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Did the Pandemic make America more liberal?: An Analysis of the U.S Elections

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus turned the world upside down and amidst this global health crisis, the world looked on as America elected into power a new President and Vice President belonging to the Democratic Party. The Joe Biden and Kamala Harris duo defeated the republican candidates Donald Trump and Mike Pence by a whole 40,00 votes. Through the means of this study the researcher uses empirical evidences to analyze this shift in power using the different political ideologies in which the election was set. The paper aims to understand if the pandemic and pandemic led changes like increased social media usage and the mail-in ballot system had any effect in the process of electing a new party to run this democracy.

Keywords: Ideologies, Democracy, Liberalism, COVID19, U.S Election, Mail-in Ballot.

I. INTRODUCTION

"What a ride! And what a finish. Exhilarating, excruciating, exhausting, extraordinary. The rollercoaster of emotions set in train by the closest, most momentous US presidential election race in recent memory, and the agonies of its interminable aftermath, are difficult to adequately express. Yet a single powerful feeling- of exultation- cuts through the confusion and noise. What a joy! What a relief. At last, America and the world are re-emerging from a long journey into darkness. The nightmare is ending." (Viser, 2020). These are lines, by the winning candidate: Joe Biden in the backdrop of the fifty-ninth quadrennial presidential election, one of the most defining characteristics of the world's most beloved regimes: 'Democracy'.

The U.S elections are perhaps one of the most meticulously organized elections in the world. Candidates for the presidency typically seek the nomination of one of the various political parties of the United States. These Primary elections are generally indirect elections where voters can cast ballots to pledge for a certain candidate, The parties delegates then officially nominate a candidate to run on behalf of it. 2020, saw Trump securing the republican candidacy without much opposition, while Biden was nominated on behalf of the

democrats over his closest rival, Senator Bernie Sanders.

While Biden was declared President of the United States at the end of the elections, Trump became the first U.S President since 1992 in the country's history to lose a bid for a second term. This time's elections were outlandish for several reasons. Rallies were virtually held, debates were rescheduled, a record number of ballots were sent in by post and the incumbent president of the United States had tested positive for the deadly infection that had plagued the world.

II. IDEOLOGIES, PARTISANSHIP AND VOTING:

Ideology, as defined by Anthony Downs is a "verbal image of the good society, and of the chief means of constructing such a society" (Roskin, 2008, p. 177). The U.S elections give voters the options to choose between two political sides: Democratic and Republican.

The democrats are primarily left leaning and follow principles based on American Liberalism, this is in contrast to the conservative ideology endorsed by the Republican party. Democrats being liberal, promote social programs, labour unions, equal opportunity and also favour abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. This is also displayed through the winning of Sarah McBride to become the first transgender senator in U.S history. The election debates also revolve around Trump accusing Kamala and Biden of being socialist, claiming "Biden admitted to being a trojan horse for the Marxist wing of the democratic party" (The Telegraph, 2020). At the same time several critics assert that Kamala Harris' policies and actions during her term as the Attorney General of California are far from progressive. She repeatedly declined police led shootings of people of colour and for aggressively convicting misdemeanour along the lines of panhandling and graffiti. However, a GovTrack analysis showed that she had one of the most liberal voting records of any sitting senator in 2019 (GovTrack, 2019). Joe Biden's campaigning involved a cautious approach. He strictly abided by the COVID protocols like following social distancing and wearing a mask.

On the other hand; Trump led republicans support conservatism, lower taxes, free market capitalism, gun rights and strongly oppose abortion rights. Trump has been widely criticised for his fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump has pointedly gone against several of these restrictions, claiming that these were politically motivated strategies ("Indian Express explained: How the COVID pandemic has impacted the US election 2020," 2020)
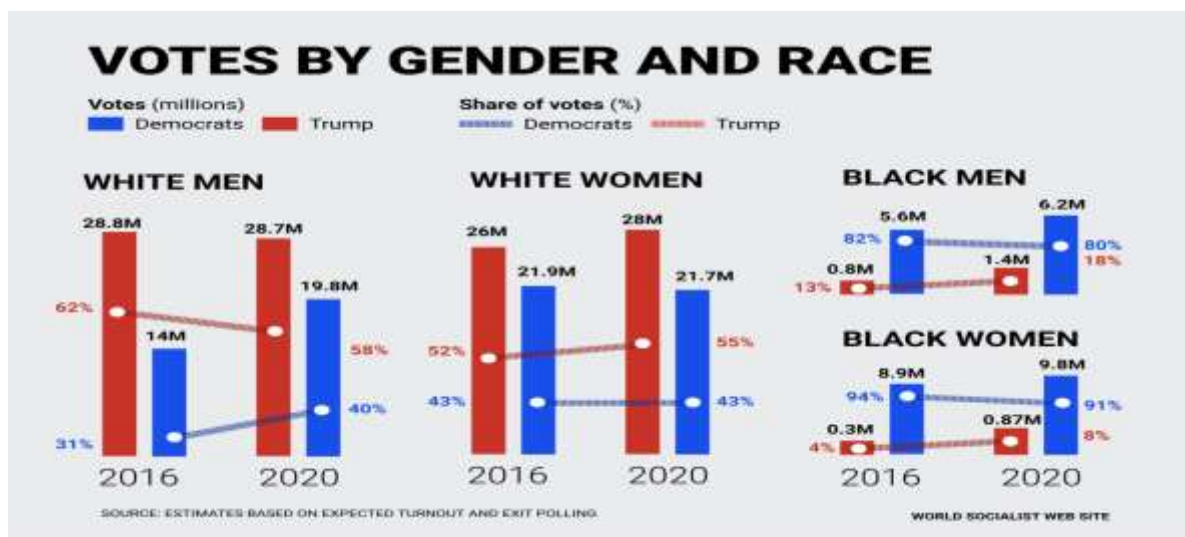
A study conducted by Stanford university linked thousands of COVID cases and several deaths owing to Trumps massive rallies and callous campaigning. Researchers, involved in this study studied infection rates across 18 places that were home to Trump's events between the 20th of

June and the 30th of September. On comparing this data to post-rally infection rates it was found that Trump's strategies leg to a surge of roughly 30,000 confirmed cases and were projected to cause over 700 deaths. Further, these cases were not directly linked to people who had attended the event, but instead these cases stemmed through contact tracing people who had attended the event. In addition to this, Trump's schedule was jam-packed with rallies and other campaigning events, which hosted thousands of supporters. The implementation of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act also included money for states to increase mail-in voting system to discourage long queues and increase the spread of the virus.

III. WHAT ABOUT THE VOTERS?

Joe Biden's decision to pick Kamala Harris was an unforeseen move that certainly had a huge hand to play in his victory as President of the United States. Research suggests that Black Americans, particularly Black women make for the most loyal Democratic constituencies, (Reuters 2020). Garnering Harris' support also tilted the balance towards Blue in States where Trump's 2016 margins of victory were quite slim like Michigan and Wisconsin which formed crucial states. As indicated in figure 1, not only black women but also suburban white woman voted blue ("The observer view on the U.S presidential Election," 2020).
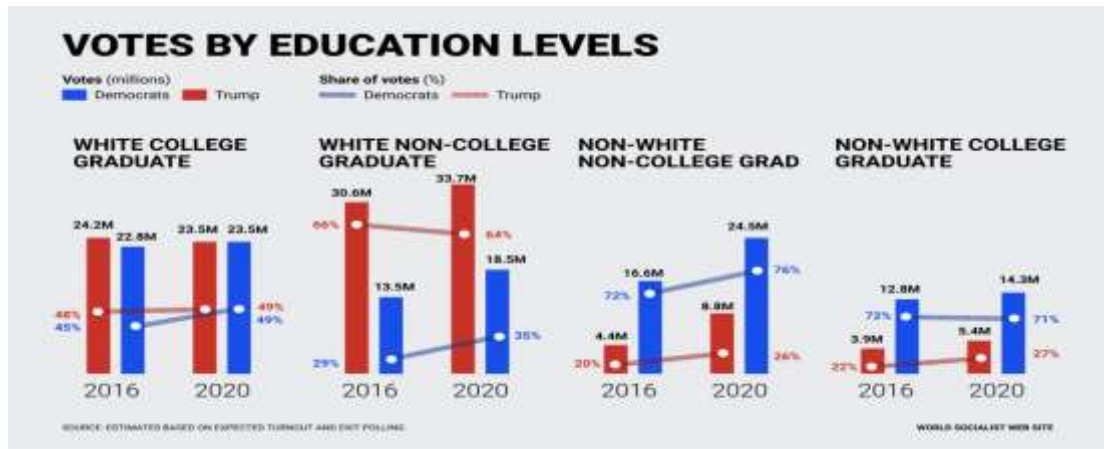
Figure 1: *Distribution of affiliation on the basis of gender and race*

This difference in allegiance to parties is also visible in the difference by which educated and uneducated people vote (refer to figure 2). In the 2016 election, Trump won a large population of whites without a college degree, 67 percent. Despite Biden laying emphasis on his roots as being working class and supporting the labourers and workers, his sympathies didn't garner the desired the support. Biden was only modestly able to reduce this gap: Trump still won 64% of this group", says Michael J. Sandel, professor of government at Harvard University

("Looking for hints of future prospects in the past and predicting what lies ahead," 2020).

Figure 2*: Distribution of affiliation on the basis of Education*

IV. ABSENTEE VOTING AND PUBLIC STANCES:

Mail- in ballots are also called absentee ballots and these allow voters to send in their votes by mail earlier, given circumstances which disallow them from appearing at the polling station on Election day. These were mostly given access to for overseas staying persons or military personnel. However, given the unusual circumstances created by COVID-19, most states endorsed the system of mail-in- Ballots. As shown in Table 1, voting in ballots show that Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents were about twice as likely as Republicans to support "no excuse" absentee or early voting; 83% as opposed to 44% ("Mail-in voting became much more common in 2020 primaries as COVID-19 spread," 2020)

Table 1: *The given table shows the Returned mail ballots and their affiliation*

Party	Returned Ballots	Frequency distribution	Requested Ballots	Return Rates
Democrats	17,992,444	47.8	25,047,831	71.8%
Republicans	10,174,747	27.0	14,914,002	68.2%

This year, an unprecedent 103.2 million people cast their ballots early. A tally by the Associated Press shows that in most states including those influencing votes like Texas and Arizona, exceeded the total vote of four years ago. In comparison to 2016, Kentucky saw nearly 13 times as many voters cast their votes ("What's the mail-in ballot controversy?" 2020") . 42.4% of Democrats cast their votes by mail while compared to 16% of Republicans. In Rhode Island's
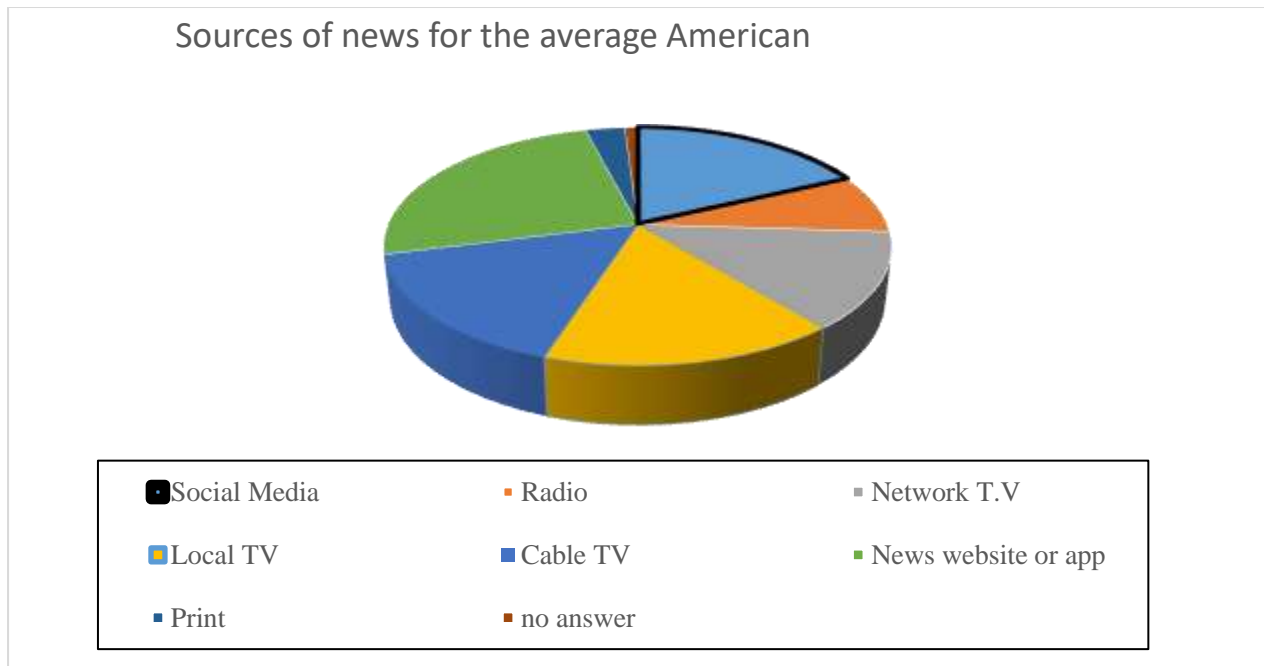
primaries for U.S. House seats 47.4% made use of Democratic ballots but only 13.2% of the Republicans endorsed this system. A difference of 34.2 percentage points. ("Mail-in voting became much more common in primaries as COVID-19 spread," 2020). While this data may suggest that this could be a cause for the election results tilting towards Biden, *The New York Times* and Siena College Research Institute in Loudonville, New York claim that any advantage for Democrats could be offset by the sheer disparity reflected through rejected ballot as well as by a higher Republican turnout in person. 28% of Democrats said they planned to vote in person on election day, compared with 68% of Republicans ("News Explainer: COVID and the U.S Election," 2020)

V. DISCRIMINATION IN THE PROCESS OF VOTING

The U.S election had a massive turnout of people who historically faced greater barriers to voting, young people, black people and people from underprivileged communities who possessed less education and less wealth. ("News Explainer. COVID and the U.S Election," 2020). However research suggests that ballots from a certain demographic populace are more likely to get rejected in comparison to others, these groups are the ones that normally favour Democrats ("News Explainer: COVID and the U.S Election," 2020). Studies suggest that the ballots of Black voters are four times more rejected than the those of white voters. A study by Darmouth university, hypothesizes that inexperienced voters are disproportionately likely to have their ballots rejected, despite everything else being similar. Voters belonging to the age groups 18–21 years also faced rejection rates four times those of the average voter aged 45–64. (Cottrell et al., 2020)

VI. SOCIAL MEDIA, THE PANDEMIC AND ELECTIONS

On following Trump's social media campaign in detail, one can see roughly 70 tweets about his presidential competitors. The pandemic has increased the twitter usage of the average American Citizen by 34.4%. Trump has also been seen to have blatantly misrepresented his handling of the virus and the ideologies of his opponents widely. These numbers are extremely alarming considering that Republicans tend to be less accurate than Democrats, consistent with the fact that the selected falsehoods were a prominent part of the Republican campaign strategy, while more educated individuals are more accurate. Among Facebook users, the relationship between social media use and the belief accuracy was around 95%. It must also be noted, that several of these voters use social media as their only source of information as seen in figure 3 (Garrett, 2019).

Fig. 3: *Sources of News for the average American*

This makes the latest Trump supporter's latest campaign on social media #stopthecount and other such initiatives bogus. According to a report 'The Truth About Voter Fraud' found that most reported incidents of voter frauds can be traced back to other genuine sources like clerical errors or data matching practices. A study published in 2014, in The Washington Post found 31 credible events of fraud by impersonation from the years 2000 to 2014, out of a massive 1 billion ballots cast. Even this minute figure is likely to be inflated, as the author of this study counted not just prosecutions or convictions, but every single credible source of claims A 2017 analysis published in The Washington Post concluded that there is no evidence to support Trump's claim that Massachusetts residents were bused into New Hampshire to vote. A researcher at Columbia University tracked the incidence rates of political fraud for two years and discovered that the rare fraud reported by angered voters, generally could be traced back to "false claims by the loser of a close race, mischief and administrative or voter error." ("Debunking the voter fraud myth," 2020).

VII. CONCLUSION

In the United States, conservatism is combined with American nationalism anhe 2020 U.S election was certainly one of its kind. An election held amongst one of the world's biggest disasters, bang in the middle of a raging pandemic. But so much has changed since November. The United states elected to power a government leaning towards the ideals of liberalism and democracy; The first woman and African-American Vice President, after the world condemned them for the death of George Floyd. The pandemic certainly gave the citizens of the United

States insights into the reality behind the progressiveness of the Republicans, who endangered several lives by underestimating the pandemic, who added fuel to the fire of climate change by calling it a hoax and who prioritised the economy over lives. The pandemic thus, led to a shift in ideology of several American's as visible by their voting into power a democratic president, who believed in the sheer reality of climate change, who acknowledged the healthcare crisis, is willing to stand up for women rights and propagates racial sensitivity. Yet, the claims of fraud are still flowing into the supreme court and the political stance of the government continues to remain Republican. It is quite disheartening that despite the fact that Biden won by a record 40,000 votes, Trump refuses to accept his defeat. At the same time, the potential for human errors to occur cannot be ignored, and perhaps the pandemic induced voting system certainly has its challenges. The impact the U.S elections can have on the world cannot be ignored, it has the power to create wars and to destroy economies, and the world looks on to the future this 'New America' brings.

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