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## The 2020 Election

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This essay won Second Place in the 2020 General Election Informed Citizen Writing Contest co-sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research and UNF Writing Center

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# *The 2020 Election*

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Once every four years, on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November, Americans exercise their democratic right to vote via presidential elections. We are once again approaching this point in what will be the 59<sup>th</sup> presidential election, this time between Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden. This election does not seem merely to be one of many because the victor will be forced to address rising extremism, a global pandemic, and economic uncertainty. For many Americans, it truly seems as if our identity, livelihood, and survival may rest on the shoulders of the victor. For this reason, it is important to carefully evaluate the stances and beliefs between the two major candidates in order to make an informed decision. In this article, I will discuss the importance of informed voting while also evaluating the positions of Donald Trump and Joe Biden in order to display the differences and similarities in their economic, immigration, and racial justice stances.

In today's society, it has become increasingly difficult to engage in informed voting. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the internet, which has allowed us to construct our own realities and absorb only what we want to hear, consequently leaving us privy to misinformation. For example, after the death of George Floyd in police custody, a video falsely claiming his death was faked was shared with 1.3 million people via Facebook (Alba). At the macro level, the Knight Foundation found that 89% of election-related links were related to sites with histories of misinformation (Knight Foundation, 4). A statistic like this is valuable because it illustrates the extent to which misinformation can infect our modern political interactions in a world of seemingly unlimited information. This still leaves the question of how to sift through the misinformation in order to become an informed voter. The first and most important step is to avoid any news source with a clear

ideological leaning. The power of self-affirming “echo chambers” can be just as destructive as false information, as they may prevent a full examination of complex issues from various perspectives. Even if a news source appears multi-faceted and unbiased, it is still wise to explore various sources rather than leaving oneself at the mercy of a single network or website.

For instance, a minimum wage increase to 15 dollars an hour was proposed in the State of Florida. A conservative radio station may run pieces detailing the potential drawbacks of this policy including increases in unemployment and the potential destruction of small businesses, while a more liberal radio station would run pieces detailing the potential benefits such as increased standard of living and a decrease in crime. Someone who only listens to a conservative or liberal radio station would not actually be capable of gaining a full understanding of the policy and may find themselves solely focused on only the benefits or drawbacks. It is only by listening to both stations, and doing supplemental research afterwards, that a truly informed decision can be made.

Pertaining to supplemental information, there are various sources available. For instance, the Department of Labor regularly releases easily accessible unemployment updates. For more information, multiple economic journals may cross-reference these statistics with potentially related events to investigate a correlation. This applies to any and all policy information, be it foreign, economic, or social. While the internet may come across as a jungle of misinformation, it can still be navigated in search of the truth. All of this is incredibly important to ensure that government policy is not decided based on misinformation and pure ideology and preventing this would have to start with individual voters doing their research. I will explain the importance of this research via my examination of the policies of President Donald Trump and his opponent Joe Biden.

President Donald Trump seems to reiterate parts of his 2016 “America First” message, invoking the perceived importance of economic nationalism. This makes sense, as it was this sentiment that gifted the President the backing of America’s “Rust Belt.” Donald Trump hopes for a repeat of his former success to retain the vote from America’s disenfranchised working class. The Peterson Institute for International Economics discovered that the establishment of trade relations with China had a direct relationship with political polarization among the predominantly white working-class (Freund). This is important when considering the political platform

of Trump's opponent, Joe Biden. In an effort to prevent a 2016-esque situation, Joe Biden aims to "ensure that the future is made in America and in all of America," establishing economic nationalism as a part of the Democratic platform where it was sorely missed in 2016 (Biden). Whether economic nationalism and protectionism are viable or not is a topic for later discussion, but it is evident that Hillary Clinton's message of moving forward from industrialization in favor of growing the service industry was rejected by the Rust Belt, with Illinois being the site of her sole victory.

So, both parties and candidates have a vested interest in the spread of an America First protectionism-centric economic message, but is this feasible? Citizen.org undertook the task of investigating the companies that received government contracts under the Trump administration and discovered 200,000 jobs were outsourced by these companies (Citizen.org). A counterargument against the findings of Citizen.org's "promises made, workers betrayed" dossier could be found in the fact that most of the companies observed were massive corporations with historic government contracts that were not to be tampered with, including Boeing, General Electric, AT&T, etc. It is also worth noting that the dossier found that most lower-level contracts were awarded to companies that produced exclusively in the United States. Therefore, the question may revolve around just how feasible protectionist policies may be, if the goal is to simply maintain smaller domestic businesses, or if the next president should personally attempt to persuade companies like Boeing to shift their production to the U.S.

Joe Biden is also attempting to focus on various workers' benefits and tax breaks to incentivize domestic production and participation in the workforce, but critics may wonder if this is enough to repair America's dying manufacturing sector. Trump's approach relies more on the usage of tariffs to discourage foreign production paired with tax incentives for domestic production. In "The Return to Protectionism," published by *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, President Trump's tariff activity is measured and charted (Fajgelbaum). Trump's tariffs included a 13% increase on all U.S imports, which seems relatively positive before accounting for the retaliatory tariffs of 20% on all U.S exports (Fajgelbaum). These tariffs heavily damaged U.S economic production in the short run with long term results having yet to be determined. Both candidates are eerily similar on issues of economics and trade, but whether this is to the benefit of the American worker also has yet to be seen.

So, economic beliefs seem to more or less unite the two candidates in terms of importance and general message but, upon evaluating various smaller issues, the differences between the candidates become clear. Immigration is possibly where the most observable differences can be found, with President Trump's attempts to limit both legal and illegal immigration in stark contrast to Biden's message of inclusion. It is worth noting that President Trump's immigration policy always appeared to harbor a nativist element as shown by his initial focus on preventing illegal immigrants from joining the job market. President Trump's initial focus has now evolved into limits on H1N1 visas and the repealing of various elements of the DREAM act in an effort to limit foreign competition in the job market.

The article "Make America 1920 Again" presents the common criticism that the president's policies are reductive, in that the "Time period to which we return is one in which immigration is sharply restricted by national, ethnic, and religious criteria" (Young). The article invokes President Trump's "Muslim ban" and constant targeting of illegal immigrants as evidence of this end goal. The potential rebuttal to this claim may be found in the idea that perhaps certain types of immigration may pose a legitimate security threat and require intense scrutiny. In a study conducted by the BBC regarding Crime in Germany, it was noted that asylum seekers and refugees were overrepresented as criminal suspects; sadly, no such study exists for the U.S (BBC). This data was not necessarily conclusive though, due to the potential impact of selective policing and nativist sentiments amongst officers.

Joe Biden provides an alternative to President Trump's anti-immigration message by appealing to the status of the U.S as a nation of immigrants. Joe Biden has already voiced his commitment to accepting more asylum seekers by establishing a target of 125,000 asylum seekers a year (Biden). Unfortunately, Joe Biden's immigration policy does not have the benefit of precedent, which makes it difficult to understand what the reality of his future policy would be. It is very clear that both candidates are deeply divided regarding the nature of both immigration law and its enforcement.

The final and perhaps most important issue dividing the two candidates is racial justice. President Trump and Joe Biden represent polar opposites, specifically pertaining to the issue of systemic racism. Despite this, both candidates are united in the belief that there is a need for a government plan to intervene and encourage the economic progress of urban communities (Biden). President Trump has his Diamond Plan centered around increased funding for Historically Black Universities and

Colleges (HBCUs), federal funding towards Black churches, and the appointment of opportunity zones in urban areas. Joe Biden's economic plan slightly differs from President Trump's by focusing on resolving disparities and reducing the racial wealth gap while also addressing racial inequalities across the board (Biden). President Trump has some similar policies, specifically the First Step Act, which has brought the average crack cocaine possession sentence from 20 years down to 15 years (Gotsch). Despite this and his occasional appeals to the Black community, President Trump seems to opt for a "rising tide lifts all boats" approach to racial inequality, hypothesizing that wealth gaps do not matter so long as everybody is experiencing rising wages regardless of race.

It is worth noting that the definition of systemic racism, a mechanism which President Trump denies even exists, is referred to as "an institutional mechanism of racism that was designed to protect whites from social interaction with Blacks" (Williams). Joe Biden seems to be more interested in specifically addressing this phenomenon by confronting issues such as housing and employer discrimination (Biden). Despite President Trump's broader approach to racial justice, both candidates have comparable economic goals and plans for America's Black communities. For instance, both President Trump and Joe Biden aim to extend more small business loans to Black communities as described on both of their websites (Biden, Trump). All things considered, this issue may come down to the idiosyncrasies and nuances of each candidate's approach.

Being able to accurately describe and understand the pros and cons of political candidates is extremely important in the modern age. It is clear that both presidential candidates have relatively similar yet somehow feuding ideas for where they aim to direct the country. By understanding this fact, perhaps we can acknowledge that just like our political candidates, we the American people are not as polarized as initially believed.

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