more legal changes made to fully correct the wrongs of the past that continue to harm people today. In the article, Affirmative Action Housing: A Legal Analysis of an Ambitious but Attainable Housing Policy, author Micah Temple looks at the program proposal called Affirmative Action Housing (AAH), which would have "the federal government purchase White-owned homes for sale in neighborhoods that were subjected to racial covenants, redlining, or other unconstitutional policies" (Temple, 2022). This program would allow for the government to sell homes to Black people for a fraction of the current price. In order for this act to be passed, there must be congressional support, it must not receive scrutiny from the Equal Protection Act, it must fall under the Fair Housing Act, and there will be economic and political criticisms to deal with. However, this program is a good start for reparations in ensuring Black people have access to homes. Mechele Dickerson agrees with this approach in the article Systemic Racism and Housing, arguing that post-WWII political leaders enacted policies making it easier for families to buy homes and increase wealth, but this was limited to White people. Today there are no active laws restricting Black home ownership, however, the legacy of segregation leads to racist landlords, renters, and realtors that work hand in hand with red-lining and gentrification to make it difficult for Black people to own homes (Dickerson, 2021). The

only way to remedy the effects of the past is for our government to enact anti-racism laws or

housing accessibility laws such as the AAH.

Along with legal changes, there needs to be a shift in the overall culture of America. This

can only be done by changing the language used along with conversations that prompt

understanding. Terms such as "ghetto" or "hood" tend to always have negative connotations

while terms such as "suburbs" or "renewal" have positive connotations. The language we use to

describe people or places has a real impact on how those people or places are perceived. The

article Placemaking as Unmasking: Settler Colonialism, Gentrification and the Myth of

"Revitalized" Urban Spaces discusses this concept by saying:

> A colorful mural, flowers in bloom, and strings of warm-hued lighting would suggest this
>
> place, Goudies Lane, means something to someone. Looking for clues, my eyes scan the
>
> space – the red light of a security camera glows just above the warmth of an Edison bulb,
>
> people walk past without a moment's pause, a man pushing a cart sits on the curb just
>
> meters away from picnic tables, and the bus grinds to a stop, though nobody gets off to
>
> join me. I could be anywhere. This is not beautification as the colorful mural might
>
> suggest. A generic geography of gentrification. A denial of Indigenous sovereignty. And
>
> while this place could be any place, it no longer is for anyone. Instead, its newly enacted
>
> facade makes clear who is no longer welcome. This is not belonging. I'm alone in a place
>
> made new for the few – but not for all. Rather, this is sanitization. Sanitization is encoded
>
> through myths of placemaking, community building, and revitalization in order to make
>
> itself palatable. In order to disguise itself, so as to not evoke violent historic trajectories
>
> of colonial progress.

Gentrification is often correlated with words such as "beautification" or "revitalization", both words that evoke a positive reaction. When labeling a process with these words and then targeting a place by using language such as "ghetto" gentrification becomes something that is perceived as a good and necessary thing (Burns et al., 2021). The language used coats over the real horrors that gentrification causes and creates a positive mindset about gentrification. By shifting the language to encompass what gentrification actually does, and the spaces gentrification affects, then people may see the real problems. Using words like "housing displacement" and "oppression" will evoke the correct negative reaction when discussing gentrification.

In hand with changes in the language used, there also needs to be conversations as conversations are the only way for people to reach an understanding. In the article Listening through white ears: Cross-racial Dialogues as a Strategy to Address the Racial Effects of Gentrification, author Emily Drew looks at a gentrifying Portland neighborhood. Every year, this neighborhood gathers and the long-term Black residents explain to the new white middle-class residents how the neighborhood has changed, and how their behavior is harmful. This process confronts white denial, puts Black people in the position of being the teachers, and promotes consciousness about systemic racism (Drew, 2012). In holding these conversations and being honest and accepting, the white residents are forced to listen and learn. Of course, this has amazing impacts on the community in working to reach understanding. However, this is just one neighborhood having these conversations. In expanding the floor for conversations nationwide by effort through individuals, organizations, or local government our country would have room to reach understanding and push for reform.

Conclusion

The foundation of our country is one that is rooted in immense trauma. The ramifications of our country being established on the grounds of slavery and oppression continue to spread today. Our history books teach us that oppression is a thing of the past, but it is not. Whilst almost every aspect of American life can in one way or another be traced back to oppression, one of the most notable and vast issues is gentrification. Gentrification negatively impacts Black Americans nationwide, leading to intense housing displacement. The main demographic that is affected by gentrification is long-term-aged Black residents, who are then faced with housing displacement, food insecurity, and even losing their businesses. As white middle-class people move in, so does white business, pushing out Black business overall. A simple solution is just to move, right? Well, the system does not allow for that either. Due to many institutions such as the education and policing systems, Black Americans are at a disadvantage from the moment they are born, forcing them to be subject to poverty at a higher rate than white people. The education system creates barrier after barrier to Black people's academic success, such as costs and high-school advisors not pushing for higher education. The policing system enables a system of oppression in which Black Americans are more likely to fall victim to over-policing, police brutality, and incarceration. These are just two of the many institutions working to keep Black people in place and oppressed. From my research, I found that in order to alleviate the negative ramifications of gentrification, there needs to be legal changes made such as the AAH, a change in the language used from "beautifying" to "displacement", and an expansion of conversation to reach understanding and push for change. These efforts offer a way to address and begin to solve the long-standing issues plaguing our country. The fact that our country treats Black people as second-class and lesser-than is the most vile thing today. A country that prides itself in freedom

for all needs to ensure that it is held true. We have not corrected the wrongs from the past, and we are very far from it, but action needs to be taken now.

When I began my research for this paper, I knew what gentrification was and how I was going to go about writing about it. However, through my research, I found that there were many things I was not aware of that deserved to be highlighted. For instance, I knew gentrification disproportionately affected Black Americans, however, I did not know that long-term aging Black people were the most affected group. This helped me shift my understanding of just how deep this issue goes as I began to think of all the discrepancies that long-term aging residents would face such as accessibility issues. Additionally, through my research, I found it necessary to include two institutions that are affected and effect gentrification cycles. I found that the education and policing systems are two of the most predominant institutions that harm Black America today. My research led me to realize that these issues dive a lot deeper than I originally thought, and through my research, I began to develop a feeling of hopelessness. However, when finding and researching solutions, I realized that there are so many people who are finding ways to tackle this issue socially and legally. The solutions I found offered me hope for a better tomorrow and a more equitable future.

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The Controversy Circulating Affirmative Action

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Affirmative Action is a contentious policy that has been at the center of many debates for decades. This policy has been getting even more attention lately as lawsuits have emerged from prestigious institutions such as Harvard and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While this essay primarily focuses on affirmative action within the context of universities, it's important to note that the policy is also implemented by employers. Its objective is to address the historical discrimination and institutional oppression faced by certain groups by granting them preferential treatment in admissions. Delving into the various dimensions of this debate, it becomes evident that one common concern revolves around the perception that students from majority groups may suffer as a result of this policy, being denied admission in favor of less qualified candidates. However, a thorough examination of the primary grievances expressed by policymakers and citizens reveals that the most hotly debated issue pertains to whether affirmative action genuinely benefits minority individuals in the long term.

Considering the disparities in educational quality that students face based on their socioeconomic backgrounds, I find myself in favor of Affirmative Action as a necessary measure to address the underrepresentation of minority students in universities. However, I acknowledge that some students encounter difficulties once they are enrolled, primarily due to academic mismatch—a concept I will delve into later in this essay. Consequently, I firmly believe that

Affirmative Action cannot solely serve as a last-resort approach to achieving educational equality. To truly bridge the gap, it is imperative to introduce a comprehensive policy that ensures equal funding for elementary through high school education.

Examining America's troubled history, particularly regarding the mistreatment of minority groups, it becomes evident that systemic racism has persisted throughout the years, albeit in more subtle forms. Past injustices, such as redlining in the 1950s, continue to inflict harm on numerous communities today—a topic that will be explored in greater detail later in this essay. It is within this context that Affirmative Action exists, seeking to level the playing field that has been uneven due to the nation's historical roots in racism and the oppression of minority groups. Consequently, a comprehensive policy is necessary to rectify these entrenched inequities and ensure fairness for all.

The current discourse surrounding Affirmative Action primarily revolves around three key aspects: how it can be enhanced, whether such improvements are necessary, and whether the policy is still warranted at all. While some argue that Affirmative Action is no longer necessary, asserting that minority groups are no longer subject to oppression, this viewpoint fails to acknowledge the persistence of institutionalized racism that continues to inflict harm upon these communities. This can be seen by looking at wealth disparities between minority groups and caucasian groups, and a long history of market discrimination when it comes to mortgage loans toward minority groups (Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon, and Christian E. Weller). A study from the Center for American progress found that "African Americans own approximately one-tenth of the wealth of white Americans" and "Latino and certain Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) household wealth falls far below their white counterparts' as well" (Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon, and Christian E. Weller). Therefore, it is evident the treatment of

minority groups appears to be different than that of the 1950s, yet there are still major problems in achieving equity that has yet to be solved.

It is not a foreign concept that having a higher education inherently leads to an individual attaining a job that will pay more money than a job that does not require a degree. This is where Affirmative Action comes into play. The policy is necessary seeing as there is no equity and oppression and discrimination against minority groups continue, therefore Affirmative Action must still be a policy used in college admissions. Assisting minority groups in obtaining a higher education and degrees actively helps to fight against institutionalized racism. However, the policy currently is not helping students in the best way that it can. Affirmative Action does not benefit as many minority students as previously believed. Education in America must be reformed to correctly benefit students who have not been given equal educational opportunities in life, as that is the root of the problem.

One of the more prominent complications that Affirmative Action has ensued is the problem that is Academic Mismatch. This can be seen in the admittance process there are different types of admittance, false positives, and false negatives. Meaning that when a student is admitted there may be some students who would have succeeded at that institution who were denied entry (false negative) and then students who were admitted but did not succeed at that institution (false positive). In an article from an academic journal, *Affirmative Action, Duality of Error, and the Consequences of Mispredicting the Academic Performance of African American College Applicants*, written by Jeryl M. Mumpower, Radhika Nath, and Thomas R. Stewart, they study the concept of false positives and false negatives and argue how this policy itself is not designed with the best predictive accuracy. They look to an old study by Hammond, arguing that

"any policy problem that involves uncertainty and thus possesses the potential for dual error, will lead to unavoidable injustice."(Jeryl M. Mumpower, Radhika Nath, and Thomas R. Stewart).

The study also finds that "The probability that an unqualified minority-group applicant will be admitted is only 0.03, in comparison with a 0.06 probability that an unqualified majority-group applicant will be admitted". Seeing as majority group applicants who are unqualified are still being admitted at a higher rate than minority group applicants is a huge indicator that Affirmative Action is not working well. Ideally, no unqualified applicants are admitted but seeing as this will occur in an admittance system where there is so much uncertainty it does reveal that even amongst unqualified students majority groups are still admitted at a higher rate. Therefore the error that exists in university admittance is prevalent amongst minority students and Affirmative Action has not been fixing the problem.

To add to the conversation on Academic Mismatch, a law professor at the University of San Diego and the U.S Civil rights commissioner, Gail Heriot, did some research on the subject as well. He finds that "there's a similar dropout rate among students admitted due to affirmative action policies and white students admitted as "legacies" with entering credentials that match those of students admitted because of a race preference" (Elizabeth Slattery, the Heritage Foundation). So one can conclude Academic Mismatch can be extremely harmful, often leading to lower grades and more instances of students dropping out of school. Affirmative Action within the status quo is therefore not as successful in helping minority group students succeed academically as previously thought.

Since Affirmative Action is not supporting students in the best way it can, another problem that ensues is the general lack of support it receives from the public. In California, a state where Affirmative Action is currently not in place, a poll to bring back the policy was

taken. From this poll, it was found that "31% of likely California voters surveyed said they would vote for the proposal...while 47% said they oppose it...22%, were undecided" (Phil Willon, Los Angeles Times). To look specifically at the voters who were not white or Latino, " 40% supported the measure and 38% opposed it" and the Latino vote was reportedly split half and half (Phil Willon, Los Angeles Times). These results can be credited most likely due to the fact that Affirmative Action has not had extremely effective results in ensuring the educational success of minority students.

Having established that Affirmative Action within the status quo does not do all that much to actually better the lives of minority group applicants, many people have argued for different ways to reform the policy to work positively. One of the ideas is class-based Affirmative Action. A civil rights report found that "School districts serving predominantly students of color receive about $2,000 less per pupil than districts who serve fewer students of color.'...K-12 funding is about $16,000 per student, school districts composed predominantly of students of color have about 15 percent less spending capacity to draw from."(Aakanksha Saxena). Revealing the problems that occur in education from an early age due to the lack of funding in schools that are primarily consisting of students of color. This is why many make the argument that class-based affirmative action is needed more than race-based, seeing as due to wealth disparities in certain areas that have an unfair disadvantage in the quality of education they receive.

Socioeconomic disadvantages are what harm many groups in our current political and social climate. Groups who are experiencing these disadvantages are largely minority groups, seeing as Affirmative Action is a policy that is supposed to be helping groups who are being treated unfairly in the United States, then by implementing class-based Affirmative Action this

reform could possibly solve the problem with Affirmative Action. Anthony Carnevale at Georgetown University found that "a child growing up with socioeconomic disadvantages...is expected to score 399 points lower on the math and verbal sections of the SAT than the most socioeconomically advantaged children. Racial disadvantages impose an additional 56 points." Revealing that socio-economic issues play a serious and large role in the reason why students have lower performance on exams which is crucial in admittance to universities. More than likely due to not receiving an education with quality as good as those who don't face many socio-economic struggles. Therefore many people then make the connection that class-based Affirmative Action would help.

The reason that mainly students of color are statistically receiving a less quality education is largely due to Redlining. The Federal Housing Administration from 1934 to 1968 would refuse to give people of color mortgage loans in order to keep them segregated where they live in poorer urban areas meanwhile caucasian people were encouraged to move to the suburbs (Becky LeBret 2019). The Fair Housing Act passed in 1968 ended this however the effects are still clearly seen today, a part of redlining was zoning and the less desirable neighborhoods are where people of color were pushed. Adding to this is "the systematic denial of various services to residents" (Becky LeBret 2019) which played a large role in making these areas lower-income and socioeconomically disadvantaged. Seeing as where one life will dictate the school one attend and the funding for that school comes from property taxes from that area, it is the reason the quality of education is poorer and as a result, these students are disadvantaged from the very beginning in their educational careers.

Many people believe that class-based Affirmative Action would not help minority students as much as if the system would be left as is. However, what many fail to realize is that it

is because of institutionalized racism like redlining against minority groups that still perpetuates a cycle of failed educational attempts in students of color. In a book written by a Law Professor at Georgetown University, Sheryll Cashin, she finds that "truly disadvantaged— black and brown children trapped in high-poverty environs—are not getting the quality of schooling they need". Therefore reforming the policy to a more class-based Affirmative Action it would then take into account the socioeconomic factors that are disproportionately affecting minority groups students as opposed to majority groups students.

While there are many different reasons why class-based Affirmative Action could work well for achieving equity amongst students of color in regard to University Admissions, there are also arguments that it would ultimately reap the same results as what is already in place. Peter Schuck from Brookings Institute, argues that the problem of Academic Mismatch still would not be solved and more false-positive admittances would occur. He states that "using social class or economic disadvantage rather than race" would be "impracticable or would make matters worse". Due to the fact that "A root cause of their disadvantage is inferior schooling, and affirmative action is simply a poultice", class-based Affirmative Action would not change the inferior schooling these students receive so the same problems that occur under the status quo now would not change. It is for this reason that many argue in order to actually level the playing field for oppressed students, there must be a combination of Affirmative Action as well as elementary education being funded equally across all schools in the nation to truly achieve equality in higher education.

Keeping all of this in mind, there are still some critics who argue that no change needs to be done at all to Affirmative Action. Rather than trying to reform the policy or the education system, the nation should be satisfied with the way Affirmative Action works within the status

quo. A college admissions counselor from Amherst College, Dix Willard, is extremely

supportive of Affirmative Action and argues that students should be grateful for how the policy

has worked to help them in college admissions. He believes that it is because of Affirmative

Action that the application process is "fair" and that every student gets their application

evaluated for a longer and more extensive period of time before making a decision due to

thinking about each student with a more holistic perspective. Specifically stating that "In order to

create a socially and culturally appropriate class for the institution each year, they need to

consider specific data along with the non-specific "holistic" aspects of each applicant.".

Therefore supporting the idea that this policy made a new process of looking at applications to

give all students a fair chance.

He continues his argument for Affirmative Action by giving some specific examples of it

benefitting students. Stating for example that "It means that admission officers learn to actively

look for applicants who may be under-represented on campuses such as LGBTQs or Native

Americans." However, he does admit that this does not mean students who are legacy for

example won't "get a pass in many cases" but he does bring up the point that "it's not as

automatic as it once was; they still have to be able to do the work to some extent.". This is the

main argument that people who are supportive of Affirmative Action make, arguing that it levels

the playing field because every application is looked at on a holistic level, and therefore students

are not judged solely on one area but rather the entire application.

Having a Holistic point of view when looking at an application may allow for more time

to look at and evaluate the application, however, it does not solve all the problems with the

admissions process that exists. If Affirmative Action truly did allow for more equal chances at

gaining admissions into schools then we would see a bigger jump in the amount of minority

group students obtaining degrees. However, we have not. The Huffington Post reports that there have only been "moderate gains for African-American and Hispanics in terms of overall enrollment, but these gains do not extend to elite schools...population growth is factored in, since 1980, the number of African-American and Hispanic students enrolled at top schools is essentially the same.". In the past forty years has had Affirmative Action in action, but we have yet to see a large increasing amount of students of color in top colleges. This is indicative that there is a problem and that Affirmative Action needs to be reformed in order to generate equality amongst all applicants.

The solution to achieve a fair admissions process that assists minority students lies in pushing for education for elementary grade levels to be quality and equal to that of schools where the quality is currently way higher combined with the process of Affirmative Action. The long list of problems that come into play with Affirmative Action is largely due to the fact that this policy is trying to last-minute bandage up a problem that begins years before. Jesse Mechanic of Huffington post argues that "The problem with affirmative action in higher education is that it should be the last piece of a consistently evolving puzzle, not the first.". Furthermore, supporting the idea that it is the disadvantages some children face in regards to the poor education they receive due to whatever their economic standing is that is the first part of the problem that has yet to be solved which is why Affirmative Action is not working the way it is intended to.

The lack of funding in schools creates disparities in the quality of education between minority and majority groups. According to the Stanford Review, "while only 33 percent of majority-minority schools offer advanced math courses such as calculus, 56 percent of predominantly white high schools offer these courses." explaining that a lack of resources in a

student's educational career has extremely negative impacts. The review also found that a "20 percent decrease in per-student spending can lead to 25 percent lower earnings and a 20 percent higher incidence rate of poverty.". Having fewer courses available to students, especially challenging courses that would look good on an application, is just one way that minority groups of students face a disadvantage in the college admissions process. Another more concerning problem is that with less challenging courses available students are not able to really challenge themselves academically and may not be prepared for the intense pressure one faces academically at a higher level of education.

So in order to reach minority groups better, we must solve the issue at its root first in order to actually level out the playing field. In order to do this, we must achieve equal spending in elementary education nationwide. This is obviously an extremely difficult task to achieve, given lawmakers would more than likely have polarizing opinions on this, however, at a state level, it might be simpler to achieve this goal. It is so important that this does happen soon because Affirmative Action does not do much to help students if the root of the problem is not solved. It is unfair that a student's socioeconomic standing is the leading factor that ultimately ends up determines whether or not they end up succeeding academically. The Stanford review puts it rather bluntly, "access to quality education in America often hinges on a child's zip code", and it is unjust that it is this way, and must change.

The ongoing debate on Affirmative Action has many different polarizing opinions. Some argue that it works well in the status quo and needs no change, others argue that it needs to go and work against what it's intended to do, and many argue it just needs to be reformed. In this paper, it is found that the ongoing injustices that minority groups have faced have not ended and therefore Affirmative Action should not be repealed. When Affirmative Action is not in place we

see a major decrease in students admitted, in California where Affirmative Action does not exist the "percentage of black undergraduates has fallen from 6 percent in 1980 to only 3 percent in 2017" (Leah Shafer).

The institutionalized racism that has plagued the United States since the beginning of its creation has bled into our modern era. There is no denying that it has when we look at academic institutions starting from Pre-K going all the way to High School and there is a clear difference in the amount of funding and quality of education students receive. Where schools that have predominantly white students generally receive higher funding than schools that have students who are predominantly of color. This being because of redlining in the 1950s which ultimately divided groups of people ensuring that minority groups would live in areas with decreased quality of living in regards to education, health, and security.

Due to the decreased socioeconomic standing that many minority groups are at, this results in those groups having increased difficulty in obtaining degrees. They are flat-out discriminated against and given unfair circumstances that block their access to quality education which later down the line results in decreased chances of gaining admission into universities. While Affirmative Action currently is not the best option for ensuring educational equality among students, it is the only option within the status quo to assist minority students in admittance to Universities. Whereas when it is not in place the amount of minority students admitted is decreased greatly. The solution to achieving equality in University admissions is to tackle the root of the problem, which is to ensure equal funding of elementary education, however, it is extremely difficult to achieve this in the political climate of America today. Therefore in the meantime, Affirmative Action must stay in place because otherwise, the number of minority students at universities would decrease greatly.

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A Critical Divide in American Education?:

Examining Critical Race Theory Discourse via a Public Opinion Lens

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Abstract

In the United States, critical race theory (CRT) has been a topic of controversy among academic, political, and public discussions. Theorists in the tradition have maintained that contrary to conventional understanding, race is not a concept grounded in biology but a socially constructed instrument of oppression, crafted by the hands of the dominant social class and institutionalized by the laws of the state. When the theory was popularized in the twenty-first century, the American public received the theory with ambivalence, with some supporting and implementation in school curricula, while others opposing its validity. Political elites, conversely, have leveraged public attitudes to justify laws prohibiting and permitting the teaching of the theory's concepts; however, their lack of consensus has only shaped CRT into a partisan issue. With these competing factors in mind, the future of CRT discourse is thus rather uncertain. Public opinion polls continue to indicate that most Americans are still unacquainted with the theory's tenets, suggesting that current measures may not be an accurate representation of the electorate's genuine attitudes. If scholars seek to garner a truer grasp on public opinion surrounding CRT, more Americans will have to understand the theory and be able to differentiate its subject matter from its politicized iterations.

Keywords: critical race theory (CRT), public opinion, school curricula, teaching history

Introduction

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged as a novel subfield of legal studies towards the end of the twentieth century. This expository criterion—materialized in response to the political landscape during the post-Civil Rights era—sought to re-examine America's social and legal institutions through a racially conscious lens (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). By deconstructing its myths, critical race theorists have challenged conventional understandings of race, redefining the concept as a social construct lacking a biological foundation (Smedley, 2007). Race, in the eyes of the theory, has been an instrument of the dominant social class, fabricated to preserve its interests at the price of people of color (Brooks, 2009). CRT scholars have contended that contrary to common perceptions, racism has not primarily been the result of individuals' "bigotry" (Taylor, 1998). Rather, from the colonial period onwards, racial prejudice has "permeate[d]" into the nation's culture and legal apparatuses (Banaji, et al., 2021), resulting in institutions of power that have preserved a social order established by the virtue of whites, for the benefit of whites (Brooks, 2009). The quest for critical race theorists then has been to decipher the racial biases in the American context and provide the means to eradicate them (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). In the past few years, contentious debates on CRT have been on the ascent, and what side of the discourse individuals, groups, and political elites have aligned themselves with has shown to be politically consequential. As a left leaning theory, CRT has the potential to steer American culture towards a more liberal direction, possibly reshaping the nation's values but also its practices—primarily—the curricula in its institutions of learning.

Academic Discussion on Critical Race Theory

Since its conception, critical race theory has been subjected to academic criticism. Traditionalist academics have deemed CRT as an antithesis to Western liberalism (Mocombe,

2017) and its tradition of neutrality. Scholars such as Thomas Sowell (Minda, 1995) and Randall Kennedy (Johnson, 1998) have defended the virtue of "colorblind" laws, maintaining that the principle is crucial for achieving legal equality in the United States. CRT scholars have responded to their counterparts with a critique of their own, expressing skepticism for American liberalism itself (Mocombe, 2017). Through rebuttal after rebuttal, they have rhetorically questioned if laws in liberal societies are *truly* as objective as they are in abstract (Leiter & Coleman, 1993). CRT theorists have contended that as long as the law has yet to live up to its ideal impartiality, race based legal analysis has warranted its place in American academia (Minda, 1995). Additionally, scholars have followed the line of reasoning that those from marginalized ethnic backgrounds have the ability to "name [their] reality" (Ladson-Billings, 1998), or in other words, tell their experiences of racial prejudice. Personal narratives, theorists have argued, have the ability to empower oppressed voices and validate their encounters with injustice (Minda, 1995). Through this singular practice, individual experiences of racism long shielded from public attention have been elucidated and offered the space for discussion (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT scholars have identified storytelling as a key to unpacking the inequalities embedded in society (Taylor, 1998). They have also recognized that stories exert merit to other discussions too, whether that be conversations on history, society, gender, or economics (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). At the same time, assigning substantial weight to narratives and qualitative accounts has also proven precarious. Scholars Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry (1997), for instance, have expressed concern for legal theories founded upon lived experiences instead of empirically sourced claims. They have avowed that individual undergoings are difficult to testify and dismiss the notion that reason is paramount in law (Farber & Suzanna, 1997). Yet in spite of these rivaling views, CRT scholars have continued to defend

the use of storytelling, asserting that the inclusion of previously shunned voices has forged a new dimension to discourses surrounding race and law, all of which would have otherwise been ignored if social scientific observations were solely utilized (Paul-Emile, 2015).

Public Discourse on Critical Race Theory

By the twenty-first century, discourse on CRT had made its way to the general public, provoking controversy among the populace as it once did among academic elites. But in contrast to the academic community which has long housed discourse on CRT, the public has largely been left out of the discussion (Oputu, 2021). It was not until recently that CRT became prevalent among public discourse. Contemporary literature has credited changing population dynamics in the United States and the rise of social movements (Hiro & Torres, 2021) for bringing the theory to public attention. Parents, activists, and even news commentators had found themselves involved, expressing both praise and disdain for its possible implementation. However, while CRT has received greater acknowledgement, public opinion scholars have observed that a significant portion of the electorate—seven out of ten Americans (Safarpour et al., 2021)—remains unfamiliar with its tenets. Furthermore, among those aware of the framework, a multitude were misinformed about the theory's application, failing to realize that CRT has mostly been reserved for postsecondary coursework and has yet to be formally embedded into primary and secondary education (Hindmon, 2021). These survey findings have raised concerns about whether the electorate has the qualifications to judge the validity of critical race theory and its place in American education.

Though skepticism has been raised towards citizen competency, individuals, in spite of their appearingly limited comprehension of CRT, have remained involved in the discussion. Many have aligned themselves along the three major sides of the debate: expressing approval,

objection, or indifference towards the theory. CRT proponents have emphasized the importance of confronting America's history and learning about the country's injustices (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). When asked about resolving these grievances, they have maintained that promoting awareness among citizens can empower them to identify and obliterate the underpinnings of racial problems (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). On the contrary, those opposed have identified critical race theory as a threat to America's tranquility and order (Blackwell, 2020). They have affirmed that America's laws and history have not been rooted in racism. Rather, the nation was founded on liberal ideals and democratic principles (Smith, 2021), all of which have been significantly improved upon since the legal victories achieved during the Civil Rights Movement (Minda, 1995). Therefore, for numerous opponents of CRT, implementing education agendas discussing the history of racism encourages children to despise one another and perpetuates the notion that whites are oppressors and people of color are victims (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). They have worried that such a narration of history (Wolfe-Rocca & Nold, 2022) has the potential of socializing its future citizens into accepting a malign image of America.

To better understand the public's attitudes towards CRT, public opinion scholars have conducted both quantitative and qualitative based surveys in hopes of acquiring a finer grasp. One group of researchers in particular from Harvard University, Northeastern University, Northwestern University, and Rutgers University conducted *The COVID States Project* and discovered links between population demographics and attitudes towards critical race theory. Their initial findings reported a relationship between race and support for CRT. In their study, support for teaching CRT was higher among blacks at 42 percent and lower among whites at 23 percent. When compared to support for CRT, support for "teaching the legacy of racism," however, (Safarpour et al., 2021, p. 11) increased to 73 percent for blacks and 46 percent for

whites. The surveys also found individuals' political alignments as statistically significant. Support for teaching CRT was higher among Democrats at 44 percent and lower among Republicans at eight percent. Concurrently, support for "teaching the legacy of racism" (Safarpour et al., 2021, p. 10) increased to 73 percent for Democrats and 24 percent for Republicans. Besides race and political alignment, individuals' age and education also appeared to have a corresponding relationship with support for teaching CRT. Younger individuals and those with higher education were both documented to be more supportive of teaching CRT.

Group and Elite Debate on Critical Race Theory

Similarly to the American public, social coalitions and political parties were brought into CRT discourse as fluctuating tides of change began to encroach upon American society. Hikes in police brutality allegations in the early 2010s had led to the development of apolitical social alliances such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Ray, 2022). Social enterprises such as BLM and The 1619 Project (Silverstein, 2019) have explored the role of race in American history and have offered alternative interpretations to racism, reidentifying the prejudice as systematic. By the peak of the anti-Black violence movements in 2020, social discussion surrounding CRT had shifted gears; suddenly, national attention was directed towards an unprecedented proposition: the history of racism ought to be taught in American schools (Winthrop, 2020). In response to the national climate, several school districts around the country began proposing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in their local schools. These programs have sought to address issues of social inequality and bias, attempting to "improve opportunities for disadvantaged groups" (Iyer, 2022). Amid its enactment, DEI programs were received with both support and dissent. Public attitudes were observed to be overall conflicted, in part because individuals and elites had erroneously identified the DEI programs or the teaching

of racism as synonymous and interchangeable with the idea of teaching CRT (Quilanatan, 2023). Conservative interest groups like the Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council began to push back against DEI and CRT related instruction, reiterating concerns about CRT's potentially divisive concepts. The Republican Party, as the embodiment of conservative thought, has aligned itself along opponents of CRT (Allen, 2022) and the teaching of its concepts. The party's counterpart, the Democratic Party, has positioned itself as a supporter of CRT and racial diversity programs (Allen, 2022). Liberal interest groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and Lambda Legal have also adhered to an analogous standpoint.

Shaping Public Opinion on Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory was initially envisioned as a non-partisan investigation of America's laws and social institutions. And while such a frame of mind was the intention of its architects (Hindmon, 2021), CRT has become increasingly politicized since its introduction to the public. Today, support or opposition towards CRT has become associated with stances of particular political parties and social factions. As one branch of critical theory, CRT has proven over its lifetime to be a revolutionary system of social analysis. Its ability to influence public perceptions of American history, laws, and institutions has granted it leverage over everyday citizens. Its novelty has made it unfamiliar and even mysterious; what the theory entails or how its concepts may be applied to education curricula has still remained foreign to most (Safarpour et al., 2021). These particular circumstances have created a strategic opening for the political elite, entrusting them with the authority to shape CRT into their desired image.

From 2020 onwards, GOP lawmakers began appearing before various television channels and social media platforms, characterizing CRT as a threat to the nation's founding principles (Meckler & Dawsey, 2021). They have asserted that the theory's tenets overly focus on divisive,

individual characteristics, espouse hatred towards whites, and generalize the country as inherently racist (Jamison & Noland, 2022). Some members have associated CRT with the "Great Replacement Theory" (Sivels, 2021), arousing fears among citizens about the loss of American heritage and the ideologically left's political agenda. Regardless of the reality behind these assumptions, the GOP's projection of CRT has seemed to appeal to the overwhelmed, undecided public. According to *The COVID States Project* (2021), public support for CRT and its implementation in educational settings has remained rather mediocre at 29 percent. Even if this figure was the result of a misleading correlation, public hesitancy towards CRT has remained favorable to the Republican Party nonetheless. NBC polls observed that members of the public were slightly more trusting of Republicans on education (Allen, 2022).

Sculpting public opinion on critical race theory has not been a one sided endeavor, however. The Democratic Party has attempted to consolidate its own reputation for CRT, responding to their political opposition with a defense of the theory (Allen, 2022). Comparably to Republicans, Democratic politicians have made use of mass media to connect with the public. They have fallen in line with CRT proponents, accentuating how the framework illuminates the truth behind the nation's dark, repressive past and will educate the country's future on the socio-economic disparities that continue to hinder marginalized communities (Taylor, 1998). Elites have accused Republicans and CRT opponents of "whitewash[ing] history" (Hiro & Torres, 2021). Their rhetoric has predominantly aimed to appease minority populations, many of whom constitute a considerable portion of the party's supporters. Yet, as discussed precedently, support for teaching CRT has remained divided. Doubt towards the theory has endured (Druckman et al., 2022), leaving public opinion on CRT relatively unchanged across the years. Democratic policies have seemed to neither garner nor discourage support for CRT, at least to any remarkable extent.

Public Opinion as Means for Advancing Legislative Agenda

Apart from molding public perceptions of critical race theory, political elites from both sides of the aisle have also pushed for public policies regarding its place in education. Each party has taken advantage of public opinion, using the electorate's positions on CRT to justify laws allowing or prohibiting its teaching. Democrats and Republicans alike have recognized the public's ambivalence and have sought to appeal to individuals' emotions and ideological predispositions. After all, public controversy around CRT has been to an extent a function of personal affect. Individuals—especially parents—leaning right of the political spectrum have expressed fear for indoctrination and division among America's youth, associating their feelings of agitation with CRT (Smith, 2021). The Republican Party has responded to public anxieties with anti-CRT laws. By 2021, nine states had passed laws prohibiting schools from teaching CRT related concepts with more states in the process of introducing bills (Ray & Gibbons, 2022). Local lawmakers have cited parental fears as the grounds of these laws (Frey & Wheeler, 2022), but for scholar William Frey, such a line of reasoning has misled the public from what he has perceived as the GOP's ulterior motives. Conservative legislators, Frey argued, have employed "parental concerns" as an excuse to initiate laws that attract the Republican Party's predominantly "white, culturally conservative voter base" (Frey & Wheeler, 2022). To reiterate his words, public apprehensions have become justifications for political maneuvers.

Such a phenomenon has also been remarked among government executives at state and federal levels. In parallel with legislators, Republican governors have referenced fears among parents as rationale for anti-CRT laws and executive orders. Governors, similarly to other political actors, have utilized their election results to survey public opinion (Thomson et al., 2019). For executives who have achieved a large margin of victory, they may be convinced that

the public has bestowed them the mandate to facilitate their position on CRT. But even in more divided races, like that of Governor Youngkin's in 2021, a slim victory margin may also validate policies. Education appeared as a principal topic during the Virginia gubernatorial race. Youngkin's position on CRT arguably became the deciding factor in his triumph (Cooper, 2021) and later justified his executive order banning CRT. In other instances, executive policies have been promoted on mere assumptions of public opinion. President Trump's 1776 Commission was founded on a perceived necessity for "patriotic education" (Executive Order No. 13,958, 2020). The executive order presumed the public was largely against the teaching of CRT and hence initiated the program on this presupposition (Executive Order No. 13,958, 2020).

Democratic governors and legislators in response have charged Republicans for abusing the public's name, proposing that conservative elites have misused public concerns to legitimize CRT bans (Frey & Wheeler, 2022). They have propounded that for long, history has excluded people of color from salient, social discussions (Minda, 1995); now, they have averred, was the time for American society to confront its past injustices. As a result, the Democratic Party has attempted to conform to the interests of minority communities, many of whom constitute a significant bulk of their voters. And correspondingly to how Republicans have advocated for anti-CRT bans on the premise of "parental concerns," Democrats have pushed for CRT related curricula in the defense of supporting people of color and the pursuit of "truth about American history" (Gaudiano, 2021). While both sides of the debate have made use of public attitudes on CRT, political strategists have suggested that Republicans have utilized public opinion more diligently, skillfully setting public concerns as the bedrock of their CRT related legislation. Democrats have strove to address Republican laws but have failed to propose bills in pace with their counterparts (Gaudiano, 2021).

Conclusion

The future of discourses on critical race theory have seemed to be as ambiguous as current public stances on CRT itself. What is certain, however, has been the extent to which the theory has deviated from the original intentions of its founding scholars. Over the course of its time in the national spotlight, CRT has been politicized and misrepresented into a partisan political instrument. Some political elites have characterized CRT as an essential component of a diverse society. The future of the country, they have insisted, must be aware of the nation's past and strive to right previous wrongs. Opposing political elites, on the other hand, have deemed CRT as a danger to the American way of life. Such a theory, they have held, only has the potential to categorize and separate the nation's young, breaking the harmony which has bound Americans together. Whether or not these two sides of the debate can find middle ground has been a question yet to be resolved. For as long as the theory continues to be subjected to political manipulation, the attention of public discourse will be directed towards partisanship rather than content. Only when do Americans transcend these political quarrels and focus on the theory's subject matter can public opinion be a truly accurate representation of the electorate's attitudes.

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The Reach

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Abstract

The United States of America is often regarded as the model example of democracy in the modern world. Within its borders, however, it grapples with a domestic issue far more dangerous than any foreign threat: polarization. 21st century politics in America is devoid of compromise and cooperation. The unrelenting growth of division in the country calls for judgment.

This is an opinion piece on the dysfunctional state of our union. I discuss how polarization can be weaponized, the data legitimizing our selfish nature, how empathy can be our greatest skill, and the power behind changing our minds. Most importantly – that our founding institutions warn against these political fissures and how history teaches us to combat them.

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

\- Abraham Lincoln -

For a country which frequently parades its unrelenting commitment to the truth, it's ironic it is so comfortable lying to the world, or more significantly, lying to itself – as the most successful lie even convinces, in the end, the mind of its architect. However, the expanse of *this* lie in particular is so frightful because of its need to bare itself so loudly, so proudly, that its falsehood is almost forgotten. Almost. How inappropriate is it to allow this lie to spread on sticky squares for mail, through the media, on cash, on the engravings of coins, through even the encouragement of children to rise from their school seats daily, put their hands on their hearts and pledge it? The lie in question refers to the unyielding fabrication that America truly deserves the moniker of: The *United* States. Because we're not, and we haven't been for a very long time.

When I say that, do you feel a pull to defend our great nation? Itching to list our never-ending internal issues? Maybe you agreed? Maybe you were indifferent.

Of course, your response likely varies between topics, but this division is common for any nation. Therefore, the etymology of designating that division as *polarization* is important when understanding its effects in the modern day. Polarization as a term has existed for centuries, but it was used exclusively for the natural sciences and had "acquired a variety of meanings" describing circumstances in which "phenomena like light" moves, according to Dr. Andreas Schedler – a Senior Research Fellow at the Central European University Democracy Institute. However, Schedler traces the first entry of the term into the world of *politics* back to 1862, when a distressed political commentator in Britain labeled the growing antagonistic culture between the Whigs and Tories as "wretched polarization of our whole national thought" (Schedler, 2023). Since then, the appellation has served to describe various confrontations between deep-rooted political groups.

Don't fret if you had any response, or none, because it isn't differences of opinion that divide this country today: it is our indifference towards the Reach.

The Reach is the principle that despite our human nature to further only our individual interests, we actively choose to coexist with each other. We choose to bind the threads of our various lifestyles, religions, opinions, races, and ages together in the investment of compromise. We choose to respect our diversity. To *reach* beyond our average lifespans to just simply learn something about somebody else, so we can intentionally *choose* to be "United".

If that sounds unthinkable, I promise it is a principle we are familiar with. When a congressman could vote in favor of a bill introduced by their opposing party because it brought jobs to their district. When we saw the oppression of a minority group and could agree it was against our founding principles. When John McCain told his Republican voters that more than anything else, his Democratic opponent Barack Obama was a "decent, family man" who he happened to have "disagreements" with. When neither party claimed the other was against the entirety of democracy. Times when we saw those different from us and still reached out a hand.

When we were capable of logic and compassion.

Let's pause. If the word polarization is used to describe any political clash between habitual groups of people, scholars make those seemingly infinite designations digestible into two major classifications: ideological [differences concerning policy] and affective [a dislike/distrust of groups different than your own] (Iyengar et al., 2019). It's important to break down the etymology and categories of the term in this way, because it gives confidence to any victim of it that it *is* indeed predictable and extensively studied. This is a critical lesson:

polarization is not some exotic oddity we can never quite explain. It's known, defined, and not hostile in nature - like it can often feel.

If this is the truth, why should we care and when does this become an uniquely American problem? Well, in regards to the United States, polarization has skyrocketed in the last four decades compared to our international peers. Brown University's Jesse Shapiro and his new research in comparative politics wanted to explore to what extent polarization affects the U.S. and why we're so much more fractured than our democratic allies. In the study, Shapiro presents, for the first time, evidence on trends across multiple nations in *affective* polarization (AP). Remember, this is a circumstance where people feel more negatively toward political groups they are not a part of than toward groups they are. They found that in the U.S., AP has increased more significantly [since the late 1970s] than in any of the other eight countries they researched — the U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Switzerland, Norway and Sweden. In five of those countries, polarization even *declined* and nowhere has it risen as fast as here. There is no educated republic in the world more dysfunctional than America today. We should be excelling in education, technological innovation, renewable energy, even human rights – not standing alone as an outlier for hatred of those 'different' from us. Hate? *Of all things?* It's shameful, especially for a country built on the foundations of compromise.

We need to understand that this trend not only affects the way we treat each other, but it drives the decisions our representatives make. Clearly, this is a major issue for our democratic institutions. But, why has the U.S. evolved in this direction? Shapiro says it may be because parties have become considerably more aligned with distinct ideologies, races, and religious identities. If you belong to certain groups and become aligned with the party which best represents you, this evolution has normalized the practice of treating those with different views

than your own with less respect, because your party *models* that behavior. It's difficult to be moderate when people who look like you, live near you, believe in the same faith as you, and vote like you are collectively embracing more extreme positions. And they're embracing those positions because the person next to *them* is doing it. And so on. It's difficult to be temperate when the positions behind many policies today are either hot or cold, yes or no; following very binary structures. We've created tribes. I believe it's easier for us to get behind the more radical school of thought of our in-group than jump tenfold to the unfamiliar out-group, who are also completely polarized in the opposite direction. If parties have begun distinguishing based on identity, even the *thought* of switching parties or reaching across the aisle is lost if you don't possess an identity the opposing party has defined themselves with. It seems as if they'd never accept you and you could never be a successful contributor to them, so why bother with the Reach? It's because of this social fear that the middle ground has vanished. It's difficult to practice the Reach when communities as a whole no longer value compromise. It's classic groupthink. It has been proven time and time again that people *will* adopt the opinion of a group at the expense of their own values.

While our political polarization may not seem so dire outside of election seasons, forgetting the Reach has been the root of many domestic threats this century. Most recently, let us observe the Capitol riots of January 6th, 2021. This was an event born from a group of people, white Americans, feeling that their place in society was threatened. Their political leader, former President Donald J. Trump, was adamant that day to use polarization as a match to spark action. While claiming election fraud in his speech at the beginning of that day, Trump told his supporters, "We're going to... the Capitol" and "if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." This choice of framing and this need to designate his personal loss as

this world-ending, anti-democratic, institution-crumbling *fact* very literally sparked a mob to take their own mild differences of opinion and inflame them into physical actions. Trump knew how to harness the feeling behind belonging to a group. Almost all leaders do. When you give a mouse a cookie or, more accurately, give a dragon an unsuspecting village, you will see fire. January 6th proved to us that polarization can be weaponized.

The founding fathers, like a lot of their work, predicted this human flaw. They knew the dangers of distrusting our neighbors and advancing our own agendas at the expense of others, so they formed our Constitution. Yes, it's a document that tells the government what it can and can't do and *yes*, it does protect individual liberties, but it also chains selfishness and scolds isolation. No matter the interpretation of this document, one of its goals is astoundingly clear: to recognize our intersectionality and to promote our union by limiting individual rights for the common good. They recognized that the Reach was so important, they built the institutional framework of this country around it. We have repaid them by being inattentive to history.

Since the Constitution's inception, the tension within our society has been considerable. Lines have been so important to us. Black and White, federal and state, North and South, citizen and immigrant, farm and city, you name it. These borders are formed when in the face of our great diversity, we choose what's familiar. A timeworn story of the fear of the unknown. And in this fear, we want *our* lifestyles, our opinions, our faiths, our way of thinking to become the prevailing majority. So, we form factions of only what we are familiar with, adamant against the Reach.

Acknowledging this, I must return to my earlier point on the founding fathers' predictive prowess. In one of his many defenses of the document before its ratification, and perhaps his most famous, James Madison wrote that the Constitution would form a society capable of

controlling the damage of factions. Arguing that factions are inevitable given the nature of man and that for as long as we have different opinions – shared property, wealth, and fraternization with those of one's own kind was unavoidable. Madison agreed that we must beware of factions. He warns us of polarization, even in the 1780s. But he also had the foresight to realize that if we wanted to cut off the causes of factions at their root, the government would have to infringe on civil liberties or even worse: attempt to give each person the same mindless opinion and thought. Neither option was appealing. So, Madison said that instead of attempting to create a "cure worse than the disease itself," we must accept the reality of our nature and control a potentially violent majority through the compromises in what is now the Constitution. This is the famous "liberty for all."

At the mention of *liberty*, our minds rush to correlate the term with freedom. Liberties, to us, are the rights that authority cannot abridge on, usually constitutionally or legislatively, that adheres us to our individuality. What's not to love? However, this is an incomplete interpretation of the service liberty performs for us today, especially as a deterrent for polarization.

The Bill of Rights is the quintessential embodiment of our active *choice* to coexist with one another's selfish natures. The rights outlined in those ten amendments precisely established the Reach. All our freedoms, which we ironically fight over today, are many small compromises we agree to in order to keep our unity. They are as much a celebration of our differences as they are a protector against the national government. It is idealism repackaged as pragmatism. It was a call to action for the new colonies as Washington and Co. struggled to find their footing as a new nation. It is completely the first real breath that democracy took in the West. It was the most vulnerable step toward defining what it meant to be American and why we would be the greatest country in the world. It was to say that if we can't live together, we are bound to die alone,

bound to pull apart as a people. The moniker of the "united states" is not meant to be nonchalant. It is not meant to be taken lightly. It is a bold name for a bold idea. A reminder that we choose not to let our innate fears overpower us and to put coexistence at the forefront of our needs. And yet, we've been remiss.

We have backslid into another period of forgetting that our greatest gift is our diversity and have begun feeling threatened by it. We must remember that to be American is to challenge, to come together and have discourse, to debate, to question, to value an opinion different from our own. To reach across the aisle because we have a government built on the soil of cooperation and negotiation.

We fail as a country when our leaders enter halls of power and insist on getting their way and their way only. Animosity is grossly un-American and goes against the heart of our nation. We must struggle so we can recognize what we can do better, but we must not let struggle we are unfamiliar with offend us away from reasonable action. Minority races continue to ask for true equality. Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and more continue to ask to be respected for their religious beliefs. Those with uncustomary sexual orientations fought the battle to be recognized by the state and *continue* to fight against discrimination in every aspect of life. And so, the wheel turns.

We've always been the country of 'one person, one vote,' but we have never been the country of one lifestyle, one opinion, one religion. Let us hear each other's voices, share disagreements, have productive debates, and encourage empathy. Let us practice the forgotten tradition of the Reach, to take a hand that doesn't look like our own and shake it for a future that looks brighter than our present. Our differences are part of the American story, but let us not let our incurable division become our story too.

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Gerrymandering as a Path to Undemocratic Representation

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Abstract

Gerrymandering is a practice of deliberate and unfair manipulation of district lines to favor one party over others during the election cycles. This political ideology has emerged as a resilient issue in American politics which quietly steals voices from citizens who are often not aware of its negative effects and far-reaching implications on equal representation. This paper examines the way gerrymandering creates a path to an undemocratic representation through the analysis of historical origins of gerrymandering and its close relationship with the redistricting process. Additionally, the technological advancements in the redistricting process, and an examination of notable election cycles and Supreme Court cases are one of the main tools that delve into the negative consequences of gerrymandering throughout this analysis. Notably, the paper also analyzes a way of reversing the practice of gerrymandering through utilizing governmental laws and authorities in the American political system.

Throughout the U.S. election years, there have been many factors that can influence election outcomes. Many believe that the popular sovereignty of the people and the "one person, one vote" in the U.S. are the deciding factors on election outcomes. However, one of the hidden factors, gerrymandering, has an imminent effect on election results. The practice of gerrymandering is commonly known as the deliberate and unfair manipulation of district lines to favor one party over others (McGhee 171). Dominantly, both the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. use gerrymandering to influence the results of elections in their respective favor. However, more often than not, gerrymandering renders voters of unrepresented parties worthless in their attempts to bring about change by casting their names on the ballot. The effectiveness of gerrymandering and its propensity to undermine the equal representation of U.S. citizens from different partisan affiliations are encouraged by one party's dominance and the advancement of redistricting. Consequently, gerrymandering of U.S. House Districts negatively affects the equal political representation of U.S. citizens.

Historically, gerrymandering has been developed through the redistricting process which continues to have a negative influence on today's election outcomes. The history of gerrymandering is closely examined in the scholarly article "Partisan Gerrymandering and Political Science" authored by Eric McGhee. McGhee is a political scientist at the Public Policy Institute of California who explores the history of gerrymandering through a lens of empirical data. His research explores Supreme Court cases such as Baker v. Carr (1962), Wesberry v. Sanders (1964), and Reynolds v. Sims (1964), which help establish the historical context of redistricting and also provide a foundation for understanding the origin of gerrymandering. These cases established an essential principle of "one person, one vote," which resulted in mid-decade redistricting to ensure an equal proportion of the population during U.S. House elections

(McGhee 173). A sudden mandate for the district lines to be drawn every ten years left the world

of politics with a "flurry of research on the causes, mechanics, and consequences of redistricting"

(McGhee 173). Most importantly, partisan dynamics rose as mechanisms that served as a

foundational principle of gerrymandering (McGhee 173). Ultimately, the redistricting process

opened an abundance of new questions as to how partisan affiliation strategies affect popular

representation in the redistricting process. Partisan affiliation strategy dictates the way lines are

drawn during the redistricting process as one party's dominance is the leading factor that

determines the layout of redistricting. Conclusively, the beginning of an intense redistricting

process in the 1960s soon caused the practice of gerrymandering through a cycle of elections

which unproportionally affected the political representation of U.S. citizens.

 2012 serves as a crucial "Great Gerrymander" election year of the U.S. House of

Representatives as it advanced the process of gerrymandering and ultimately disintegrated an

equal political representation of the U.S. citizens. Gary Jacobson; a professor of political science

at the University of California, San Diego, emphasizes the importance of the "Great

Gerrymander" year as a leading author in his book "The Politics of Congressional Elections."

Jacobson highlights that the redistricting process in 2012 has set the future of gerrymandering in

the Republican favor. More importantly, in the 2012 election, Republicans were in charge of 9

states where the arrangement of House seats changed as a result of the redistricting process,

giving them control over 18 states with 202 House seats in total (Jacobson & Carson 13).

Furthermore, Democratic dominance over this process was limited to 6 states. Republicans have

benefited from this since they were able to "shore up some of their marginal districts" by

increasing voter turnout in some of their vulnerable districts (Jacobson & Carson 13). Because

Republicans were able to gather more votes in the redistricting process, the current minority

party (Democrats) has lost seats. Ultimately, this led to an unequal representation of the voters who identify as members of the Democratic party. Clearly, this year serves as proof that gerrymandering sidelines voters of an underrepresented party, the Democrats, and instead enlarges the overrepresentation of the Republican party through the statistical data of a 2012 election. In the long run, people who affiliate themselves with an underrepresented party do not receive an equal representation in the election process. Ultimately, it is evident that gerrymandering hinders an equal political representation of U.S. citizens in strategic election cycles.

This political ideology certainly creates misrepresentation among voters of an underrepresented party who reside in places that receive little to no representation, and thus their votes often get wasted. According to the Efficiency Gap (a quantitative measure for the effects of gerrymandering), the definition of wasted votes refers to "all the votes cast for a party in a district that the party loses, as well as the votes cast in excess of 50% in a district that the party wins" (McGhee 173). Therefore, unrepresented votes that are cast in districts in which the dominant party wins are essentially "worthless" because they have no effect on bringing change due to the strategic layout of district lines. In the long run, this leads to an unequal representation of those whose votes identify with the weaker party because of the way their local districts are designed. For instance, a large portion of Democratic voters are concentrated in urban areas which receive little representation. Moreover, urban areas are counted as singular districts, despite their propensity to represent a large population. In the long run, districts are not equally divided based on their representative population. As a consequence, many of those voters are sidelined and cannot attain equal representation. The geographical location in the process of redistricting additionally creates a stronger foundation for gerrymandering and makes it difficult

for people who are underrepresented to bring about change by casting their names on the ballot. Hence, gerrymandering adversely influences the political representation of U.S. citizens through the redistricting process.

The practice of gerrymandering unquestionably targets minority groups who more often than not identify as members of a Democratic Party. Consequently, the validity of the Voting Rights Act is deteriorating with a wave of partisan gerrymandering. This is illustrated in the article "How the Supreme Court's New Gerrymandering Case Threatens the Voting Rights Act", which closely examines the effect of gerrymandering on minority groups. Authors, Michael Li and Yurij Rudensky, who are members of the Senior Counsel for the Brennan Center of Justice, discuss the dangers of gerrymandering in affiliation with minority groups. Their article explores the new redistricting Supreme Court Case in Alabama, Merrill v. Milligan, which brings attention to political representation because it shows that communities are often divided for the benefit of political gain. The background of the issue lies in federal lawsuits brought by Black voters when it was alleged that the state violated the Voting Rights Act by failing to draw a second congressional district with a majority of Black people in the state's "Black Belt," an 18-county area that is primarily rural and home to some of the nation's highest poverty rates (Li & Rudensky 2022).

Moreover, Alabama lawmakers drew a map that maintains a practice of dividing the Black Belt into four congressional districts, disregarding the request of Black constituents to be kept together in two districts for better representation as well as the significant demographic changes in the region over the last couple of decades (Li & Rudensky 2022). Ultimately, redistricting without major restrictions results in unfair gerrymandering, which as presented in this case, ignores the community of African American people. In cases like these, the representation of the

Democratic party is undermined which is reflected through outcomes in which the minority groups who lean Democrat cannot get an equal representation. Undoubtedly, the exigency of this Supreme Court case speaks to minority communities in the United States who feel the consequences of gerrymandering. Thus, gerrymandering dismantles the equal representation of minorities and creates a path for democratic backsliding.

Gerrymandering robs many people of their privacy and more importantly, unfairly pinpoints people's political affiliation through an advancement of redistricting. Hence, "packing" and "cracking" (different methods of gerrymandering), in addition to the new technology improvements, do not leave much room for fair improvement in the redistricting process. More specifically, technological improvements have been a significant factor that contributes to unfair redistricting acts. The article, "How Redistricting Became a Technological Arms Race" authored by Vann R. Newkirk II, a senior editor at The Atlantic, discusses how technological improvements throughout the years of redistricting affect the gerrymandering process. Historically, gerrymandering used to be a process that required "the high cost of hardware, the unwieldiness of computers, and the use of giant, slow map printers that literally drew maps with big markers" (Newkirk II 2017).

The cost and efficiency of the previous redistricting process clearly were not supported by favorable conditions. However, modern technology nowadays favorably impacts the development of today's redistricting process. Newkirk asserts that "with the rise of big data and big datasets, mapmakers have been able to scry—with remarkable accuracy—both the political leanings and voting likelihood of blocks and households, which then allow them much more fine-tuning of district lines" (Newkirk II 2017). The advancement of technology evidently allows for precise and strategic redistricting which further develops gerrymandering. Ultimately, the

newer redistricting process highlights that because gerrymanders have much wider knowledge about voters, such as their political affiliations and other personal information, the gerrymandering process has become even more efficient in recent years. The improvements in redistricting additionally make it easier for one party to "dig deep into the field of big data in order to gain advantages" (Newkirk II 2017). The abundance of this data allows the dominant party to gerrymander electoral districts effectively. Thus, this method fails to produce an accurate representation of the actual party affiliation in several districts. The used data is manipulated to create gerrymandering and confirm one party's unfair electoral advantage. In the end, votes are calculated and used to one party's benefit which reflects unequal political representation. Ultimately, many voters are at risk of being robbed of their privacy along with the validity of their representation in the redistricting process. Therefore, the process of technological improvements for the purposes of gerrymandering negatively affects the political representation of U.S. citizens.

In exploring other perspectives of gerrymandering, there are those who believe in the positive implications of gerrymandering. The scholarly article "Is Gerrymandering Good for Democracy?", authored by Jacob Rubel, a political science student at Tufts University, closely examines the hidden values of gerrymandering. More specifically, the author argues that gerrymandering may be advantageous to American democracy because it "restores an essential principle of the American republic by balancing elite and popular influence" (Rubel 2). Rubel utilizes the Founding Principles of the U.S. Constitution to explain how the republic was intended to strike a precise balance between the desire of the people and the independent judgment of a few intelligent and aspirational elites. In his view, because gerrymandering is done through the judgment of a few individuals who draw district lines, the act of doing so

accomplishes the goal of balancing democracy between the will of the people and a few ambitious elites. Rubel follows up his argument by stating that if we were to rely on the complete will of the common people, we would be closer to creating a tyranny that would destroy individual rights the government was initially created to protect (Rubel 3).

Even though Rubel argues that the intended creation of government strives to stay away from tyranny, the practice of gerrymandering still continues to present an obstacle to a healthy democracy. More often than not, the unlimited power of a few individuals will be used for the benefit of one political party over another. In addition, the unfair actions of a few individuals serve as a representation of the whole population's voice. Many people are victims of the principles that build the practice of gerrymandering, and the power of few elites is one of those principles because it dismantles the votes of many people. Ultimately, this practice does not allow for a fair political representation. Therefore, an intended purpose of a representative democracy of the United States, as Rubel envisions while he discusses the values of gerrymandering, cannot be fulfilled with the progressing power of gerrymandering. Furthermore, the power of the few elites who cause the practice of gerrymandering should be limited by the supreme law of the land.

Gerrymandering has been an ongoing issue for many years that is stealing voices from citizens who are often not even aware of the negative effects of this political ideology. In recent years, gerrymandering has been a political term that creates Supreme Court cases and raises a question of democratic validity in the United States. It has been a common practice to use gerrymandering to destroy equal representation of voters whose voices are ultimately not equally heard in order to benefit one party's dominance. The redistricting process, which involves drawing district lines in a way that will favor one partisan party, is undemocratic. Consequently,

the enormous prevalence of gerrymandering in today's elections renders many groups of people worthless in their attempts to bring about change by casting their names on the ballot. However, the future of gerrymandering could be reversed with the power of the governmental authorities. The article "How Can We Combat Gerrymandering?" authored by Georgia Lyon, discusses possible ways to combat the power of gerrymandering, with the main focus being on governmental laws. The article highlights that in order to slow down the effects of gerrymandering on the national level, the Congress should pass The Freedom to Vote Act. This Act would "employ standard quantitative measures of partisan fairness to see if each voter's vote counts equally and make it easier to bring legal challenges to a disputed map by permitting individual residents of a state and the U.S. Attorney General to sue to enforce the law" (Lyon 2021). Therefore, this legislative bill incentivizes the creation of fairer maps due to its ability to allow voters to express their concerns about disputed maps. Thus, the power of a legislative body to enforce a bill that will extend on a national level proves that the future of gerrymandering could be reversed and ensure an equal political representation of all U.S. citizens.

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