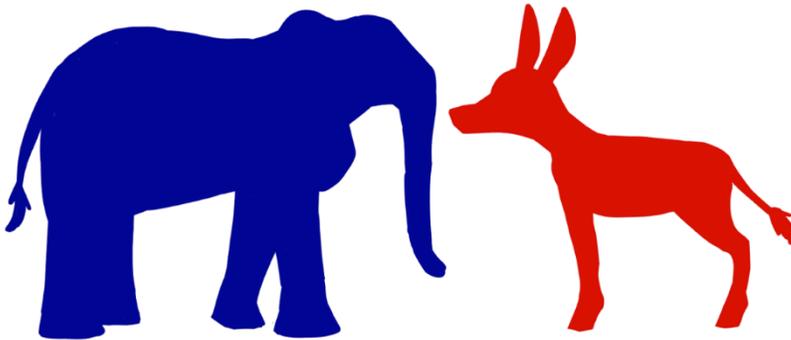




November 2nd, 2020

## Conservative and Democratic Clubs Debate

By Club Presidents, Jaye Conn (R) and Tyler Walley (D)



In light up the upcoming presidential election, *The Acta Diurna* decided to host its first written political debate between Altamont's two most prominent political clubs, The Young Democrats and The Young Conservatives. The Young Democrats are led

by President Tyler Walley and sponsored by Ms. Daniels. The Young Conservative are led by President Jaye Cohn and sponsored by Mr. Dunn. Each club received three long response questions drafted by our very own history teachers, Dr. Nelson, Dr. Melonas, and Mr. Dominguez. The two clubs were given eight days to draft their official club responses to the questions below. The goal of this exercise was to give both clubs a platform to use their voices, in hope of displaying Altamont's encouragement of individual opinion and freedom.

1. *In Gov. Ivey's speech announcing the Alabama mask mandate, she said:*

*'I still believe it will be difficult to enforce, and I always prefer personal responsibility over a government mandate, and yet I also know with all my heart that the numbers and the data over the past few weeks are definitely trending in the wrong direction.'*

*Gov. Ivey was speaking to the COVID-19 crisis, but she's pointing to a broader tension between 'individual liberty' and 'collective responsibility'. In this moment of multiple crises (public health, racial uprising, the economy, confidence in government), how should we think about the role of the individual and the role of the government?*

### **Conservative Response:**

I should start this response off by saying that we all need to wear masks and socially distance! Wearing masks is an essential part of the mitigation of this virus no doubt, but there is a difference between the government forcing citizens to do something and a citizen-lead project. As a libertarian, I believe that we should have as many personal freedoms as we can as long as they don't harm others. This means we each have a social responsibility to wear masks and should not infringe on someone else's right to life, which could be sacrificed if we do not socially distance and wear masks. We should all question our government and the freedoms they infringe upon as much as possible. When we talk about our 'individual liberty' we refer to our ability to act freely without harming others. If I drive my car down the street safely, I do not harm or affect anybody, so I retain my right to do so. However, I do not have the right to recklessly drive down the street and run into a neighbor's mailbox, as this harms his personal property. The same logic applies to mandatory masks: in the privacy of my own home or outside away from others I retain my right to wear my mask as I please, but when I enter a place with other's I risk harming them by not wearing a mask, so I do not get the right to remove my mask. I recently talked to Birmingham City Council member Valerie Abbott about the constitutionality of the mask mandate and she explained that the city does have the right to enforce laws like the mask mandate despite constitutionality. A city can restrict tons of our rights, but a national mandate would raise questions of constitutionality. Wear masks and question the government!

### **Democratic Response:**

The Democratic Party often stresses the power of a strong federal government, which I agree with, but more than ever, I think that Americans need to reconsider the relationship that they have with the government. Given the failure of the federal government (and especially the executive branch) to provide a meaningful response to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of race relations in the United States, shifts in the federal government in the present are necessary. Individual liberties are absolutely necessary, especially in times of great moral and political crisis like the present, but collectivized measures such as a national mask mandate should be undertaken to combat the current pandemic.

2. *William Faulkner once wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Is he right? What role should history and the ways we collectively remember the past play in politics today?*

### **Democratic Response:**

Americans have a complicated relationship with the country's past, and it seems that the tensions built up in that relationship are more prevalent today than ever. The past has always and will continue to define contemporary events. The past is something that we should neither fully forgive nor forget. The past should inform political norms and laws to an extent, but we shouldn't be forever controlled by the statutes and ideals of societies in the past. One example in particular of how Americans need to reconsider their past is the Confederacy and Confederate monuments. In short, Americans must come to terms with the fact that the Confederacy specifically fought to preserve the institution of slavery, and that the majority of Confederate

monuments were installed in the Jim Crow South for purposes of racial intimidation. On the other hand, values from our past, such as freedom of protest, enrich our society and ultimately lead to actual progress. As cliché as it sounds, learning from the past is the only way to implement substantial changes in our democracy if we want politics to be a productive and effective medium for Americans to participate and benefit from.

### **Conservative Response:**

The reason we study history is to learn from our past. The way that our species progresses is by learning from mistakes, so if we allow the past to become “dead,” we lose our ability to grow. The past is especially important in determining how we respond to problems now. When I initially read this quote, I was brought back to a moment last year that stunned me. I was discussing the Black Lives Matter protests with others, and specifically the violence that erupted. I was very critical of the violence and especially the violence in Birmingham. I marched at the march in Birmingham before Funnymaine Johnson was charged with inciting a riot at Kelly Ingram Park. Johnson said “We’ve got a lot of cities around the country. They’re tearing down Target. They’re tearing down city hall. We can’t do that. We gotta protect our city,... We can’t tear down 16th Street Baptist Church. We can’t tear down the civil rights museum. We can’t tear down Carver. We can’t tear down A.G. Gaston Plaza. But what I’m not telling you to do is walk to Linn Park. I’m not telling to walk to Linn Park after this rally. I’m not telling you to tear something down in Linn Park. I’m not telling you that I’m going to be over there after this rally...That’s what I’m not telling you to do because the law says I can’t tell you to do that. I cannot tell the police to look away. We don’t see you,” he said. “I cannot tell the police to march us over there. I can’t tell you that, so I’m not telling you to meet me at Linn Park at 7:30 p.m. Central tonight. I’m not telling you that...But while the whole world is on national TV tearing stuff down, we need to tear something tonight. They need to see Birmingham, the home of the Civil Rights Movement tear some [expletive] down tonight.” We have a right to protest in this country, but we do not have a right to destroy public or private property. Seeing livestreams of Birmingham citizens setting statues on fire, attempting to pull down the confederate monument, smashing in windows of businesses, and mugging the reporters was terribly sad. Birmingham is a city of incredibly violent racial history, but we have made incredible progress. Today, Birmingham is not a very racially tense city, and although we are not perfect, and the consequences of racist practices like redlining are still present, we are fairly free from racial violence. We had a really interesting opportunity to set the example for peaceful protests especially with our intense history in mind. Our city could have been one of the few protests that did not turn into violent riots, but unfortunately, we have let the past die a bit. What we should have done in order to honor history, would not be repeating this cycle of excessive violence, and instead honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who was arrested for peacefully protesting in Birmingham. Faulkner should be right, the past is never dead, but it seems that we are letting the past die by not honoring history and trying to improve the way we make changes.

3. *For the last 60 years, the United States has played the role of world leader. Further, since the end of the Cold War, the US has enjoyed relatively unchallenged authority and all of the responsibilities that accompany this position. In recent years, the U.S. has been especially vocal in*

*the realm of climate change by choosing to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement Internationally, what role should the US play in regard to climate change and other existential threats?*

### **Conservative Response:**

We can claim that withdrawing from the Paris Agreement has “damaged the US’s reputation,” but let’s look at the facts of our involvement in the Agreement. When we were in the Agreement, there was a major economic burden on American businesses and workers. Emissions of air pollutants declined by 74% between 1970 and 2018. U.S. net greenhouse gas emissions dropped 13% . In short, the US leads the world in CO<sub>2</sub> reduction now that we are unrestricted by the agreement.

This question frames the U.S.’s involvement in the Paris Climate Agreement as widely accepted and unconflicted but this is incorrect. The Paris Agreement is a treaty, but it would not have been passed by the Senate, so Barack Obama decided to call it an “executive agreement” in order to bypass the Senate’s approval. Here are some advantages from the U.S.’s withdrawal: U.S. taxpayers will not have to spend as billions on the UN’s Green Climate fund (much of which could just end up in the hands of corrupt politicians), the U.S. will no longer have to raise the price of energy because of new domestic policies, the U.S. can capitalize off of our comparative advantage of energy price, the U.S. could work towards being the biggest energy producer in the world, and we may be able to save the senate’s duty of ratifying treaties.

The U.S. plays a huge role in reducing climate change, but the Paris Climate Agreement really just raised taxes and put restrictions on the U.S. only for the benefit of smaller countries. The Agreement doesn’t end up helping the U.S, nor does it provide a great plan for reducing the U.S’s pollution. The U.S. needs to focus on its own needs for something like energy production. We have proven that we can self-regulate our own emissions, and although we still have tons of work to do for our conservation efforts, we should focus on our own country. We give billions of dollars per years to help other countries and giving away even more money instead of focusing our funds on improving our own infrastructure is a waste. We should always prioritize our own citizens and being a part of the Paris Agreement just doesn't allow us to do so.

### **Democratic Response:**

The science on climate change could not be more clear: it’s real, it’s being propelled by humans, and it will have tremendous consequences on land, people, and economies across the world. The United States should take an active role in combating climate change as one of the largest historic and present emitters of carbon dioxide. First, the United States needs to reenter the Paris Climate Accords. Furthermore, on an international scale, the United States needs to take more responsibility for its present and past emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by committing to investments in green energy and emissions reductions. The United States can act as a true leader on the global stage for this existential issue, while also holding other large countries like China accountable for climate progress.

---

# Student Opinions

---

## ***Kamala Harris: A Female Vice- Presidential Candidate***

*By Margaret Schedler*



Prior to Kamala Harris, our nation has only had two female vice-presidential candidates: Geraldine

Ferraro (D, 1984) followed by Sarah Palin (R, 2008) The female presidential candidate list is even less substantial, as Hillary Clinton is the only woman ever to be nominated for President of the United States. Many other women have run for both the offices of Vice President and President, but none have made it past the primaries. Because Harris is one of the first women, the first South Asian American woman, and the first African American woman to be nominated for VP, I decided to ask my fellow students what they thought about this historic nomination.

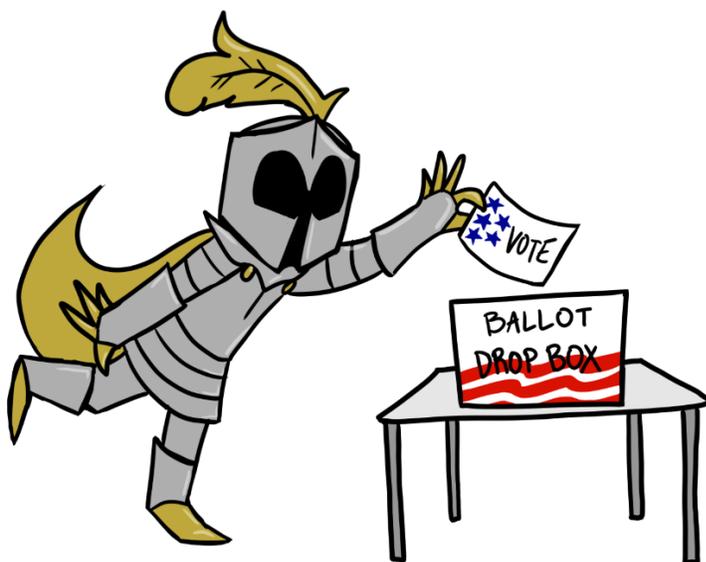
I asked them three broad questions: 1. *What do you think about possibly having a female VP?* 2. *What strengths and weaknesses would Harris bring to the job as VP?* 3. *What unique qualities as a woman might Harris bring to office of VP?* As their answers flowed in, I noticed that respondents had differing opinions on Kamala Harris's political stances. Some of the students mentioned that they did not agree with most of Harris's policies. Jaye Conn, an Altamont senior, mentions in her response, "[Harris] will not respond about packing the Supreme Court, shady law and order history (she prosecuted 1,900 marijuana incarcerations as San Francisco district attorney), she attempted to keep inmates in prison for cheap labor, she has a personal history of attacking Joe Biden for being a racist." She continues with, "[Harris's] healthcare opinions have bounced around from Medicare For All to even one time being critical of private insurance."

While there are students like Jaye who do not agree with Harris's policies and opinions, I noticed one major connection between the answers. Respondents expressed a shared opinion on the significance of a female VP, one student even calling it "revolutionary". But as Jaye said at one point in her response, "As a woman, it would be cool to see a female VP, but I believe that actions and words speak much louder than one's gender." Knowing this we must separate the performance of the job from the significance of the person. For example, we must separate Harris's gender from her political performance. Keeping this in mind, I asked my second question: *What strengths and weaknesses would Harris bring to the job as VP?* Like before, some students replied that they did not agree with Harris's plans or views, going as far as to say that Harris had many weaknesses, but Toby Conn did stress one of her strengths. Toby writes that

she believes Harris would “keep Biden on his toes.” Others, like Matthew Mugweru, said Harris’s strengths were that she “can take the heat... As a former prosecutor, she's used to criticism and isn't shy to give some to her colleagues.” However, Matthew also pointed out one of Harris’s flaws, saying, “As I sat watching the debate, I was reminded of how some politicians tend to answer questions without saying anything of substance or truth. She dodged numerous questions in order to save face. In a country where transparency is becoming less and less available, Harris needs to commit to truth and honesty for the American people.”

I then asked if Harris might bring to the table any unique qualities as a woman if she were elected to the office of VP. Most responded neutrally, unsure of exactly what Harris could add as a female voice in the White House. One commented on a stereotype that women are ‘more emotional than men.’ Matthew Mugweru believes that Kamala Harris could break that cliché. “[That stereotype] has lost its power (not like it ever had any to begin with). After viewing how this current president and his administration react to such petty criticism, I think it's very clear who is the more emotional gender (that was mostly a joke). But in all honesty, I think Harris (like almost all women I know) would bring much needed rational thought into conversations.”

While students of Altamont may have differing opinions, this survey of 16 random students shows exactly how diverse the school of thought is among peers. Through several student responses, we get a glimpse at numerous perspectives. Some implore us not to just look at the gender of the candidate, but also at their policies and actions. Others have pressured the importance of integrating not only a female voice, but also a Black voice into the White House. A female in office would be a remarkable step up for women in America. America has been an independent country for 243 years, during which women have slowly progressed to where we are now. Whatever happens on election day, I am confident in the steps that have been made for a more equal future, and the responses of my fellow students only support that confidence.



## ***Why Vote?***

*By Kalia Todd*

Many people have the right to vote, yet so many choose not to. Voting is a special right that many eligible voters take for granted. It is one of the most important parts of our democratic system, and is the most powerful tool you can use to help

both your community and yourself express your political voice. Despite this, there are many reasons why citizens choose not to vote. For example, some people believe it is hard to register to vote or do not know

how to register. Others believe that their vote will not make a difference. Sometimes people may not like the candidates and they believe no one is fit to win the election. Others may struggle to get to the polls. However, not voting is disrespectful to those who fought and struggled for this right. Voting is one way to participate in societal change. It is those same citizens who don't cast a ballot who end up criticizing the country when things don't go the way they wanted. If you are a student this year who is eligible, you need to get out and vote! You are a representation of our new generation and you can help to elect officials that will consider your values when they vote for an issue. You have a chance to make a statement and let your voice be heard. Please do not give that up by deciding not to vote. Casting a ballot unites your beliefs across the nation, and it most definitely makes a difference. To have a say in social, political, and economic matters is a privilege, so let's all exercise our right to vote!

---



## ***The Vice- Presidential Debate: A Student's Reflection***

*By Claudia Williams*

Wednesday, October 7 –  
the Vice-Presidential Debate.

People across the country tuned in to watch two candidates make their arguments for why you should vote for this or that, what stance the U.S. should take on an issue, and who should be elected to the presidency. Little was remarkable about this particular debate aside from a fly taking a special interest in Pence's head. However, one question which stood out from the rest was the final query – submitted by an eighth grader from Springville, Utah named Brecklyn. The question focused on the topic of division in America.

“When I watch the news, all I see is arguing between Democrats and Republicans. When I watch the news, all I see is citizen fighting against citizen. When I watch the news, all I see are two candidate parties, trying to tear each other down. If our leaders can't get along, how are the citizens supposed to get along? ...Your examples could make all the difference to bring us together.”

A stark contrast to the heated discussions which preceded, Brecklyn's question highlighted the matters which unite us rather than those which divide us. This was reflected in the upbeat responses of the two candidates, Senator Kamala Harris responding first with, "...When you think about the future, I do believe the future is bright. And it will be because of your leadership, and it will be, because we fight for each person's voice through their vote."

Vice President Mike Pence had a similarly positive reply. "...Here in America, we can disagree, we can debate vigorously as Senator Harris and I have on the stage tonight. But when the debate is over, we come together as Americans. That's what people do in big cities and small towns all across this country...We always come together and are always there for one another. And we've especially learned that during the difficulties of this year."

We, like students everywhere, will soon be fully-fledged members of society with a broader ability to influence America for the better, or for the worse. Brecklyn's question serves to remind us that whatever kind of country we create using our power as citizens, it is important to remember the value of listening, the value of respecting others, and the value of working alongside other people no matter what their views may be. Respect is a core value for all Altamont students, one that should be carried with us into the world and into our future as American citizens.

What would you ask our political leaders if you had the chance?

Page, Susan. "Read the Full Transcript of Vice-Presidential Debate between Mike Pence and Kamala Harris." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 8 Oct.

2020, [www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/10/08/vice-presidential-debate-full-transcript-mike-pence-and-kamala-harris/5920773002/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/10/08/vice-presidential-debate-full-transcript-mike-pence-and-kamala-harris/5920773002/).



---

## Politics

# *Get to Know Your Candidates!*

*By Madeleine Beckwith*

With the election fast approaching, staying up to date on the 2020 presidential candidates is of the utmost importance. Provided below is a summary of what each candidate has promised during their campaign. For more detailed information on these candidates and their policies,



visit [www.donaldtrump.com](http://www.donaldtrump.com) or [www.joebiden.com](http://www.joebiden.com). (All information in this article was pulled from these two sites.)

## **The President**

**Jobs:** Donald Trump promises that if re-elected, he will generate 10 million new jobs in the span of 10 months as well as create 1 million new small businesses. He pledges to cut taxes, boost take-home pay, keep jobs in America, expand “opportunity zones,” enact fair trade deals to protect American jobs, continue the deregulatory agenda for energy independence, and create “Made in America” tax credits.

**Covid-19:** Donald Trump promises that he will have a vaccine developed for Covid-19 by the end of 2020, as well as a return to normalcy by 2021. He vows to provide health care workers in the United States with all medicines and supplies needed to fight Covid-19. Finally, he guarantees to refill medical stockpiles in preparation for future pandemics.

**China:** Donald Trump vows to bring 1 million manufacturing jobs back to the United States from China, as well as provide tax credits for the companies that do so. He will also give 100% expense deductions for essential industries, specifically pharmaceuticals and robotics, who bring their manufacturing jobs back to the United States. Trump will discontinue giving federal contracts to companies who outsource jobs to China. He also promises to hold China accountable for the spread of Covid-19.

**Healthcare:** Trump pledges to cut the price of prescription drugs and healthcare insurance premiums. He also wants to lessen government control in America’s healthcare system. Trump promises to end surprise medical bills and protect social security and Medicare. Lastly, he wants to provide better healthcare and services for veterans.

**Education:** Donald Trump pledges to provide school choice for every child in the United States, as well as require schools to teach American Exceptionalism.

**“Drain the Swamp”:** Donald Trump seeks to pass Congressional term limits, end bureaucratic ‘bullying’ of United States citizens and small businesses, expose Washington’s money trail, delegate power back to the American people, and eliminate international organizations that hurt American citizens.

**Police:** Donald Trump promises to fully fund and hire more law enforcement officers. He wants to increase the penalty for assaulting police officers, as well as prosecute drive-by shootings as an act of domestic terrorism. He vows to bring violent extremist groups to justice and end cashless bails.

**Immigration:** Donald Trump promises to block illegal immigrants from participating in taxpayer-funded welfare, healthcare, and receiving free college tuition. He wants to require mandatory deportation for non-citizen gang members. He promises to dismantle human trafficking networks, end sanctuary cities, and prohibit American companies from replacing US citizens with foreign workers. He also wishes to require new immigrants be capable of financially supporting themselves.

**Innovation:** Donald Trump wants to launch Space Force, establish permanent manned presence on the moon, and send the first manned mission to Mars. He wants to build the world’s greatest infrastructure system and win the race to 5G by establishing a national high-speed wireless internet network. He strives to continue leading the world in access to the cleanest drinking water and cleanest air. He also wishes to partner with other nations to clean up our planet’s oceans.

**Foreign Policy:** Donald Trump promises to stop all needless wars, bring home troops, expand America's military strength, and wipe out all global terrorists who wish to do our country harm. He also promises to build an unrivaled cybersecurity defense system and missile defense system.

**Defend Values:** Donald Trump promises to continue nominating constitutionalist Supreme Court judges and lower court judges. He promises to protect unborn life, defend the freedoms of religious believers and organizations, and support citizen's Second Amendment right.

### **Joe Biden**

**Jobs:** Joe Biden promises to create millions of jobs for the American people as well as provide immediate relief to those who have been laid-off due to Covid-19. Biden pledges to create jobs by enlisting people to fight against the pandemic. Joe Biden wishes to create a caregiving and education workforce that helps ease the burden working parents face. Joe Biden also promises to raise minimum wage, end tipping wage, and end sub-minimum wage for those with disabilities.

**China:** Joe Biden vows to bring manufacturing and innovation back to the United States. Biden promises to build more modern, equitable, and cleaner infrastructure. He wants to encourage small businesses and entrepreneurs by reversing Trump tax cuts for larger corporations. He also wants to impose common-sense tax reforms that will ensure wealthier Americans pay more taxes.

**Covid-19:** Joe Biden promises to make Covid-19 testing free and widely available and to eliminate all cost barriers that prevent care and treatment for Covid-19. He promises to deploy all supplies, personnel, and facilities needed by hospitals to fight the pandemic. He guarantees emergency paid leave for all those affected by the virus. Finally, he promises to reinstate the White House National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense.

**Healthcare:** Joe Biden seeks to protect the Affordable Care Act. He wishes to build on the Affordable Care Act by giving Americans more choice, reducing health care costs, and making the health care system less complex to navigate. He wants to give Americans a new public health insurance option similar to Medicare. He also promises to lower prescription drug prices and make healthcare equal for all. He promises to increase the value of tax credits, lower premiums, and extend coverage to more working Americans.

**Education:** Joe Biden promises to increase teacher pay, invest in better resources for schools, and ensure all children have access to a good public school. In doing so he pledges to provide every student with a path to a successful career.

**Equality:** Joe Biden has several plans in place to make America more equal. He has specific plans for the Black, Arab, Latino, AAPI, Native American, Indian, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and LGBTQ+ communities. All plans are to ensure that Americans have equal access to services and opportunities.

**Immigration:** Joe Biden vows to modernize America's immigration. He promises to welcome immigrants into America and reassert America's commitment to asylum-seekers and refugees. He also wants to fight back against irregular migration and promises to implement effective border screening.

**Innovation:** Joe Biden promises to use American innovation to lead the charge against climate change. He will work to help the United States reach a 100% clean energy economy by 2050. He also promises to stand up to larger corporations whose pollution emissions harm poorer American communities.

**Foreign Policy:** Joe Biden promises to aid Puerto Rico by helping them reconstruct their infrastructure to modern standards. He also pledges to invest in Puerto Rico's future through economic development initiatives. He promises to provide Puerto Rico with relief from unsustainable debt while expanding the Puerto Rican education system and workforce. He also vows to help Central America by developing a four-year, four-billion-dollar plan that will address the factors that motivate so many to migrate from Central America.

**Defend Values:** Joe Biden promises to protect abortion and the LGBTQ+ community, protect the middle class, and ensure equality for all those living in America.

---

## ***Voting Barriers: Discrimination and Disenfranchisement***

*By Lucine Carsen*

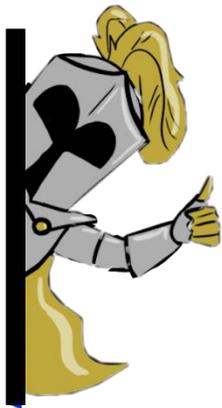
Most of us can agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed our daily lives in more ways than one. People are dying by the thousands, wearing a mask has become a political issue, we all get to spend just a little too much quality family time, and it's much too dangerous to give a close friend the loving hug they need to brighten their day. However, many of us students haven't considered the impact coronavirus has on what may not seem important to us specifically but is vital to maintain our democracy. Most of us aren't old enough to cast a ballot, but the world around us is reeling from the voting barriers COVID-19 has presented us with. However, voters are already suppressed for reasons other than coronavirus – and have been for decades.

Historically, entire groups have been barred from casting ballots because of the color of their skin, economic status, or country of origin. Although our nation has evolved, there's no doubt that we have a long way to go in terms of voting equality. Even before the pandemic complicated matters, we have always had a history of crafty laws and devious regulations that oppress voters in ways that may not seem apparent to many. Even before the polls open, districts are subject to suppression such as gerrymandering<sup>1</sup> – arbitrarily redrawing district lines in order to include or exclude areas with certain political preferences. This process – which to be fair has been used by both major political parties – ends up silencing the voices of citizens nationwide. But this is just the first of many voting barriers that affect citizens.



As the days inch closer to an upcoming election, countless people register to vote. Alabama's Secretary of State website<sup>2</sup> tells us that the state requires a person to be a citizen, live in the state, be eighteen years of age or older, have no disqualifying felony convictions, and not be regarded as legally "mentally incompetent." While some of these requirements may seem just, many forms of registration restrictions act as barriers to eligibility. For example, some states block voting registration in the weeks before an election. Our state of Alabama prohibits registration during the fourteen days before an election, and New York requires citizens to register before the twenty-five days preceding<sup>1</sup>. Because of laws requiring registration to end before the election becomes the dominant concern in many people's minds, many are discouraged from registering at all. The American Civil Liberties Union estimates that more than 900,000 New Yorkers were prohibited from voting because their applications were not sent in or approved by the specified date. Over 900,000 voices were silenced due to timing restrictions on registration – in only *one* out of fifty states. It's almost impossible to imagine the countless others effected by voting discrimination – discrimination caused by many other factors.

Although voter purges are meant to be used to remove the names of dead or moved voters from the rolls, oftentimes they are used to silence the political voices of enormous groups of people. In fact, many would-be voters only realize their names have been purged when they show up at the polls. A study by the Brennan Center<sup>3</sup> finds that, between the years of 2014 and 2016, almost *sixteen million names* were removed from voting rolls, four million more than the amount between 2006 and 2008. This 33% increase is undeniably



larger than the growth of both the total registered voters and the total population, which are 18% and 6% respectively. In 2016, over 7,700 names were purged in Arkansas because of felony convictions, when in reality, the list included many whose voting rights had been restored as well as those who were never even felons in the first place. In New York the same year, the Big Apple's Board of Elections inaccurately purged over 200,000 names. Three years before, almost 39,000 Virginians were removed from the rolls due to a defective database with an error rate of up to 17%, meaning over 6,000 voters were unfairly purged. Many reasons are behind this unlawful removal, with one of the most prominent being racism. Before the Supreme Court went back on their 2013 decision to end federal preclearance, allowing areas with pasts of racial discrimination to forgo additional scrutiny, districts then free of preclearance had much higher numbers of purged voters than districts with preclearance requirements. The Brennan Center determines that *two million names* would still be on the rolls if jurisdictions suddenly without preclearance had purged voters at the same rate as other jurisdictions. Throughout the nation, countless numbers of voters have been purged due to errors and injustices. However, past and present voters have yet more obstacles to face.

Thirty-six U.S. states require voters to show specified types of identification at the polls, and seven of those number necessitate pre-approved photo IDs<sup>4</sup>. Since the passing of an Alabama law in 2014, Alabamians must present one of a government-issued list of photo IDs in order to cast their ballots. But since over twenty-one million nationwide do not have access to such IDs, the voter turnout rate is decreased by around three percentage points according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, meaning tens of thousands of ballots unfilled in just one state. But why can't voters just simply get an ID? In reality, IDs often are

unaffordable, and even when they are free, the documents required to apply for one are costly. And since obtaining an ID requires a trip to the nearest ID office, many citizens who live in rural areas or have preexisting conditions that limit travel face even more unnecessary barriers to vote. In fact, the American Civil Liberties Union estimates that Texans living in rural areas must travel around 170 miles to reach the nearest ID office. Not only do ID requirements affect the elderly, disabled, and rural, but other minorities as well. Although only 8% of white people do not have access to IDs, the percentage for African American citizens is up to 25%. Many studies agree that ID laws greatly widen the gap between minority and white turnout, and Caltech/MIT research has found that racial minority voters are more often asked about IDs than white citizens are. ID requirement laws negatively affect millions of U.S. citizens and only help to widen the voter participation gap between different racial groups. Political, economic, racial, ethnic, gender, religious, and other minorities have historically been the targets for voting discrimination, and with other barriers such as differed access to polling locations and even felony disenfranchisement, the odds are not stacked in their favor. And the current situation isn't helping: coronavirus is only making things worse.

Unfortunately, tens of thousands of people have died of COVID-19, tens of thousands of voices that will never be heard. And while the dire situation might seem to be enough to push people to the polls, many do not want to risk their lives in the process – or simply cannot spare the time. The Social Science Research Council<sup>4</sup> reports that the many effects of the virus – including unemployment, mental health issues, medical expenses, and loss of health insurance – end up discouraging Americans from voting in the upcoming election. Even if citizens have the means to vote, the polls are simply unsafe. The Human Rights Watch<sup>5</sup> finds that many polling locations in the time of COVID-19 are overly crowded or not even structured to allow social-distancing. On the other hand, absentee and mail-in voting has become the focus of national attention. The Union of Concerned Scientists<sup>6</sup> writes that voting by mail is the safest way to cast a ballot this year. However, many states are lagging when it comes to easy and accessible mail-in voting. The Union agrees that in order to catch up with the times, states need to invest more in the Postal Service and mail capacity, as well as diminish the legal obstacles blocking mail-in voting. And although the situation may seem dire, there are still ways all of us can help to reduce voting barriers created and exacerbated by COVID-19.

Even if you are still too young to vote, you can get involved. What better way to spend extra time by saving democracy, and effectively, our country? Although it may be too late this year, it's important to keep in mind the ways you can help. For example, the Union of Concerned Scientists' website has a list of resources<sup>6</sup>, including a link to another page where a volunteer can write a letter to the editor to a newspaper of their choice about the importance of safe and accessible voting. The website also has an educational video on voting-by-mail and early voting – in both English and Spanish – that you can share on social media. If you are a science or political expert, or know someone who is, visit the Union of Concerned Scientists' website and learn how to add onto their open letter pushing for accessible and safety-conscious voting reform. Election Protection offers opportunities for both legal professionals and average citizens to help all eligible voters cast their ballots fairly and safely. Volunteers for the Postcards to Voters or the Vote Forward programs can help encourage a higher poll turnout by sending postcards or letters with special messages to eligible voters. Even if you are not

involved with any of these groups, you can draft your own messages to city or state officials and help equalize our democracy. But hurry – time is running out.<sup>1</sup>

Websites to visit (for the little time left or next time around):

- The Union of Concerned Scientists: <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/voting-and-covid-19>
- Election Protection: <https://866ourvote.org/volunteer/>
- Postcards to Voters: <https://postcardstovoters.org/>
- Vote Forward: <https://votefwd.org/>

Citations:

1. "Block the Vote: Voter Suppression in 2020." American Civil Liberties Union. February 3, 2020. Accessed October 16, 2020. <https://www.aclu.org/news/civil-liberties/block-the-vote-voter-suppression-in-2020/>.
2. Interactive, Alabama. "Alabama Votes." SOS Online Services. Accessed October 16, 2020. [https://www.alabamainteractive.org/sos/voter\\_registration/voterRegistrationWelcome.action](https://www.alabamainteractive.org/sos/voter_registration/voterRegistrationWelcome.action).
3. Morris, Kevin, Myrna Pérez, Jonathan Brater, and Christopher Deluzio. "Purges: A Growing Threat to the Right to Vote." Brennan Center for Justice. July 20, 2018. Accessed October 16, 2020. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/purges-growing-threat-right-vote>.
4. Haselswerdt, Jake. "Voting in Crisis: The Likely Impact of Coronavirus on US Political Participation." Items. June 4, 2020. Accessed October 16, 2020. <https://items.ssrc.org/covid-19-and-the-social-sciences/democracy-and-pandemics/voting-in-crisis-the-likely-impact-of-coronavirus-on-us-political-participation/>.
5. Leal Parker, Alison, and Lewis Mudge. "What Democracy Looks Like." Human Rights Watch. September 22, 2020. Accessed October 16, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/22/what-democracy-looks/protecting-voting-rights-us-during-covid-19-pandemic>.
6. "Voting in the Year of COVID-19." Union of Concerned Scientists. July 7, 2020. Accessed October 16, 2020. <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/voting-and-covid-19>.

---

# Letter from the Editors

---

*Intro by Margaret Schedler*

Every four years we are given the chance to elect a person to lead and represent our country. This act in itself is an extraordinary perspective into our government system. From George Washington to our current President, Donald Trump, we have seen many examples of leadership and world change. While looking back at old copies of *The Acta Diurna*, an issue dating back to 1984 caught my eye. 1984 was an election year with Reagan up against Mondale. “Ronald Reagan (Republican) defeated Walter Mondale (Democrat). Reagan won 58 percent of the popular vote, and carried every state except Minnesota in the Electoral College.”<sup>2</sup> The issue, written by students then too, included the two candidate’s policies and even a poll taken of the school. Students, who may have even not been able to vote



---

<sup>2</sup> <https://dsl.richmond.edu/voting/preselections.html> " Ronald Reagan (Republican) defeated Walter Mondale (Democrat). Reagan won 58 percent of the popular vote, and carried every state except Minnesota in the Electoral College.

yet, expressed their views through the school newspaper. This upcoming Tuesday is election day. Just like in 1984 when eligible students and teachers alike casted their ballot for a better future, *The Acta Diurna* staff of 2021 asks you to do the same. Exercise your constitutional right to elect the next leader for The United States of America and create the change we all wish to see in the world.

### Lucine Carsen

For this issue, we're using our Letter from the Editors article for more than just a simple conclusion to the newspaper. We're here to push you to *vote*. Although most students at Altamont are too young to cast a ballot, our oldest students as well as the faculty and staff all may have the ability to vote. So please do so! However, not everyone realizes why voting is so important. After all, your ballot is only one among millions, right? While that may be true, this particular attitude towards voting is devastating. If large masses of people feel this way – which they often *do* – then none of their voices will be heard, greatly altering the outcome of any election. But why care? Well, do *you* want to be silenced? Do *you* want to relinquish your power to save the country from political destruction or guarantee worthy candidates seats where they belong? I didn't think so. Democracy only functions when *all* citizens have their voices heard, which is why we're using *The Acta Diurna* to push its readers to vote. The country is a mess right now, and I think we *all* can agree with this, no matter which candidates or political party you back. Only the power of the franchise can help us recover and grow in a safe, helpful, and rational way. So, if you're old enough to cast a ballot, please do so! If you have a relative or friend who can, encourage them to vote! Cast a ballot, cast a vote, cast your voice.

