TRIUMPH OF THE WOMEN?

The Female Face of Right-wing Populism and Extremism

03

Case study
United States of America

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TRIUMPH OF THE WOMEN? THE STUDY SERIES

All over the world, right-wing populist parties continue to grow stronger, as has been the case for a number of years – a development that is male-dominated in most countries, with right-wing populists principally elected by men. However, a new generation of women is also active in right-wing populist parties and movements – forming the female face of right-wing populism, so to speak. At the same time, these parties are rapidly closing the gap when it comes to support from female voters – a new phenomenon, for it was long believed that women tend to be rather immune to right-wing political propositions. Which gender and family policies underpin this and which societal trends play a part? Is it possible that women are coming out triumphant here?

That is a question that we already raised, admittedly playing devil's advocate, in the first volume of the publication, published in 2018 by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung *Triumph of the women? The Female Face of the Far Right in Europe.* We are now continuing this first volume with a series of detailed studies published at irregular intervals. This is partly in response to the enormous interest that this collection of research has aroused to date in the general public and in professional circles. As a foundation with roots in social democracy, from the outset one of our crucial concerns has been to monitor anti-democratic tendencies and developments, while also providing information about these, with a view to strengthening an open and democratic society thanks to these insights.

The *Triumph of the women?* study series adopts a specific perspective in this undertaking: The country-specific studies examine right-wing populist (and occasionally right-wing extremist) parties and their programmes concerning family and gender policy. The analysis highlights the question of which political propositions appeal to women voters, making parties in the right-wing spectrum seem electable in their eyes. How do antifeminist positions gain ground? In addition, individual gender policy topics are examined, the percentage of votes attained by these parties is analysed and the role of female leaders and counter-movements is addressed.

While the first volume of studies focused on countries within Europe, the new study adopts a broader view and analyses individual countries and topics worldwide. Where do right-wing populist parties manage to shift the focus of discourse or even shape debates on family and gender policy, in addition to defining the terms of engagement when dealing with issues relating to flight and migration? And do their propositions concerning social policy respond to the needs of broad swathes of the electorate for greater social welfare?

Whatever the answers to these questions, it is important to us that progressive stakeholders agree on these challenges and work together to combat the growing fragmentation and divisions within our societies.

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CASE STUDY
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY CYNTHIA MILLER-IDRISS

// The following chapter focuses primarily on the gendered dimensions of populist nationalism and Trumpism—a term that refers to the peculiar blend of celebrity, nativism, populism and unpredictable leadership comprising the political trends that led to Trump's 2016 election (Sopel 2018; Tabachnick 2016) in the U.S., including the years leading up to and following the Trump election. Specifically, this chapter analyses the role of women and gendered framings in the Tea Party, and the impact of »family values« and masculinity narratives in evangelical Christianity that might have supported the ultimate success of Trump's first campaign. It also briefly reviews the impact of the administration's policies and legislation related to gender equity, including issues of reproductive rights, contraceptive health care coverage, and protections for the LGBTQ+ community. //

Against their Interest? White Women and the 2016 Trump Election

As a wide variety of observers have noted, a majority of white women voted for Trump in 2016, across nearly every age bracket. Over 40 per cent of women overall supported him (Jaffe 2017; Setzler and Yanus 2018), but the level of support was higher for white women, with 53 per cent of white women ultimately choosing Trump over the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton. Trump's history of sexist and misogynistic remarks, including an infamous audio recording of him bragging about grabbing women's intimate body parts without their consent, did not sway white women voters to vote for Clinton (Jaffe 2017). How can this seeming contradiction be explained? The story of white women's support for Trump is heavily intertwined with the history of the Tea Party movement, the evolution of politics in evangelical Christianity in the U.S., and a decade-plus-long populist revival that positions ordinary Americans in existential opposition to elites, science, and current government leadership. These three organisational and social movement developments intersected with gender-related mobilisation on themes about traditional motherhood and the protection of children's future, pro-life sentiments, and an effort to redefine feminism as autonomy from government dependence, in ways that fuelled Trump's 2016 victory.

The question of why »women organize against their own freedom,« as the journalist Seyward Darby puts it in her recent book, *Sisters in Hate,* is complicated (Darby 2020: 115). Across the variety of analyses that struggled to explain the 2016 election result, it is clear that along with men, many conservative women were mobilised to vote for Trump by their adherence to traditional Republican views related to themes like smaller government, by anti-Hillary Clinton attitudes (Tien 2017), and by party loyalty (Setzler and Yanus 2018). High numbers of Americans vote along party lines, regardless of who the party's candidate is in any given election, and these party loyalties are also racialised; a majority of white women favoured the Republican candidate in the last three elections, while most black and Latina women supported Democrats (Tien 2017: 667). The last time a majority of white women voted for a Democratic nominee for president was in 1996—and that came after a 32-year gap (Darby 2020: 119).

But most white women are not only motivated by party loyalty or core conservative ideas about small government. They are also mobilised by race, especially the protection of their white privilege against explicit or implicit American frames that characterise white women as »second in sex but first in the race to non-white minorities« (Junn 2017: 348). Harvard University's 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study reported that nearly 70 per cent of white women in the study's over 20,000 respondents somewhat or strongly opposed affirmative action policies (Darby 2020: 119; Massie 2016).[1] As Cassese and Barnes (2019) argue, white women's support for Trump can be explained in part by their desire to protect the status quo that benefits them, relative to minority women. White women's vote was thus a reflection of »social positioning practices« that aimed to maintain and reinforce their privilege, although the candidate they chose reinforced men's privileged status over women (p. 687). In the end, the evidence suggests, as the author Alexis Grenell wrote in a New York Times op-ed entitled »White Women, Come Get Your People,« that »the gender gap in politics is really a color line« (Grenell 2018; Darby 2020: 119).

Sexist attitudes also strongly determined the women's vote in 2016 (Cassese and Barnes 2019). Many white women were motivated to support Trump because of the resonance of his campaign rhetoric with specific, gendered frameworks that seemed to place value on women's roles in the home, even as actual gendered and reproductive rights were threatened in a campaign characterised by repeated sexist and misogynistic remarks and elected officials' behaviour that was counter to the »family values« conservatives claimed to hold dear. In this light, it is also important to note that women—including, for example, Kellyanne Conway, Ivanka Trump and press secretaries Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Kayleigh McEnany—have also played a prominent role in Trump's campaign and presidency, particularly as spokeswomen and advisors. Having successful women as front-facing advocates in the press helped the campaign and the White House show that it was not holding hostile sentiments towards women.

1 To access the data in the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, visit https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi%3A10.7910/DVN/XFXJVY (last accessed 30.9.2020).

However, Cassese and Barnes argue that some conservative women develop antipathy or »hostile sexism« toward women who they believe aim to usurp men's power. As it turns out, hostile sexism was the second most important predictor of support for Trump, following political orientation (Glick 2019). In this sense, white women's support for Trump was critically predicated on hostility toward Hillary Clinton, especially for conservative women who embrace traditional gender roles and maintain their privilege by »protecting and prioritizing their relationships with white men« (p. 688). In contrast, women of colour lack the same incentives to support white men's privilege (ibid.).

Both the three social movement developments and the gendered themes described above were racialised in important ways that have often escaped analytical attention, which is why the following sections focus specifically on the mobilisation of white women's support for Trump in light of the gendered dimension of these three social movement developments.

The Tea Party and Sarah Palin's »Mama Grizzlies«

The Tea Party did not get Trump elected—in fact, one could argue that Trumpism replaced Tea Party mobilisation as the dominant force that led to Republican electoral success in 2016. But the Tea Party is an important factor in understanding conservative women's mobilisation in the years leading up to the Trump administration, in ways that have had an impact on women's support for Trump and their engagement within the administration. The Tea Party was unique in American political history in many ways, but perhaps most notably because of the significant role that women played in it, including the most senior levels of leadership. Although men represented well over half of Tea Party members, it was women who tended to be at the helm of leadership and organising efforts (Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 4243). In part, this was due to the decentralised Tea Party structure, which enabled a wider range of women—from stay-at-home mothers to already politically-engaged conservative women who had found it difficult to break into male-dominated, traditional Republican Party spaces—to sweep into Tea Party leadership across the country (Deckman 2016). The Tea Party has long been understood to be a reactionary development, but few have fully acknowledged the extent to which that reactionary mobilisation was gendered—both in terms of actual women's participation and in the gendered frames that engaged them.

The Tea Party emerged on the U.S. political scene in 2009 out of conservative »tea party« protests against the Obama administration tax and homeowners' relief policies. The protests drew on the metaphor of the American colonists' Boston »tea party« protests against the British colonial tax on tea (Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 4)—a historical event that has long lived in American school textbooks and popular myth and memory as the event that sparked the American Revolution, becoming a symbol of resistance to government tyranny through civil disobedience (White 2018: 17). Through the strategic use of costumes, symbols, and Boston tea party re-enactments, the Tea Party movement received outsized media attention and significant financial and strategic support from conservative organisations (Rosenthal and Trost 2012). Within short order, the Tea Party protests of 2009 and 2010 grew into a national network of organisations that eventually spanned about 1,000 local Tea Party groups across the country (Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 8). The combination of local, bottom-up mobilisation and top-down organisational support meant that the Tea Party movement—and its new form of conservative branding and marketing—emerged as a unique combination of both grassroots and ›Astroturf‹ organising (Rosenthal and Trost 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 1112; White 2018: 19).

The Tea Party was highly significant in American political history, although for a relatively brief period of time. In 2019, CNN's Chris Cillizza described it as the »dominant movement in American politics at the start of the decade« and as a group that had seized »control of the Republican Party« (Cillizza 2019). The movement faded in the Trump administration, losing its influence completely by 2019, and largely fading from the public's memory. But the Tea Party had an impact on women's political engagement in ways that are worthy of attention.

The Tea Party's grassroots organisational structure enabled unprecedented participation from women by relocating political activism from the national level to local communities and mobilising women who had built their lives around more traditional homemaking roles. As the writer of the Moms4SarahPalin blog explained, the Tea Party »has given women like me, stay-at-home and work-from-home moms, a voice« (Deckman 2016: 13). But the Tea Party also worked to redefine »women's issues« in new ways (Deckman 2016: 16), ultimately drawing women in with a trio of core thematic frames: motherhood and family protectionism; women's autonomy from government dependence; and a reclaiming and redefining of feminism as based on autonomy rather than choice (Deckham 2016: 19). Taken together, these themes created a new way of framing conservative politics in gendered ways. The new frames argued that smaller government is better for American families and their children's future, that government regulation was patronising to women, and that the federal government aimed to restrict women's liberties and their ability to defend themselves against government tyranny (Deckman 2016: 34). These themes proved especially attractive to conservative women.

Former Alaska Governor and one-time Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin can be credited with much of this reframing, including a direct appeal to what she called »mama grizzlies«—moms who are »rising up« and »banding together, saying no« to big government policies that would »attack their cubs« and that were not »right for our kids and for our grandkids« (Deckman 2016: 1). Local Tea Party leaders and organisers took up the call and brought it to women on the ground, arguing that fighting back against the big government was mothers' obligation, as part of their charge to protect their families and their children's future standard of living. While the motherhood frame had long been invoked in conservative politics, Tea Party women took the framing a step beyond traditional ideologies about gendered roles, situating good motherhood as a political act that involved fighting back against the moral fiscal threat posed to their families, in order to ensure that their children's future economic opportunities remained intact (Deckman 2016: 17). A related frame suggested that gun rights were linked to mothers' roles as family protectors, linking the political act of motherhood with the defence of the Second Amendment (Deckman 2016: 18).

Notably, conservative women's framing of motherhood and the validation of their roles as homemakers were also situated in the context of the nation's memory of some of Hillary Clinton's most notable public blunders, including a 1992 campaign comment when she said that she was not the kind of woman who »stayed home and baked cookies,« or a 60 Minutes interview where she said she was not »sitting here like some little woman standing by my man« (Tien 2018: 657). The backlash against Hillary Clinton from stay-at-home mothers was swift and enduring. Conservative ›feminist backlash‹ has to be considered in this light and against the fact that Trump was not just running against any Democratic candidate, or even any woman Democratic candidate: he was running against a candidate who conservative, traditional stay-at-home mothers resented in a deep and abiding way. In contrast, Ivanka Trump worked hard to contrast her image as a successful businesswoman with repeated social media and public statements about her role as a doting mother (Filipovic 2017).

The Tea Party thus recruited traditional women at the local level by reframing motherhood as a political act. But it also worked to reframe and reclaim the mantle of feminism itself, arguing that the women's movement push for equality with men had been replaced by an emphasis on choice in ways that betrayed the original movement's ideals. Tea Party women argued that liberal feminists' linking of women's rights to abortion rights and their emphasis on government regulation of ›fairness‹ as a way of ensuring quality, marked an actual betrayal of the original women's movement goals. Modern liberal feminism, they argued, promotes a patronising approach that fosters dependence on the government and incorrectly prioritises reproductive rights over all else. In contrast, conservative feminists argued they were reclaiming the true mantle of the women's movement by promoting autonomy from government dependence, self-reliance, and personal responsibility (Deckman 2016: 1921). The Tea Party's promise to restore women's agency successfully attracted legions of conservative women who had previously taken a back seat in political movements and activism.

Evangelical Christianity, Christian Nationalism, and »Family Values«

The support of white evangelical women for Trump is part of a broader puzzle about white evangelical Christians' voting behaviour in 2016. Eighty-one per cent of white evangelical voters supported Trump on election day, making that group the predominant voting block responsible for his electoral success (Martinez and Smith 2016). Pundits and the public alike struggled to understand how conservatives who had long touted »family values« could »support a man who flouted every value they insisted they held dear« (Du Mez 2020: 3). A flurry of scholarship emerged in the immediate wake of the election, aiming to explain evangelicals' support for Trump. Analysis of election data showed that policy positions like anti-immigration proved more important than other factors in securing Republicans' support for Trump in the nomination phase (Scala 2020: 17). Other scholars pointed out that evangelical Republicans' strong negative feelings about Democrats make them »unlikely to ever abandon the Republican candidate« (Margolis 2020: 110), regardless of how distasteful they might find him personally. Many analysts also pointed to the importance of flagship issues like abortion and a host of other gender issues like same-sex marriage or LGBTQ+ people in the military, which drove conservatives' selection of Trump as their candidate (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019).

Many of the same arguments that explain white women's support for Trump hold for the explanation of white evangelicals' support for Trump, particularly related to race and the protection of privilege. Amid initial reports that the evangelical vote helped elect Trump, scholars were quick to point out that about a quarter of American evangelicals are non-white, and two-thirds of them voted for Clinton (Gorski 2017: 2). This racial difference in evangelical support for Trump must be understood as part of the gendered story of Trump's electoral success —meaning that we have to interrogate the ways that intersectionality and multiple group identities (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2002; Cassese and Barnes 2019: 41; Manne 2020)—played a role in white women's and white evangelicals' support for Trump. One way that white evangelical support for Trump can be explained, is by analysing the view of the majority of conservative evangelicals who are white Christian nationalists, particularly as it relates to the latter group's romantic nostalgia for a past Golden Age and fears of an apocalyptic future (Gorski 2017). White Christian nationalists report high levels of national pride, pro-military sentiments, nativism, animosity toward Muslims, opposition to interracial marriage, and a belief that the country is on the wrong path forward (Gorski 2017: 56). This »wrong path« is infused with a wide variety of threats to family values and traditional gender roles, especially around abortion, an issue the far right had already used to link »foetal salvation to rescuing America's future« and the need to combat moral degeneracy, evil, and national decline all at once (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019: 4).

Trump's electoral campaign, steeped in nostalgia for a Golden Age and restorative promises of a utopian future, laden with racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim remarks, and filled with masculine bluster, thus appealed to a wide range of conservative men and women who feel threatened by demographic and social change. These included fears about immigration and birth-rate-driven changes in whites' majority status but also views on abortion, insurance coverage of contraception, transgender bathroom access, same-sex marriage, gays in the military, and the right to deny service to gay people based on religious views (Gorski 2017). For the religious right, Trump was not just a president who would defend white Christians' future. He was a »divine leader« sent by God to deliver power back into the hands of the Christian right, reinstating authority to its proper place and thereby saving America (Posner 2020: 8).

The Christian home-schooling movement plays a particularly important role in this regard. Following nearly two decades of steady growth, by 2016, 1.7 million American children were home-schooled, about two-thirds of whom were religious (Du Mez 2020: 189). Christian home-schooling is an important factor in evangelical women's support for Trump because of the curriculum itself, which is a »steady source of teachings on militant patriarchal authority and Christian nationalism« and the reinforcement of »biblical patriarchy« (Du Mez 2020: 188 and 189), situating husbands as the breadwinning head of the household and wives as submissive, supportive homemakers and mothers who will raise children in an environment promoting chastity, purity, heritage, tradition, and family values. White evangelicals »believe that men and women are different and that men are natural leaders,« while women are in charge of home and family life and responsible for the moral upbringing of children (Monk-Turner 2020: 30). In addition to reinforcing traditional gender roles, this frame places mothers at the helm of warding off a wide variety of cultural threats to their families, including threats from liberalism, abortion, Islam, immigrants, the decline of religion, gendered pronouns and LGBTQ+ people. The mobilisation of evangelical Christian women in the 2016 election, in many ways, was the culmination of a decades-long effort by the Christian right to encourage »housewives outraged by moral decline (…) to get involved in politics« (Posner 2020: xv).

These threats were heightened for evangelicals in the wake of Barack Obama's election, mobilising them into action (Du Mez 2020: 238). A series of legal and policy changes galvanised Christian evangelicals further, including the Pentagon allowing women into combat in 2013 and the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) lawsuit against a cake shop owner for refusing to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favour of same-sex marriage in 2015, followed by an Obama administration challenge to North Carolina's restrictions on transgender bathroom usage, evangelicals stoked »a sense of embattlement« among followers (Du Mez 2020: 240–241). Coupled with the ongoing sense of threat posed to families from perceived permissive abortion laws, all of these gendered issues laid the groundwork for Trump's campaign promises to protect religious freedom and preserve Christian traditions. Trump's »promise to put ›pro-life‹ judges onto the Supreme Court« sealed the deal, given the central importance of abortion and the goal to restrict abortion rights among evangelical Christian communities nationwide (Monk-Turner 2020: 35).

It was not just gender issues that motivated voters. The very framing of the Trump campaign around national decline and promised restoration was equally important. Trumpists view the lost Golden Age (typically depicted as the 1950s U.S.) as rooted in a moral decline, which could only be interrupted through a virtuous restoration in order to prevent the nation from coming to an apocalyptic end-times, populated by invaders and rapists who threaten the purity of white women. Their nation is perceived as under siege, threatened by leftists, multiculturalists, immigrants, Muslims, globalists, »radical Islam«, transgender warriors, and communism. Parents—and especially mothers—are called on to protect and defend their families and the future of their children against all of these threats and more. Highly rooted in metaphors of »pollution and purification, invasion and resistance, apocalypse and salvation, corruption and renewal,« the nation's virtuous restoration, is above all else, gendered, because decline and weakness were »brought about by docility and femininity,« and a »return to greatness« required a reassertion of dominance, masculinity, and manly bravado (Gorski 2017: 11 and 9). A heroic leader whose aggressive, militant masculinity was »not restrained by political correctness or feminine virtues,« for many evangelicals, was just the ticket (Du Mez 2020: 253). As Du Mez explains: »With the forces of evil allied against them, evangelicals were looking for a man who would fight for them, a man whose testosterone might lead to recklessness and excess here or there, but that was all part of the deal (…). Trump embodied ›American strength,‹« and promised to project the views globally (p. 260 –2 61).

In other words, American voters did not rally around Donald Trump despite his hyper-masculine and heteronormative bluster, but rather because of it (Glick 2019: 721). This was true for evangelicals, whose support for Trump was the culmination of an »embrace of militant masculinity, an ideology that enshrines patriarchal authority and condones the callous display of power, at home and abroad« (Du Mez 2020: 3). But it was true for voters outside of the evangelical community, too. In the end, hostile sexism was an important predictor of favourable attitudes toward Trump—more than religiosity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, education, age, marital status, and income (Glick 2019: 721). Trump was elected because he was the kind of »real man« whose »rugged masculinity« reminded voters of a time in America when »all was right with the world« (Du Mez 2020: 271).

The story of gender and the far right is not only about electoral results or the ways in which women vote. Gender is also central to the far right's attacks on knowledge, especially in the U.S. through assaults on the higher education sector, which are often framed within critiques of gender studies.

Populism, Anti-Science and Anti-Gender Studies

The populist-nationalist resurgence that swept across Europe, India, Brazil and other places globally also came to the U.S., although in the guise of a mainstream party. Populism—which I define as both a schema (way of thinking) and a rhetorical strategy—positions the ordinary, pure people against the corrupt elites (Bonikowski 2017; Canovan 1999; Brubaker 2017; Miller-Idriss 2019, 2020; Mudde 2004; Müller 2016). Populist nationalism, in turn, extends the pure people-corrupt elite framework to one in which the perceived threat includes all »others«. Populist nationalist leaders argue that a stronger state is necessary in order to protect the pure people from the threat posed by Muslims, immigrants, non-ethnic others and more (Brubaker 2017; Berezin 2019; Kubik 2018; Miller-Idriss 2019; Woods et al. 2020).

In the United States, these populist nationalist frames are also heavily anti-science, railing against established expertise and higher education, with gender and gender studies as a particular target. For the American far right, higher education is the predominant scapegoat for the decline of Western, Christian civilisation and far-right ideological values. Gender studies and feminism thus become part of a larger set of far-right targets related to biased universities and higher education institutions being part of a purported broader »cultural Marxist« plot to inculcate youth with leftist ideas as a precursor to a revolution (Miller-Idriss 2020: 123 f.). Gender is a key target for such claims, drawing on recent changes in campus practices related to gender-neutral bathrooms and the growing use of alternative pronouns. Campuses are said to be sites of »subversive leftist activity« (Posner 2020: 156), awash with radical ›feminazis‹ who will emasculate or usurp men of their rightful power and place and brainwash impressionable young students into submission to political correctness (Miller-Idriss 2020: 124).

Gender is also key to attacks on higher education beyond the populist-nationalist part of the far-right spectrum. Far-right favourite Jordan Peterson tells people to »abandon universities (which have been hopelessly corrupted by their adoption of ›women's studies‹) in favor of trade schools« (Phillips-Fein 2019). Far-right provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos created a post-secondary-education »Privilege Grant«, for which white men were exclusively eligible so that they could be »on equal footing with their female, queer and ethnic minority classmates.«[2] Meanwhile, gender studies as a field is regularly attacked and discredited by the far right as an instrument of »gender ideology« and as going against supposedly »real« scientific evidence from fields like biology and evolutionary psychology (Krämer and Klinger 2020: 253). Feminist approaches were already threatening to the far right because of their challenge to traditional gendered roles. Still, populist nationalists position this threat as intentionally manipulative in the field of gender studies, which they argue aims to »corrode« existing gender roles, destroy traditions, and undermine family values (Krämer and Klinger 2020: 258). Universities thus pose a serious danger to Western civilisation and the Christian religion in ways that amount to what one right-wing writer warns is »cultural treason« (Posner 2020: 156).

What is happening in the U.S. is consistent with other, global fascist attacks on knowledge and expertise, which are a critical step in undermining the public's source of factual information and creating broader receptivity to propaganda and extreme ideologies (Stanley 2018). But in the U.S., they are also the legacy of decades of conservative critiques of the academy's purported liberal bias, dating at least to McCarthy's hunt for communist academics in the 1950s and periodically surging under varying political administrations (Miller-Idriss 2020; Social Science Research Council 2018). Far-right attacks on higher education and science today, however, differ from mere conservative attacks for the ways they position higher education as part of a broader global plot to undermine traditional family values, promote a nefarious »gender ideology«, and eliminate the »natural« differences between the sexes. These attacks include hostility to constitutional rights for women and LGBTQ+ people, including legal challenges to transgender bathroom laws and the Obama administration's repeal of the transgender ban in the military (Hosie 2019).

2 The Anti-Defamation League reported that, in March 2018, Yiannopoulos announced that the charity administering the grant had closed. See: Milo Yiannopoulos: Five Things to Know,« ADL, n. d.; available at: https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/milo-yiannopoulos-five-things-to-know (last accessed 27.2.2020).

Whose Impact? The 2016 election's effect on gender and reproductive rights

Trump's victory brought a range of challenges to women's reproductive rights and existing protections for LGBTQ+ people in the United States. It is worth noting that Trump's track record on LGBTQ+ issues prior to his election was somewhat complicated. He described himself in 2013 as »evolving« on the issue of same-sex marriage, had pledged in 2016 to be a »real friend« to LGBTQ+ people (Olorunnipa 2019), and criticised North Carolina that same year for restricting transgender bathroom access.[3] His views on abortion were clearer: Trump campaigned on anti-abortion promises, including a commitment to appoint pro-life judges and saying on the campaign trail that women should have some sort of punishment for abortions—a statement he revised, after a protest, to say that it is the doctors, who perform abortions, who should be punished (Diamond 2016). But it was Trump's Vice President Mike Pence—a devout evangelical Christian—whose views on issues of gender, women's reproductive rights, and LGBTQ+ protections resonated strongly with the Christian right. In his prior roles as the Indiana Governor and as a U.S. Congressman, Pence had a long record of co-sponsoring or voting for bills or policies that challenged reproductive, abortion, and LGBTQ+ rights, including legislation that »sought to redefine rape« and restrict abortion access, attempts at the state level to make it legally required for women to hold burials or cremations for foetal tissue, and efforts at the national level to allow HIV funds to support »conversion therapy«. As governor, he passed a law allowing Indiana businesses or individuals to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people and publicly spoke out against same-sex marriage, which he believes will cause »societal collapse« (Girard 2017). During the campaign and throughout the administration's first term, Pence was broadly supported by evangelical Christians; evangelical leaders »liken him to a prophet restoring conservative Christianity to its rightful place at the center of American life« (Coppins 2018).

3 See: 2016 presidential candidates on LGBTQ issues, in: Ballotpedia, n.d.; available at: https://ballotpedia.org/2016_presidential_candidates_on_LGBTQ_issues (last accessed 2.8.2020).

It did not take long for these views to have an impact. On the administration's first full day in power, Trump reinstated the »global gag rule«, a Reagan-era policy that stripped funding from any international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who provide abortion services or even discuss abortion with women (Graves 2017; Grossman 2016). Staffers at the State Department were ordered to »scale back language in a global human rights report that historically had addressed women's rights, family planning, and abortion« as well as sexual, racial and ethnic discrimination (Posner 2020: 180). Sweeping attacks on abortion rights came from every angle. Much of these efforts centred on efforts to »defund« Planned Parenthood—a century-plus old organisation that provides low or no-cost reproductive health care to over 2.4 million clients annually across the U.S.—nearly 75 per cent of whom have incomes below the federal poverty level (Ackley 2011).[4]

The challenges to women's reproductive rights are not only federal ones, and they go well beyond challenges to Planned Parenthood. State legislatures were emboldened by the Trump administration's moves to restrict abortion (Grossman 2017). In 2019, over thirty states introduced legislation that would ban or restrict abortion, including a ban in Alabama of nearly all abortions, and so-called »heartbeat bills« in several other states, which ban abortion after a foetal heartbeat is detected, typically around week six of a pregnancy (Lai 2019; Shaw and Duford 2019). More than half of those laws have already been passed, while others have been temporarily blocked by judges or are currently being challenged in court. In some cases, individual U.S. states are deliberately passing abortion bans, or restrictions that they know violate federal protections established under the 1973 Roe v. Wade case, with the explicit intent of bringing a case to the U.S. Supreme Court; many state lawmakers believe that judicial appointments and changes during the Trump administration have made the Supreme Court more favourably inclined toward possible changes in federal abortion right protections. The death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Gins-

4 Read more about Planned Parenthood and its services at https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/facts-figures (last accessed 24.8.2020).

berg in September 2020 and the subsequent appointment of the conservative judge Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court just one month later—a rushed process aimed at securing the appointment before the 2020 election—has significantly increased these concerns. Pro-life groups widely celebrated Coney Barrett's appointment—in anticipation of the potential for Coney Barrett to vote to overturn Roe v. Wade should a challenge make its way to the Supreme Court (Liptak 2020). Several such challenges are possible. Nine states currently have restrictions on abortions that are unconstitutional and are currently blocked by courts in ways that would not be possible in a post-Roe environment. In comparison, seven states have laws that would maximally restrict abortion if Roe is overturned (Guttmacher Institute 2020).

Women have thus been more likely to face difficulty in obtaining abortions or even preventative care at abortion-providing facilities as a result of Trump administration policies and efforts. But they also faced new challenges in preventing pregnancies, to begin with, due to new policies allowing employers and health insurers to deny birth control coverage if their reasons for doing so were religious or moral in nature.[5] Starting in 2012, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) had mandated that women receive no-cost contraceptive coverage from their private insurance plans, with only two exceptions: houses of worship were exempt from the requirement, as were health plans that were in place before the ACA became law in March 2010. Eight years of subsequent litigation ensured that women's rights to contraception coverage were constantly pitted against employers' rights to deny that coverage on religious or moral grounds. The Trump administration swiftly came down on the side of the employers, issuing new regulations in October 2017 that expanded the religious exception (Behn et al. 2019; Keith 2020; Sobel et al. 2018). Following nearly three years of legal challenges, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Trump administration's regulations in July 2020, with a 7–2 majority. Only Justices Ginsburg and Sotomayor dissented (Liptak 2020).

The impact on LGBTQ+ and transgender rights has been equally harsh. Starting on inauguration day with the literal erasure of mentions of LGBTQ+ people from the Department of Labor, Department of State and White House websites, the Trump administration implemented dozens of policies, regulations and judicial nominations rolling back prior protections for LGBTQ+ people. A draft executive order was leaked less than two weeks into Trump's presidency that would give any individual or organisation the right to refuse to do business with anyone based on gender identity, sexual identity, marital status, or whether they had had premarital sex or an abortion (Posner 2020: 3). Although that executive order was eventually scaled back to one with more general language, other formal rollbacks of protections for LGBTQ+ people from a variety of federal agencies followed, bringing about the loss of protections against discrimination in housing services and homeless shelters, new requirements that schools must ban transgender students from participating in school sports or lose federal funding, and rollbacks of protections for transgender people in federal prison facilities, to name just a few.[6] Trump's administration also reversed the Obama administration policy allowing transgender people to participate openly in the military (Jackson and Kube 2019).

Across the board, in sum, the Trump administration's policies threatened or reduced health care access for millions of pregnant women (or those seeking to prevent pregnancy), along with health care access and protection from discrimination for millions of gay and transgender patients (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019). However, threats to rights and rollbacks to protections against discrimination are only part of the story of the gendered impact of the Trump administration. Through a wide variety of cuts, policies, rollbacks and legislative efforts, the Trump administration's impact on women and children has been far-reaching. This has been most publicly evident in the administration's immigration policies and bans and their direct and damaging effect on vulnerable women and children and separated families, in ongoing ways. A June 2020 presidential proclamation promising restrictions on foreign workers particularly

5 See documentation at the Transequality's website, available at: https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration (last accessed 21.8.2020).

6 See documentation at the Transequality's website, available at: https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration (last accessed 21.8.2020).

targeted spouses and children, effectively separating families by not allowing legal visa holders to bring their families to join them. The effect was to force voluntary deportations, where employed foreigners returned to their home countries in order to reunite with their families (Anderson 2020). But there have been quieter, less public effects for women and children as well. It is hard to overstate the impact of a variety of Trump administration policies on issues like childcare, food stamps and food assistance, after-school and summer-learning programmes, and weakened resources and protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and more, through changes with a generational impact in ways that disproportionately impact women and children (Frothingham and Phadke 2017).

One clear example is the lack of paid maternity leave. The U.S. has »the most family-hostile public policy of any OECD countries and is one of two countries on the planet with no paid family leave,« as the sociologist Caitlyn Collins recently wrote in a searing Harvard Business Review essay detailing the experiences of two new mothers in Sweden and the U.S. (Collins 2020). Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, U.S. workers are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, but only under strict conditions: they must have worked for the employer for at least a year (and for at least 1,250 hours in the past year) and at a location with 50 or more employees. It is the barest of protections, with no financial support. For parents who return to work, the cost of childcare is often prohibitive, putting new parents in an impossible position: returning to work, for many women in the U.S., is more expensive than staying at home.

The Trump administration has mobilised some Republican interest in paid leave, at least in part through the influence of Ivanka Trump. The administration signed an act that includes 12 weeks of paid leave for parents in the federal government to care for newborn or newly adopted children, for example. But its other efforts in this area—including a now-expired pilot programme to provide employers with small tax credits for offering paid leave to their workers—have not produced meaningful change.[7] The administration's new Advanced Support for Working Families Act, for example, is set up as a loan rather than paid leave, providing what the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities describes as »no net new financial help for families« (Shabo 2020).

There has been no significant mobilisation with progress among women in the U.S. to demand paid leave, outside of individual states or regions. As of July 2020, for example, workers in Washington, D.C. are entitled to up to eight weeks of paid leave to care for a new child or up to six weeks to care for another family member with health needs under the new Paid Family Leave Program. From a global perspective, these policies barely scratch the surface of what paid leave should do. The fact remains that the issue is not raised as a priority in national elections, and women across the country do not mobilise around it in significant numbers.

Finally, it is important to note that the Trump administration will have an outsized impact in the legal arena for decades to come through a near record-breaking number of federal judge appointments, many of whom are only in their 30s and 40s (Johnson 2020; Reynolds 2020), including the appointment of three U.S. Supreme Court judges. This means that the Trump administration has ensured a trickle-down legacy on issues of gender and reproductive rights that will last generations.

Counter-Movements and (Successful) Strategies

The response to far-right mobilisation in the U.S., including the election of a populist-nationalist candidate, was swift and far-reaching. Broad coalitions of social movement groups emerged to protest Trump's election in the streets, to sit in protest of the so-called Muslim ban at airports, and to protest the separation of families at the southern border (see Roth 2019). New non-governmental organisations dedicated to progressive organising emerged, including The Coffee Party, a group formed in reaction to the Tea Party that uses the tagline »civility, unity, integrity«. The Poor People's Campaign launched in summer 2018 to unite economically marginalised people across demographic lines in order to push for change—launching what

7 I am indebted to Vicki Shabo, Senior Fellow at New America, for email exchanges and data on the Trump administration's paid leave efforts.

their website describes as »a new organism of state-based movements« and nonviolent civil disobedience.[8] Other organising endeavours within unions (Feffer 2020) and in climate and environmental groups like Extinction Rebellion rounded out coalition group protests with lobbying efforts and direct actions such as traffic blockades.

Black Lives Matter, the »Wall of Moms«, and Union Support

Women and LGBTQ advocates took to the streets to protest Trump's election, in joyous »queer dance« and »glitter gay bomb« dance parties outside a number of administration officials' and associates' homes, including most famously Mike Pence's temporary home, but also the homes of Stephen Miller, Ivanka Trump, outside the Trump Tower in New York, and in demonstrations in cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia in advance of Trump visits or GOP meetings. Rainbow flags flew from dozens of homes throughout Pence's residential neighbourhood, ensuring that he would see them on his daily commute. The January 2017 Women's March on Washington (WMW), colloquially referred to as the »women's march« or the »pink pussy hat« march, drew over four million protesters to the streets across the country, which was the largest protest in U.S. history. Similar protests were held globally. Notably, the WMW was regarded both as a success for its ability to bring »new« activists to the street and was heavily criticised for lack of inclusivity, lack of diverse representation among organisers, and because the white women organisers appropriated the march's original name (the Million Women March) from earlier, black-led marches (Traister 2017). It is also important to acknowledge the extent to which this wave of women's engagement came amid a national reckoning with sexual harassment in the #metoo movement and widespread anger on the part of women (and men) as repeated stories of unchecked harassment and sexual assault by prominent men in a variety of sectors emerged.

The grassroots Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was not a response to recent far-right mobilisation per se—rather, it was a direct response to generations of structural racism, ongoing white supremacy and police brutality against Black Americans. It was founded after the acquittal of the man who shot Trayvon Martin—a 17-year-old Black boy who was walking through his relatives' gated Florida community eating a bag of skittles when he was shot by neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman (Botelho 2012). Zimmerman claimed self-defence and was acquitted at trial. It took seven years for BLM's efforts to reach the mainstream—in the summer of 2020, after the George Floyd protests, when thousands of mostly young people across the country took to the streets for months of protests, still ongoing at the time of this writing.

But although three Black women organisers started the BLM movement, it was primarily organised around the experiences of Black men and boys, making names like Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Treyvon Martin, Philando Castile, and Eric Garner nationally and globally recognisable in ways that the names of Black women and girls killed by police were not—ultimately »shaping our understanding of what constitutes police brutality, where it occurs, and how to address it« (Chatelain and Asoka 2015: 54; Kelly and Glenn 2020). Within a couple of years, an internal push among BLM activists refocused attention on the impact of police brutality on Black women, the poor, elderly, and LGBTQ+ people. The Say Her Name movement, founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw's African American Policy Forum in 2014, as part of the overall BLM movement, pushed for Black women to be included in the national discussion about police reform and racial justice (Kelly and Glenn 2020).

The 2020 racial injustice protests that erupted in the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer were sweeping, drawing a more racially diverse cross-section of protesters and launching a national reckoning about race and structural racism. The mayor of Washington, D.C. had Black Lives Matter painted in giant letters on the street leading to the White House and had the plaza renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza, with similar street murals following across the country. Entrenched protests in places like Portland, D.C. and Seattle stretched into the fall. In Portland, group of mostly white, suburban mothers organised the Wall of Moms, reaching out to a local Black-led non-profit called »Don't Shoot Portland« to help organise support at local protests. Hundreds of mothers clad in yellow t-shirts, singing lullabies appeared at the protests »to act as a literal wall,« as founder Bev Barnum describes it in a media interview. By late July 2020, the group had 30,000 followers on twitter and another 14,000 on Facebook and Instagram. »A mom recognizes a bully when she sees him on the playground,« Barnum described, comparing local police officers to bullies and noting that she had not been previously politically active. But watching the protests that unravelled locally, Barnum noted, »if there was ever a primal mom rage, I felt it (…). It just woke me up« (Ann 2020).

On July 20, 2020, union members across the country signed on to a »Strike for Black Lives«, organised by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Union members had already been mobilising and protesting for weeks by that point, with notable examples like the Minneapolis bus drivers refusing to transport protester to jail in the city's Metro Transit buses as the George Floyd protests got underway in May 2020. As Minneapolis bus driver Adam Bruch explained on Facebook, »as a transit worker and union member I refuse to transport my class and radical youth to jail. An injury to one is an injury to us all« (Moattar 2020). The Strike for Black Lives quickly drew support from dozens of other unions and coalitions, including the American Federation of Teachers, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the United Farm Workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Amalgamated Transit Union, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and more.[9]

Democratic Mobilisation and She Should Run Campaigns

Progressive leadership also mobilised in reaction to far-right populism in the U.S., especially in reaction to Trump's election. Groups like the National Organization for Women launched voter mobilisation campaigns.[10] Nonpartisan organisations like She Should Run emerged, seeking to »dramatically increase the number of women considering a run for public office«.[11] Even children's toys reflected the changing mood; in 2020, Mattel released a new line of racially-diverse, politically-themed Barbies, including a political candidate, a campaign manager, a fundraiser, and a voter doll (Shamo 2020). Voter mobilisation efforts showed success in the 2018 mid-term elections, as a record-breaking number of women won House of Representative (235 women) and Senate (22) nominations. Major increases in women of colour nominees were also evident. The 2018 elections brought the first Native American and Muslim women to Congress and saw the first Democratic woman of colour elected to the governor (in New Mexico). A record-breaking number of women (6) were candidates in the presidential primary process in 2019, and the first woman of colour became the Democratic Party's Vice-Presidential nominee. Kamala Harris, Joe Biden's running-mate, is the third women in history to be the vice-presidential pick (following Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin) and the fourth woman on a major party's presidential ticket (with Hillary Clinton).[12]

Not all of these successes were a result of traditional Democratic Party mobilisation. Many were due to what media have referred to as an »increasingly powerful progressive campaign apparatus,« made up of groups like the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, Justice Democrats, Our Revolution, and Indivisible that are pushing the Democratic party to become more progressive. With a focus on issues that include affordable and guaranteed health care, social security expansion, and debt-free college, such movements are working to develop more progressive social policies, but also try to change how progressive movements mobilise. The Indivisible Movement, for example, emerged out of the Indivisible Guide, written by three former Democratic staffers to suggest ways to organise locally and how to lobby and put pressure on state representatives and congressmen. The movement »borrowed tactics of the Tea Party« to mobilise grassroots support (Roth 2019: 501). Justice Democrats is a federal political action committee (PAC) that solicits and uses donation money to train and support progressive candidates to run as »primary challengers against out-of-touch Democratic incumbents and organizing to hold the party accountable to our

8 See the Poor People's Campaign at https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/.

9 More information about the Strike! for Black Lives at https://j20strikeforblacklives.org/about/.

10 See more about the National Organization for Women and voter mobilisation at: https://now.org/now-foundation/voter-mobilization/.

11 To learn more about She Should Run, see: https://www.sheshouldrun.org/what-we-do/.

12 See election and voter statistics at the Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics: https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/milestones-for-women.

issues«.[13] While it is too soon to say for sure how effective these new efforts will be on actual policy outcomes, several progressive primary wins against decades-long Democratic incumbents—including the now well-known Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley—helped demonstrate the success of the strategy in securing new representation in Congress that will help support similar kinds of policies (Rakich and Conroy 2020).

Legal Efforts: Civil Rights Protections and Private Litigation

Several legal efforts have been part of progressive resistance to far-right mobilisation over the past several years, including the blockages of state legislation on abortion described above, as well as the June 2020 U.S. Supreme Court landmark civil rights law ruling protecting gay and transgender employees from workplace discrimination. The latter's historic decision ruled that gay, lesbian, and transgender employees are protected under the 1964 Civil Rights Act in what has been described as a »huge victory for the LGBTQ community and a major loss for the Trump administration, which had sided with employers« (Totenberg 2020).

Other lawsuits, court orders, temporary injunctions, and more have been a steady part of counter-protests and mobilisation against the far right, including efforts that have blocked deportations, state legislative actions against reproductive rights, and more. Not all of these efforts showed success, as illustrated by the 2018 Supreme Court ruling upholding the Trump administration's third Muslim ban.[14] The 2020 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that upheld the Trump administration's expansion of the religious exemption for employers' health care coverage of contraception, described in greater detail earlier in this report, is another example. But the steady use of legal action to force political reform and to protest the far right is a growing tactic, most recently evidenced in the use of federal lawsuits against law enforcement brought by protesters in Seattle (Johnson and Phillips 2020).

Reflections on the 2020 Election

This chapter is going to press just after the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, during a period in which the Democratic challengers, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, have won the popular vote by a significant margin and are slated to exceed the 270 votes needed in the electoral college. The Biden-Harris team has declared victory and announced its transition teams, and is moving forward with setting up the new administration in advance of the inauguration. However, President Trump has not conceded the election, continues to contest the outcome of several states with demands for recounts, and along with other Republicans is pushing a false narrative about widespread election fraud. This is a volatile period both politically and socially, as lawsuits are filed and a tense political standoff seems likely. The reflections offered here are early observations during this uncertain period.

One significant issue to reflect upon are the initial reports on voter demographics from polling data. It is clear that above all else, this election was tremendously mobilising, bringing Americans to the polls at rates that exceeded every election for the past 120 years, even in pandemic conditions. Joe Biden received more votes than any other candidate in history, and President Trump received the second-highest number of votes historically. The popular vote margin between the two candidates is clear—at several million votes—but is close enough to show a highly divided country, in which President Trump retains tremendous support from upwards of 70 million Americans. Voter polling shows that the two camps—Biden voters and Trump voters—disagree significantly about nearly everything, from concerns about COVID-19 to the importance of racial justice or climate change. As the Pew Research Center wrote in its initial report on the election, it is clear that the U.S. now has »two broad coalitions of voters who are deeply distrustful of one another and who fundamentally disagree over policies, plans and even the very problems that face the country today.« Only about 20 % of voters believe they share the same core American values and goals as voters on the other side (Deane and Gramlich 2020). This is a country, in other words, that will remain highly polarised for years to come. The new administration will grapple with strong resistance from voters who at best feel threatened, and at worst, believe the election was »stolen« from them.

13 As described in the »What We Do« section of the Justice Democrats website, https://justicedemocrats.com/about/.

14 See: Timeline of the Muslim Ban on the *ACLU Washington's* website; available at: https://aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban.

Early information on the demographic breakdown of voters is also informative, especially for the purposes of this chapter. According to exit polls, Trump again received steady support from evangelical Christians, and increased his support across ethnic minority groups, including Black Americans (from 8 to 12 %), Asian Americans (from 27 to 31 %) and Latinos (from 28 to 32 %). Trump won every age group of white voters. Most notably for the purposes of this chapter, white women increased their support for Trump from 2016 to 2020, with 55 % voting for him—compared to 44 % of women overall who voted for Trump (Lawless and Freedman 2020). For nearly half of American women—and over half of white women—Trump remains the candidate of choice—in all likelihood, for similar reasons to those articulated throughout this chapter. The challenges the Trump administration poses to reproductive and gender rights appear to have had no impact whatsoever on women's voting behaviour in 2020.

Conclusion

The gendered dimensions of far-right mobilisation in the U.S. are multifaceted. On the one hand, women's support for right-wing political mobilisation, populist nationalism, and Christian nationalism played a significant role in the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency in 2016. A majority of white women voted for Trump in both 2016 and in 2020, raising questions among many observers about their motivations and rationalisation of a candidate whose sexist and misogynistic behaviour, hyper-masculine performativity, and anti-feminist policy promises were abundantly clear. White women's support for Trump, as argued in this chapter, is in part rooted in a desire to protect their own privilege and a status quo that benefits them. For white evangelical women, who are highly motivated by a perceived sense of moral and national decline in the face of rapid social, cultural, and demographic change, Trump has fulfilled promises that matter to them: appointing conservative judges, increasingly the likelihood of restrictions in federal abortion rights, and reducing protections for transgender and LGBTQ+ people. What progressives view as losses and rollbacks of rights has clearly been received by core Trump supporters as a tremendous success. White women's support increased as a result.

But women have also taken more of a leadership role over the past four years in progressive efforts to combat the rise of the entire far-right spectrum. Increasing numbers of women have run for office, mobilised in street protests across the country, and played key leadership roles in important ways that affected the turnout of the 2020 election. This includes Stacey Abrams, a Black woman candidate who narrowly lost the 2018 Georgia gubernatorial election amid claims of voter suppression among Black voters in particular—and then turned that loss into a campaign to register voters. Abrams created Fair Fight, an organisation credited with registering 800,000 new voters in Georgia over the past two years and helping sweep the state to a Democratic victory in the 2020 Presidential election (Griffith 2020). The 2020 election itself, of course, also means the country now has a Black woman, Kamala Harris, who is the daughter of immigrants from India and Jamaica—as Vice President elect.

In effect, the story of the 2016 and 2020 election has shown just how divided women are in the U.S. on questions of politics, even those that are directly related to gender and reproductive rights, family leave policies or other issues predominantly affecting women. In this respect, women in the U.S. mirror the deep divides of the nation more generally, with two distinct and powerful groups of voters whose political positions, opinions, fears and concerns hold little overlap.

With the outcome of the balance in the Senate still unclear as of this writing—due to a January 5 election run-off in Georgia whose outcome could sway the Senate to a Democratic majority—, it remains unclear how effectively a Biden presidency will be able to achieve its legislative agenda (Kapur 2020) or what changes will be on the horizon for the country. But if nothing else is clear at this moment, it is that the gendered divides in the U.S. are just one part of what is a complicated story about polarisation and division in the nation more generally. The 2020 election has made abundantly clear that closing those gaps will be key to forward momentum in the years to come.

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