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EÖTVÖS LORÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM  
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

# ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*A faji politika hatása a 2020-as Amerikai elnökválasztásra*

*The effects of racial politics on the 2020 American  
presidential election*

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A HKR 336. § ad 76. § (6) pontja értelmében:

„... A szakdolgozathoz csatolni kell egy nyilatkozatot arról, hogy a munka a hallgató saját szellemi terméke...”

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Budapest, 2021.04.21.

Hunyadi Ákos s.k.

a szakdolgozat szerzőjének neve

## Table of contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction  | 1  |
| 2. The New American Majority                               | 2  |
| 3. Polarization  | 3  |
| 3.1 Trump’s right-wing base                                | 4  |
| 3.2 The significance of a candidate’s personality and past | 6  |
| 4. Protests  | 9  |
| 4.1 Effects of protests in the past                        | 9  |
| 4.2 Violence and backlash                                  | 10 |
| 4.3 Trump’s “law and order” strategy                       | 12 |
| 4.4 Trump’s attempt to link Biden to the protests          | 14 |
| 5. Voter turnout   | 14 |
| 5.1 Negative partisanship                                  | 15 |
| 5.2 Young voters   | 16 |
| 6. Voter suppression                                       | 17 |
| 6.1 Voter identification laws                              | 17 |
| 6.2 Polling place closures                                 | 18 |
| 6.3 Organizations fighting against voter suppression       | 19 |
| 7. Conclusion  | 20 |
| Works Cited  | 23 |

## 1. Introduction

According to Albright, Black and Latino voters “drove Joe Biden’s victory” in the 2020 presidential election (“White Voters”). In the first half of 2020, it was believed that the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences would be the most important issue for voters. In fact, according to a study by *Pew Research Center*, 62 percent of registered voters claimed that the coronavirus outbreak was “very important” to their vote, and a poll by *The New York Times* revealed that roughly 56 percent of them were discontent with Trump’s pandemic-response (“Important issues;” Byler). However, among all registered voters, the opinions of young voters of color, especially Blacks’ and Latin Americans’, are the most significant, as their increased turnout may have been the most important factor in Joe Biden’s victory. According to a study by Circle, the pandemic mobilized a significant share of minority voters as 50 percent of young Black Voters claimed that the pandemic was the “single most important factor” determining their vote, and 48 percent of young Latino voters said the same (“Election Week”). However, it would be a mistake to claim that voters mobilized by the pandemic drove Joe Biden to victory alone. In fact, after nationwide protests began over George Floyd’s death, and as racism became a salient issue, racial tensions dominated the public discourse, as well. Consequently, 45 percent of Black youth and 28 percent of young Latino voters claimed that they viewed the protests over police violence as the “single most important factor determining their vote” (“Election Week”).

This paper argues that racial tensions were significant in Biden’s victory. The first section will show that minority voters’ impact on presidential elections is growing rapidly, and that progressive voters can decide elections if they are mobilized well. The second section will be about the polarization of the country, Trump’s dividing rhetoric and its effects on left- and right-wing voters, and the significance of Biden’s reputation among White and minority voters. The third section will discuss voters’ opinions on the summer protests, and Trump’s

attempts to depict himself as the protector of “law and order” while trying to link Biden to the riots. The fourth section will detail how the protests and racial tensions may have affected voter turnout. The fifth section will describe what voter suppression strategies were used against minority voters and how it backfired in 2020.

## **2. The New American Majority**

Even though racial progression dominated the politics of the 1960s and achieved significant improvements regarding Black people’s voting rights, racism and issues originating from it, such as police brutality against minorities, did not cease to exist. Furthermore, most presidential candidates neglected Black progress as it is a rather dividing topic, and either excessive support or opposition regarding the cause might result in losing non-partisan median voters, whose support was essential to win the presidential elections (Cashin, 92-96). However, in the 2010s, several studies concluded facts that could not be ignored anymore; by 2045 white people will become a majority-minority (Frey). As of right now, Latin-Americans constitute around 17 percent, and African Americans make up 13 percent of the total US population. Regarding birth numbers and deaths, each day the net increase of white people is around 844, whereas the net increase of minorities is approximately 4,853. However, immigration also aggravates the difference, as 90 percent of immigrants settling down in the country are people of color (Philips, ch. 1).

Consequently, as the proportion of minority voters grow, the significance of appealing to them also increases. In fact, the number of eligible progressive people of color and progressive Whites, who are more supportive of candidates who support racial progression, already constitute 51 percent of the citizen voting age population in the US (Philips, ch. 1). Experts refer to this 51 percent as the New American Majority, which, soon, will become the outright mathematical majority in 33 states, thus, their support could win a progressive

candidate 398 electoral votes, 331 members in the House of Representatives and 64 senators. Since one is required to have 270 electoral votes to win the elections, 218 representatives to control the chamber and 60 senators to beat filibusters, the importance of progressive voters cannot be denied, since if they are well mobilized, they can determine the outcome of elections (Philips ch. 1). However, if both candidates' campaigns target the working-class White swing voters and do not aim to mobilize voters of the New American Majority, then presumably, progressive voters will not turn up on Election Day. This was the case at the 2010 and 2014 midterms when the Democrats focused most of their time and resources on the non-partisan swing voters but overlooked the majority of their voter base. As a result, members of the New American Majority, alienated by the Democrats' campaign, did not cast their votes, which led to the victory of Republicans in both midterm elections (Philips, ch. 2). Evidently, the importance of swing voters is decreasing since the support of the New American Majority is enough to win the elections if they are mobilized well.

### **3. Polarization**

However, there are other factors, as well, which have reduced non-partisans' importance. In the past 20 years, topics, such as immigration, gender equality, environmental protection, taxes, and government spending further polarized the two political parties (Klein ch. 2). Due to the significantly differing opinions of the parties on vital issues, most swing voters were forced to ally with either one of the parties (Klein, ch. 7). As a result, even if swing voters do not agree with the with the candidate of their party on several issues, they will not switch to the other party as they would rather stay home in that case (Klein, ch 7). Therefore, it may have become more significant to focus on mobilizing the core base of the party than appealing to swing voters.

Nevertheless, after analyzing the decreasing significance of non-partisan voters and the growing value of the New American Majority, instead of focusing on the mobilization of their core base, many Republicans voiced the importance of appealing to minorities. Republicans were considering to increase the proportion of minorities in the party, even among the leaders, and put their resources into making a new and comprehensive immigration reform. Furthermore, it was also suggested to establish their presence in Black communities and historically Black colleges to win over those Black voters who had conservative values, but due to the Republicans' appeal to white voters, they allied with the Democrats (Philips, ch. 8). However, Trende found that Republicans can afford to neglect minority votes as between 2008 and 2012 the Republican party lost roughly 7 million White votes. Romney lost to Obama by 5 million votes, therefore, mobilizing these missing White voters could be a quicker path back to power than appealing to the minority voters who were already captured by the Democrats (qtd. in Klein, ch. 5; Klein ch. 1).

### **3.1 Trump's right-wing base**

According to Dionne, negative emotions are one of the strongest drives for one to vote and identity groups are more likely to turn up on Election Day when they feel threatened ("Unhappy Voters"). Therefore, if a candidate manages to convince a group that their current way of living will be jeopardized in case the candidate of the other party wins the election, then presumably, members of that group will be mobilized. In fact, in 2016, and in 2020, as well, there are numerous voters on the right who are frightened of the New American Majority and of the statistics suggesting that by 2045 White people will have become a majority-minority in the country (Klein, ch. 5). In particular, people living in the South and experience illegal immigration from Mexico firsthand are the most concerned. According to Jardina's findings, to certain identity groups, the rising proportion of minorities imply that

White people are losing their hold on power, and since elections can be won without conservative White support, their interests will be neglected in the future (qtd. in Klein, ch. 5).

Trump succeeded in capturing the attention of these groups by “weaponizing identity politics” during his 2016 presidential campaign by promoting the idea that undeserving immigrant groups got ahead while White Americans were left behind (Klein, ch. 1). By pushing anti-immigrant policies, such as building a wall on the southern border and canceling Obama’s protections for Dreamers, Trump dedicated his campaign to racism to a certain degree which was welcomed by a large share of White voters. Furthermore, Trump demonized his opponent, Hillary Clinton, as well, who ran to Obama’s left in her campaign. By claiming that she would end “systematic racism” and promising not to deport any undocumented immigrants from the country, she allowed Trump to depict her as a potential threat to his voters (Klein, ch. 7). Trump built on the polarization between the two parties; he knew that he would not lose votes to Hillary, because most Republicans oppose her racial liberalism more than his racist rhetoric. Thus, she was an opponent to Republican values and even those conservative voters who disagreed with Trump, due to his occasionally racist rhetoric, had to vote; not for him, but against Hillary and her policies that support immigration (Klein, ch. 3). Due to Trump’s campaign which was based on anger against immigrants and minority groups, a large share of Democratic voters were concerned after Trump’s victory that the election may have been about protecting White supremacy, and that the results were foreshadowing four years of moving towards racist bigotry (Chow).

Trump’s victory over Hillary verified that right wing voters were still significant in the US and appealing to them can result in victory. Therefore, Trump remained faithful to his core base and to his campaign rhetoric throughout his presidency. Thus, he was careful not to judge or criticize any far-right protests, even if they resulted in death as was the case at the 2017 Charlottesville car attack when a White supremacist drove his car into a group of people

who were peacefully protesting against a white nationalist rally. One woman died, and when Trump was asked about his opinion on the events, he said there were “very fine people” on both sides (“Charlottesville attacker”). In 2018, he stated that Black people cannot lead a country, and in 2019, he told four congresswomen of African American and Latin-American descent to “go back” to where they came from. According to a study by *The Washington Post*, Trump’s rhetoric boosted racism across the US (Feinberg et al.). The study concluded that after the 2016 elections the number of hate crimes significantly increased; since September 11, 2001, 2016 saw the largest uptick in hate crimes, and this higher rate of hate crimes carried on in the following years, as well. According to the analysts, the data cannot prove that the increasing number of hate crimes is an evident result of Trump’s election and rhetoric, however, there is a suggestive link between the two (Feinberg et al.). Another survey, carried out in 2017, shows that people who read Trump’s statements were more probable to write or talk about minority groups in a derogatory way (Williamson and Gelfand).

### **3.2 The significance of a candidate’s personality and past**

According to a study by *Pew Research Center*, in 2019, 56 percent of Whites and 71 percent of Black Americans said that race relations were bad (Horowitz et al.). In 2016, however, only 45 percent of Whites and 61 percent of African Americans believed the same (“Views of race relations”). 56 percent of Americans said that Trump made race relations worse, 13 percent said he tried but failed to make progress, and 15 percent said he made progress, whereas, only 25 percent said Obama made race relations worse, 37 percent said he made progress towards improving, and 27 percent said he tried but failed to make progress (Horowitz et al.). The percentage of people, particularly among African Americans, who are discontent with the lack of racial progress during Trump’s presidency is significant, as in 2016, many of them did not feel connected to Hillary, and thus, either stayed home or voted

for a third party candidate (Williams). In fact, according to a study by *The New York Times*, 39 percent of the Black Obama voters, roughly 1.6 million, stayed home during the 2016 elections since a significant share of them did not trust Hillary's intentions due to the fact that in 1996, she called Black gang members "superpredators," however, the word, taken out of context, was linked to all young African Americans (Williams; McElwee et al.). However, not all Black people who did not cast their vote on Hillary were infuriated by her past. In fact, Black voters aged between 18 and 37 who did not vote for her believed that she took Black votes for granted and did not voice a message that would resonate with them (Williams).

The study by *Pew Research Center* also found that 12 percent of White Americans who voted for Obama in 2012, which is around 5 million votes, shifted to Trump in 2016 (McElwee et al.). Intriguingly, the switch of White voters, most presumably, happened due to the fact that Trump turned the 2016 elections into a referendum on race relations and immigration. He forced Clinton to position herself left of Obama on immigration issues, which alienated many conservative White voters away from the Democrats (Beauchamp). However, despite the loss of 5 million White votes, the missing 1.6 million Black votes would have been enough for Hillary to win the elections if they were mobilized as they could have shifted the outcome in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Bump, "4.4 million"). Thus, the 2016 elections revealed that Democratic Party must nominate a candidate who can mobilize and win the trust of Black voters, and who is not far left on immigrant and racial issues as it results in a significant loss of conservative votes.

Biden was a candidate who Black voters could trust since he was a faithful ally of the first Black president. However, due to the fear and anxiety that had built up in minority voters during Trump's presidency, Biden's campaign team was not required to mobilize the voters or focus on articulating messages which resonate with Black voters since they mobilized themselves as for many of them the goal of the election was not Biden's victory, but Trump's

defeat (Klein, ch. 3). Klein refers to this phenomenon, when voters are driven by the hatred against the other party's candidate, as negative partisanship, which dominated the 2020 campaign during summer and fall (ch. 3). However, presidential approval ratings showed that throughout the majority of 2020 more than 90 percent of Republicans approved of Trump's job as president, therefore, allowing him to neglect Black voters' negative partisanship ("Presidential Approval ratings"). Nevertheless, Trump tried appealing to Black voters, since shifting only one percent of Black voters could have been significant in swing states, and claimed to have achieved the lowest Black and Hispanic unemployment rate in the history of the U.S. (Cineas). However, this trend began during Obama's presidency, and furthermore, the majority of jobs given to Black people were low-wage jobs, which were the first to disappear after COVID-19 appeared in the US leaving a large share of Black people unemployed. He also signed the First Step Act which sets prisoners free before their sentence is served if they have good behavior credit. This affected many Black prisoners positively, however, there were several attempts in the Trump administration to detain the applications or set the requirements higher (Cineas). Nevertheless, even if the statistics regarding the unemployment rate were true and the First Step Act worked impeccably, due to his dividing personality on racial lines, Trump would not have been able to win significant support among Black voters.

Furthermore, despite the polarization of the two parties, a small share of swing voters who leaned Republican in 2016 found Trump's often racist rhetoric unpresidential and unacceptable, thus, they decided to either stay home or vote for Biden, who being a moderate himself could be trusted not to push racial progress too rapidly (al-Gharbi and Lazarsfeld). Moreover, being linked to Obama's presidency boosted White moderates' trust in Biden, as well, since Obama did not dedicate his presidency to rapid racial progress despite being the first African Americans president of the US (Bryant). Though, many points of his program,

such as expanding access to small business loans, business development resources, and education to minority entrepreneurs mostly appealed to minority groups, as they were the main beneficiaries of these proposals, his refusal to support far-left demands of the protests following George Floyd's death, such as defunding the police, reassured moderate voters (Harper and Stewart). Thus, Biden could create a broad coalition of racial progressive and moderate voters giving him a significant lead over Trump. Thus, by the spring of 2020, Biden had a significant support among both Black and moderate voters.

#### **4. Protests**

Protests can be of great significance regarding the outcome of elections as they allow groups to express their discontent on certain issues, which a portion of eligible voters are unaware of, and they reveal politicians attitudes on the problem (Gillion, *The Loud Minority* ch. 1). Gillion explains that the severity of the issue, the size and the length of the protests, and the reaction of both the running and the incumbent president all influence voters' perception on the highlighted issue (ch. 2). If the subject of the discontent remains salient long enough, it can significantly change the focus of the campaign, and furthermore, depending on the reaction of the candidates, it can also affect voter turnout on Election Day (ch. 2). Therefore, when a series of protests commenced after George Floyd's death on May 25, it became evident that one of the most important issues of the 2020 presidential elections would be racial tensions. Organized by Black Lives Matter, these protests drew attention to the fact that police brutality against Black people still exists. According to a poll by Gallup, during the summer, 19 percent of Americans believed that race relations and racism is the most important problem in the country, which is the highest ratio since the 1960s (Newport).

##### **4.1 Effects of protests in the past**

Generally, one would be right to assume that such a tremendous attention towards a topic that is championed by the Democrats would benefit the Democratic party as it was the case in 1964, as well, when Lyndon B. Johnson won an overwhelming victory after having shown that he supports the goals of the Civil Rights Movement (Gillion, *The Political Power* 2). However, if peaceful protests turn violent, there is a high probability that they start losing support and the percentage of those who oppose the protests significantly increases leading to a growth amongst the supporters of the Republican candidate. In 1964, two weeks after the signature of the Civil Rights Act, riots broke out in Harlem following the death of James Powell who was killed by a police officer. Between the elections of 1964 and 1968, violent rioting became annual and they dominated the public discourse (Mayer, 49, 71). A large proportion of White Americans considered that Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society failed to address the social problems and to find a solution for them (70). Furthermore, 85 percent of White Americans believed that racial progression was moving too fast (Mayer, 73). Nixon realized that that he could win the elections by appealing to the discontent White voters, thus, he dedicated his campaign to "law and order" (Mayer, 70). Even though the Voting Rights Act resulted in a growth of Black voters, Nixon was able to win the elections with his "law and order" strategy and the election revealed that backlash against the violent protests was significant outside the South, as well (Mayer, 55).

#### **4.2 Violence and backlash**

This explains why several Democrats worried that Trump might benefit from the protests after some of the demonstrations against police brutality turned violent (Pilkington). Furthermore, after having clashed with law enforcement, protesters created a police free autonomous zone in Seattle, where shootings resulting in death and injuries occurred regularly (Johnson). After Rayshard Brooks was shot dead by a police officer on June 12, armed protesters in Atlanta attempted to create a police free zone similar to the one in Seattle

(Fernandez). Furthermore, several historic monuments portraying colonial figures, slave owners, or Confederate leaders were damaged during the demonstrations as protesters regarded them as a symbol of racism (“Demonstrations & Political Violence”). Consequently, according to a poll, while in June 62 percent of Americans believed that protests were “mostly legitimate,” only 53 percent thought the same in August. Furthermore, the percentage of Americans who believed that people act unlawfully during the protests rose from 28 percent to 38. Support for Black Lives Matter also decreased by 23 points from June to August (Enten). Some groups, such as the Anti-Defamation League, attempted to increase the disapproval towards the organizations that were involved in the protests by spreading misinformation about them, such as labeling Black Lives Matter activists violent extremists or calling Antifa a terrorist organization (“Demonstrations & Political Violence”).

Besides the riots, some of the demands chanted during the demonstrations, such as “defund the police,” and “kill the police,” were also regarded to be extremist by the general public, and therefore, alienated a small share of people who supported the movement in June (Bump, “The White House”). Cutting police funding became an acknowledged demand by the demonstrators, however, there were several interpretations regarding the extent and the concrete policy goals of the reductions. According to Rakich, the majority of the protestors did not wish to take all the budget away from the police as it was suggested by disinformation campaigns (“How Americans Feel”). Furthermore, reducing the funding of the police was only half of their goal since protestors wanted to redirect that money towards other sectors of the social safety net, such as better officer training, local programs for homelessness, mental health assistance, and domestic violence (Rakich). Unaware of the concrete policy goals, 58 percent of poll respondents opposed the “defund the police” movement, and only 31 percent of them supported it. However, if the goals were clarified for poll respondents then 76 percent of them supported the proposal against the 22 percent who still opposed cutting police

funding. Considering Republican voters, around 84 percent opposed reductions to 11 percent. However, after having been told the ambition of the movement, a large share of Republicans changed their view causing a split amongst the Republican Party's voters as 51 percent of them were in favor to 47 percent who still opposed, revealing that Trump should have been cautious with his anti-protest rhetoric as his voters were divided on the issue (Rakich).

#### **4.3 Trump's "law and order" strategy**

However, besides national unrest, Trump's presidency was also affected by the negative news on the pandemic. In fact, 56 percent of Americans believed that Trump did not handle the pandemic well (Byler). Since the outbreak in the US was rather severe, it was improbable that Trump could change voters' opinion on the pandemic if they were not already in favor of him. Therefore, according to Byler, Trump's main opportunity to convince swing voters to vote for him and to mobilize his core base, most of whom were White Americans without a college degree and who are more likely to find racist rhetoric appealing, was to change their opinion on protests and how Biden is viewed on racial issues ("Americans Solidly Oppose"). In fact, Trump's campaign team believed there were roughly 2.4 million non-college-educated White voters who did not turn up in Pennsylvania in 2016, and working class White voter turnout that year was similar in Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Thus, mobilizing them might have won the Republicans the election in 2020 (O'Connor).

Consequently, Trump used Nixon's "law and order" strategy and loudly opposed the occurring events to appeal to working class White voters. Furthermore, not only did Trump oppose the events but he also did not acknowledge that protests were just as when he was asked about his opinion on police officers killing Black people, he responded that more White people are murdered by White police officers, neglecting the fact that proportionately speaking, the percentage of Black people killed by police officers is significantly higher

(Lopez). According to Miller, even though Black people constitute 12 percent of the US population, 25 percent of people who were killed by police officers are Black, and 54 percent of them were Whites, who make up 62 percent of the population (Thomsen). Furthermore, the proportion of Black people killed by police officers is even higher among victims who posed “minimal-or-less threat to police” meaning that innocent Black citizens are “three times as likely to be killed” by police (Thomsen).

By promising to “DEFEND OUR POLICE” when protestors are demanding police reforms, and by threatening to use military force against rioters and stating, “when the looting starts, the shooting starts,” Trump revealed that, in fact, gaining the support of non-college-educated White voters were more significant to him than easing racial tensions in the country (Lopez). Trying to alienate voters from the protests, he labeled the protesters as “radical left, looters and thugs” and linked the chaos caused by the riots to his rival, Joe Biden, and Democratic mayors (Lynch). Trump was able to blame Democrat mayors for the violence as, in fact, the majority of the riots took place in cities lead by members of the Democratic Party. These cities tend to have more Black inhabitants, and therefore, there is a higher chance that Black people are attacked by police. Since Black voters constitute a significant share of Democrat voters, Democratic politicians cannot afford to deal with riots using a heavy hand as it could result in the loss of votes. Therefore, when Trump wanted to send federal reinforcements to these cities to handle the riots, the Democratic governors and mayors refused to accept the help. However, their refusal allowed Trump to link the Democratic Party to the violence (Bump, “The White House”). Vice President Pence also joined Trump in linking the Democratic candidate with violence as during his convention speech he accused Biden of being a “Trojan horse for the radical left” and stating that Americans “won’t be safe in Joe Biden’s America” (Riley-Smith). Furthermore, Trump also attempted to alienate suburban voters from the Democratic Party claiming that Biden’s affordable housing plan

would draw criminals to the suburbs leading to a growth in crime in those areas and to the decrease of property values (Miller). Nevertheless, Trump's "law and order" rhetoric was not credible for many since, as an incumbent, drawing attention to the chaos across the country makes the case for the opponent as it shows that the current president cannot enforce "law and order" (Peoples & Miller).

#### **4.4 Trump's attempt to link Biden to the protests**

However, more than 90 percent of the protests that occurred during the summer were peaceful, and demonstrations which turned violent did not disperse across cities but remained in specific blocks ("Demonstrations & Political Violence"). Nevertheless, Trump was successful in turning people against the Black Lives Matter protests as a poll by Marquette University Law School revealed that 40 percent of voters believe that protests were mostly violent (Enten). Furthermore, Black Lives Matter lost some support throughout the summer, as in June 67 percent of voters expressed "at least some support" for the movement, whereas in August, only 55 percent expressed the same views, and the proportion of those who said they "strongly support" the movement slipped from 38 percent in June to 29 percent in August (Thomas and Horowitz). However, Trump's efforts to link Biden to the riots were unsuccessful as a study by Quinnipac showed that 58 percent of voters believed that Biden would handle the racial tensions better than Trump, and 61 percent said that Biden's "bringing people together" approach was better than ensuring "law and order" (Byler). Eventually, there was no connection between Biden's and Black Lives Matter's popularity as they are not closely connected. In fact, Biden positioned himself carefully throughout the summer, as he supported peaceful protests, but repeatedly condemned riots and opposed defunding the police, thus, avoiding Trump's accusations (Bacon).

#### **5. Voter turnout**

In 2016, a large share of voters did not turn out on Election Day which mostly harmed the Democratic Party since it was their voters who had a lower turnout rate which resulted in the loss of several significant battleground states, such as Wisconsin, Michigan or Pennsylvania, and therefore, in Trump's victory. This occurred due to two major reasons: non-registered voters did not feel enthusiastic about the election; and they believed their votes did not matter as there was no significant improvement in the quality of their lives during the Obama administration. However, voters' opinions on the significance of voting changed as in 2020 more than 159 million Americans voted, which is a record high number of ballots cast in the history of the US, which was 67 percent of all eligible voters, being the highest voter turnout since 1900, when it was 73.7 percent (Molla). This record voter turnout was a result of Trump's presidency, during which he often abused his power and supposedly increased racism in the country, since relatability for the Democratic nominee became secondary for a significant share of Democratic voters as they regarded preventing another Trump administration the most important (Pazzanese). In fact, according to Burns et al., only 26 percent of all registered voters viewed Biden as "very favorable," whereas, Trump was regarded as "very unfavorable" by 50 percent ("Biden Takes"). Furthermore, according to a study by the *Pew Research Center*, 83 percent of registered voters said the 2020 presidential election "really matters," which is the highest percentage since 2000 when they started collecting data on the subject, and 67 percent of Americans claimed to be more enthusiastic about this election than usual ("Election 2020"). Consequently, several non-partisan individuals and groups, such as Black Voters Matter or More Than A Vote who were working vigorously between 2016 and 2020 to mobilize minority voters across the country, were driven by negative partisanship.

### **5.1 Negative partisanship**

Despite the negative feelings against Trump and the activities of several groups, voter registration fell in the first half of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, voter registration skyrocketed after nationwide protests began over George Floyd's death, and neither the virus nor the restrictions could prevent the infuriated citizens from registering ("Voter Registration"). Negative partisanship driven by racism was especially vital among young voters between 18 and 29 who were the most likely out of all groups to say that racism in the US was "a very or somewhat serious issue" (83 percent), and 79 percent of youth believed that racism in the police force was "somewhat or very serious," as well. Furthermore, according to a study by Circle, 24 percent of all voting-eligible youth voters named protests over police violence as the "single most important factor determining their vote." However, there were differences among young people by their race; 45 percent of young Black voters responded that the protests were the most important factor compared to 28 percent of young Latino voters, 21 percent of young Asian voters, and 18 percent of young White voters ("Election Week").

## **5.2 Young voters**

According to Thomson-DeVeaux, et al., record voter turnout was significant for Biden's victory, as in general, voting-eligible young Americans, a large share of whom lean left, are more likely to be non-voters than older white people, who tend to vote for Republican candidates ("Why Many"). In fact, according to a study by Circle, only 42-44 percent of eligible young voters turned out in 2016, whereas, roughly more than 90 percent of people above 65 voted for either one of the candidates ("Election Week"). In comparison with 2016, young voter turnout increased by nearly 10 percent in 2020. 61 percent of young voters voted for Biden nationwide, but their presence was the most significant in the battleground states as without their votes Biden would not have won some of the important swing states such: Arizona where he received 59 percent of the young votes; Wisconsin where 58 percent of

young voters voted for him; or Georgia where he got 58 percent of the their votes (“Election Week”). However, there was a significant difference among youth voters by their race concerning their votes, as well, since only 44 percent of White youth backed Biden compared to 89 percent of young Black voters and 69 percent of young Latin American voters (Exit Polls 2020).

## **6. Voter suppression**

However, due to the *Shelby v. Holder* US Supreme Court decision in 2013 which “eliminated federal oversight of election decisions in states with histories of discrimination,” despite the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination in voting, historic turnout had been challenged by a range of tactics which aimed to suppress voters, particularly in communities where the majority of voters are people of color (“Why Do Nonwhite”). In fact, according to Albright, over half a million votes had been purged in Georgia and Wisconsin in 2020 only (“Black voters”). Due to the pandemic, the proportion of mail-in ballots significantly increased in 2020, however, these votes are rejected at a higher rate than those cast in person, and according to Shino et al., Black voters’ mail-in ballots are more likely to have problems with signatures and IDs. There is no clear evidence why racial minorities tend to be less successful at filling out and returning their mail ballots, but Shino et al. suggests that it might be due to the fact that Black and Latin American voters are given lower-quality services by election officials (“Here’s the problem”). Furthermore, Worland claims that Republicans made efforts to make rejecting mailed ballots on technicalities easier which affected Black voters disproportionately. In fact, out of the 6,800 mail-in ballots that were contested in North Carolina 40 percent was sent in by Black voters, even though they constitute only 20 percent of the state (“How the Trump Campaign”).

### **6.1 Voter identification laws**

Some Republican states have more restrictive ID laws which according to a study by *FiveThirtyEight* that was carried out in Texas, Michigan, and Indiana, stricter ID laws significantly harm Black and Latin American turnout since they are less likely than White voters to possess proper photo ID identification (Hopkins). A study by the ACLU reveals that the reason why Black and Latin American citizens are less likely to have an ID is that its cost ranges from \$75 to \$175 which is a significant expense for these voters as they tend to have lower-income jobs (“Oppose Voter ID Legislation”). Therefore, strict ID laws shift outcomes toward Republicans since the majority of both Black and Latin American voters lean towards the Democratic Party. In fact, in comparison to the national average, White-Black turnout gap is roughly 9 percent higher in the 15 states which have more restrictive ID laws (Hajnal et al.).

## **6.2 Polling place closures**

According to Fowler, the aim of reducing the number of polling sites is to discourage people of color from voting. Since the majority of Black voters are not willing to cast mail-in ballots due to their lack of trust in the system, they vote in-person but as a result of the fewer sites, the lines are significantly longer and after several hours of waiting, voters often decide to leave the polling place, and not to vote at all (“Why Do Nonwhite”). Since 2013, hundreds of polling sites were closed across the country and even though the reductions crossed racial lines, it primarily affected nonwhite neighborhoods. In fact, McLennan county, Texas, cut the number of its voting locations by 44 percent between 2012 and 2018, even though the population of the area grew by more than 15,000 people, two third of whom are African and Latin Americans (Salame). Consequently, wait times often exceeded 40 minutes in areas where the majority of voting-eligible citizens were racial minorities (Cole et al.). The same occurred in Georgia, where voter rolls had grown by nearly 2 million people, however, the numbers of polling sites had reduced by nearly 10 percent, mainly in nine Atlanta counties, where four out of five new voters were nonwhite. Almost 50 percent of the state’s active

voters live in these areas, however, only 38 percent of the polling places are located here. Wait times were unreasonably long in Georgia, as well. As a matter of fact, there was a voting location where voters had to wait more than 11 hours (“US Election 2020”). However, a study by Georgia Public Broadcasting/ProPublica revealed that average wait time was long, as well, as after 7 p.m., people had to stand in lines for 51 minutes where the majority of voters were nonwhite while in polling sites with a White majority it did not take longer than 6 minutes to cast a vote (Fowler). Besides the rejection of ballots and the closure of polls, there are other voter suppression strategies, as well, such as: voter intimidation, sending out false information to voters or disenfranchising voters due to a current or previous felony conviction.

### **6.3 Organizations fighting against voter suppression**

However, after racial tensions became salient, Republican attempts to suppress minority voters backfired as it resulted in a higher desire to vote among Black and Latino voters who turned out in order to “protect their constitutional rights” and to put an end to structural racism (Ellis and Chavez). Furthermore, several organizations stepped up to fight against voter suppression, and reached out to help minority voters register. These groups, in fact, had a significant effect on Black and Latino voter turnout in battleground states, such as Georgia, where turnout among Black voters increased by 20 percent, and Latin American turnout grew by 72 percent.

There was a network of more 50 organizations which educated Black voting-eligible citizens and registered more than 800,000 voters in Georgia alone (Bailey). Among these organizations, Black Lives Matter was the most known, due to its role in the summer protests, which did online how-to presentations for mail-in balloting which were available in the entire country, and they also issued a voter guide in Los Angeles (Kaplan). Besides educating voters, the organization also believed that giving Black voters more influence on the local

level would boost their motivation to vote in the presidential election. As an example, they helped an African American community in Nashville, Tennessee, to convince the residents of the city that the creation of a civilian oversight board was necessary in order to protect Black inhabitants against police brutality. Black Lives Matter spent about \$15,000 on materials, sent thousands of text messages, and did a door-to-door campaign. Consequently, 59 percent of all votes supported the creation of the board in a city where only 29 percent of the residents were Black (Ross). According to Ross, helping local communities to achieve their goals increases voter turnout in the election, as well, since voters regain their trust in the political system, and they start believing that their votes matter.

Organizations which mobilized Latin American voters were also significant in Biden's victory. In fact, according to Galka, Latino voter turnout may have been the most single important factor in shifting Arizona to the Democrats, which is a state that had been a Republican bastion for 72 years and the last time a Democratic candidate won the state was in 1996 ("How the Latino"). In fact, Latin American voter turnout in Arizona is mostly due to organizations' work, such as Mi Familia Vota, who registered nearly 200,000 Latin Americans in the state, or Voto Latino, which registered more than 1 million voters in the US (Soto; "Voto Latino Registers"). Organizations' work to register Latino voters was also significant in Nevada where Latin American voters "delivered Biden a net vote advantage of more than two times the margin" with which he won the state in total (Strott and Mueller).

## **7. Conclusion**

This thesis discussed that if it had not been for the salience of racism in the country, Trump may have won the 2020 presidential election. The first section presented that due to the growing proportion of progressive voters, the significance of appealing to them also increases rapidly. The second section showed that the New American Majority allowed

Trump to weaponize White identity politics which, however, resulted in the deterioration of race relations. Furthermore, even though Biden was not viewed as a “very favorable” candidate, his reputation among minority and moderate White voters as a unifying personality made him a perfect candidate against Trump. The third section discussed how the summer protests were viewed by voters. It argued that despite the riots and Trump’s “law and order” rhetoric, Biden’s popularity was not harmed by the events. The fourth section was about the record voter turnout and how it was driven by negative partisanship. The sixth section detailed the different voter suppression strategies used by the Republicans, and different organizations’ respond to them.

The growth in the number of minority voters, and thus, their increasing influence allowed Trump to build his campaign on racism in 2016. Since far-right voters had become his core-base, he continued using his racist rhetoric after winning the elections. This, however, divided the nation on several issues, such as racism, and infuriated many non-voters. Consequently, a significant share of voters were driven by negative partisanship in the 2020 presidential election.

Even though race relations were bad in the US, racism was not a salient issue. However, this changed as nationwide protests began after George Floyd’s death. The demonstrations encouraged a large share of young Americans, most of whom were left leaning, to vote. Nevertheless, after riots commenced, Democrats were afraid that Trump could use them to his advantage. However, it was not the case since less than 10 percent of all protests turned violent and the candidate campaigning with law and order was the incumbent.

A large share of voters were mobilized by the these protests, young voters of color in particular, however, the Republican party challenged their turnout through voter suppression strategies. Nevertheless, there were several organizations who worked since the 2016 election,

not only to mobilize voters, but to ensure that they are registered and to give them the necessary education on how to correctly fill out their ballots.

Thus, if it had not been for Trump's racist rhetoric throughout the 2016 campaign, his presidency, and the summer protests, there is a probability that not enough left leaning voters would have been mobilized, thus, Albright may have been right in saying that minority voters indeed "drove Joe Biden's victory."

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