



US ELECTION

2020

SOCIAL EUROPE DOSSIER

US ELECTION 2020

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG
SOCIAL EUROPE PUBLISHING

SOCIAL EUROPE DOSSIER

Published by Social Europe Publishing in cooperation with the Friedrich
Ebert Stiftung.

ISBN 978-3-948314-18-7

Berlin, 2021



CONTENTS

Preface	v
1. WHERE DID TRUMPISM COME FROM? Sheri Berman	1
2. REVIVING TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AFTER TRUMP Max Bergmann	8
3. ARE THERE ANY PERSUADABLE VOTERS LEFT IN THE US? Karen Nussbaum	15
4. FREEDOM IS WHY BLACK LIVES MATTER Corey Wiggins	22
5. AN ECONOMIC RECOVERY THAT PUTS WORKERS AND THE CLIMATE FIRST Jessica Eckdish	27
6. A NEW START FOR TRANSATLANTIC SOCIAL DEMOCRACY? Knut Dethlefsen	33
7. THE BIDEN VICTORY AND THE FUTURE OF THE CENTRE-LEFT EJ Dionne Jr	39
8. JOE BIDEN'S MISSING COAT-TAILS Matt Mawhinney	54
9. WHAT SAVED AMERICAN DEMOCRACY? Bo Rothstein	61

PREFACE

The three postwar decades of peace and prosperity in western Europe and north America—as they appear now—were built on a relationship between progressives on the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The era was defined by commitment to full (male) employment, with Keynesian demand management; falling inequality, with progressive taxation funding the delivery of public goods; and a liberal international order, based on the multilateralism of the Bretton Woods agreement.

Yet four decades ago a conservative transatlantic alliance, between the then president of the United States and the prime minister of the United Kingdom, took a scythe to that order, in favour of market fundamentalism, major tax cuts for the wealthy, spiralling inequality and the atrophy of public institutions. This deregulated world became increasingly crisis-prone and chaotic, fostering the global mistrust

and rise of nationalistic populism in which Donald Trump could be elected president in 2016.

In co-operation with the Washington, DC office of the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, *Social Europe* explored the 2020 United States elections, the potential for a reinvigorated transatlantic relationship and a political turning point for the USA in the wake of compounding domestic crises, continuing fights for social justice and the dubious policy legacy of the Trump administration. The 2020 elections and the environment in which ballots were cast was not simply a referendum on the Trump administration but also a stress test for American democracy, while a global pandemic stripped away any remaining pretences surrounding the American economy, healthcare system and rudimentary social state.

The series aimed to examine different facets of the elections: from the electoral and governing alliances between moderates and progressives required to win and then govern from 2021 to the question of how workers and union members would vote. It looked at the issues of race and politics in the American context and combating strategies of voter suppression endemic in the US political system. In considering the issue of climate change as part of a just transition, part of a vision of a Green New Deal, the series also addressed global issues—including the transatlantic relationship, the future of social democracy in the transatlantic space and a reinvigorated international order.

In the wake of the November polls, the series concluded with analysis of the prospects for a Biden presidency, the challenges of Democrats' weak performances at state level and the tumultuous events of January 6th 2021.

WHERE DID TRUMPISM COME FROM?

SHERI BERMAN

In November the United States will hold its most critical election in generations. The presidency of Donald Trump has revealed and intensified deep problems in American society and democracy. Should Trump and the Republican party emerge victorious, the damage done may well become irreparable.

Understanding how the richest and most powerful country on earth became associated with dysfunction and decline is a crucial task for anyone who cares about the US or the future of democracy. Generally, explanations fall into two camps.

The first is 'bottom-up' and focuses on structural economic trends. This approach emphasises how the rising inequality, declining mobility, increasing precarity and growing divergence between dynamic metropolitan and declining rural regions generated by capitalist development over the past decades has changed the preferences and priorities of citi-

zens, leading to dissatisfaction with democracy and support for right-wing populism.

Others in this camp stress socio-cultural developments. From this perspective, rising immigration, the mobilisation of minorities and women and dramatic shifts in attitudes have led many citizens—particularly if white, uneducated, religious and living inland—to feel ‘strangers in their own land’, resentful of ‘elites’ who purportedly disdain their values and traditions and of immigrants and minorities who supposedly take resources and opportunities from them, leading them to support populists who attack the *status quo*.

Another approach is however ‘top-down’—focusing on the choices and behaviour of powerful political actors. In the American context, this means emphasising how (actual) elites, and the wealthy in particular, have turned the Republican party into a vehicle dedicated to protecting their own interests, at the cost of deeply polarising society and undermining democracy.

‘Immense shift’

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson are among the most prominent proponents of this perspective. Their just-published book, *Let Them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality*, expands upon their previous work and that of other scholars and is probably the most damning version of the argument.

Hacker and Pierson stress the long backstory of right-wing populism in the US. An ‘immense shift’, as they put it, preceded the rise of Trump, who must be understood as ‘both a consequence and an enabler’ of his party’s steady march to the right. As with other scholars of American politics, Hacker and Pierson emphasise how much further the Republican party is to the right than its ‘sister’ parties in Europe—more like the French *Rassemblement national* than Britain’s Conservatives. (The Democrats, meanwhile, retain the profile of a fairly typical centre-left or even centrist party).

The economic preferences of the plutocrats driving this shift diverge greatly from those of most voters, even Republican voters: Hacker and Pierson stress, again as do other scholars, that a majority of Americans actually have centre-left economic dispositions. Nonetheless, over the past decades the Republican party has consistently pursued a right-wing, ‘plutocratic populist’ economic agenda. Reflecting this, two of the most *unpopular* Republican policies of recent years—the 2017 reform cutting tax to corporations and the persistent attempts to gut the Affordable Care Act or ‘Obamacare’—only received majority support from party donors with incomes in excess of \$250,000 per year.

How can the Republican party implement policies so clearly at ‘odds with the broader interests of American society’ without facing a backlash? More generally, how can the party reconcile its support of an economic system that generates great inequality with the need to gain votes from

those disadvantaged by it? Hacker and Pierson argue that this is simply the long-standing ‘conservative dilemma’—how can elite privileges be maintained once mass suffrage exists?

Distract attention

For them, the answer is clear: to gain the votes necessary to win elections, elites need to distract voters’ attention away from the negative consequences of the economic policies they favour to focus on social and cultural issues instead. ‘The Republicans,’ Hacker and Pierson argue, have ‘used white identity to defend wealth inequality. They undermined democracy to uphold plutocracy.’

This strategy involves fear-mongering about immigrants, fanning resentment against African-Americans and other ploys to make white, and particularly white working-class, voters feel as though their values, traditions and identities are threatened. As Hacker and Pierson put it, ‘This fateful turn toward tribalism, with its reliance on racial animus and continual ratcheting up of fear, greatly expanded the opportunities to serve the plutocrats. Republican voters would stick with their team, even when their team was handing tax dollars to the rich, cutting programs they supported, or failing to respond to obvious opportunities to make their lives better.’

Republican elites were aided in their ability to organise and mobilise angry white voters by ‘aggressive and narrow groups’ specialising in ‘outrage-stoking’ and the ‘politics of

resentment’, such as the National Rifle Association and the Christian right. They were also aided by the rapidly growing ‘outrage industry’ of right-wing media, which proved extremely effective at ‘escalating a sense of threat’. And if all this proved insufficient to garner a majority, Republicans resorted to dirty tricks, ‘from voter disenfranchisement to extreme partisan gerrymandering, to laws and practices opening the floodgates to big money’.

For Hacker and Pierson, in short, the best way to understand the deep problems facing American democracy is to focus on how Republican elites consciously ‘capitalized on pre-existing prejudices in pursuit of political gain’. In the absence of ‘elite manipulation and outrage-stoking’, they argue, American citizens might well have been ‘receptive to more moderate policy stances and strategies’.

European perspective

Let them Eat Tweets does an excellent job of helping us understand the American story. If, however, we take a European perspective, some *lacunae* appear.

Many of the factors stressed by Hacker and Pierson are absent or attenuated in western Europe, yet similar outcomes have occurred. There we have not seen the same exploding inequality, declining social mobility and so on caused by the plutocratic policies pursued by the Republican party, yet rising xenophobia, nativism, right-wing populism and democratic dissatisfaction have eventuated. Nor have west-European populists been able to rely on

gerrymandering, voter intimidation or the immense private sums available to their Republican counterparts to manipulate electoral outcomes, yet they have managed to gain support and even in some cases political power.

In addition, the absence of the left from this analysis occludes some crucial dynamics. Hacker and Pierson correctly argue that the success of the Republican party and right-wing populists more generally depends on shifting voters' attention away from economic to non-economic issues and from class to ethnic identities. But is it possible to understand how this has happened without focusing on parties of the left as well—and, in particular, on the watering down of their (left-wing) economic profile and the concomitant increasing attention paid by them to non-economic issues and non-class identities over past decades?

Moreover, while it is true that the right-wing *economic* policies pursued by the Republican party diverge from the centre-left economic preferences of a majority of voters, it is also true that a majority of US voters have preferences on social and cultural issues which diverge from those advocated by the Democratic party—as demonstrated by the same surveys on which Hacker and Pierson rely. This is also true for European voters, a majority of whom are to the right of social-democratic and other left parties on social and cultural issues.

Trump and the plutocratic populism he represents threaten to destroy American democracy. Yet if we want fully to understand the problems facing the US, as well as other

democratic countries, we need not only more excellent analyses of particular cases but also broader comparative work, which can help uncover the myriad factors behind and multiple paths to democratic dissatisfaction and populism across the world today.

This article is a joint publication by Social Europe and IPS-Journal.

Sheri Berman is a professor of political science at Barnard College and author of *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancien Régime to the Present Day* (Oxford University Press).

REVIVING TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AFTER TRUMP

MAX BERGMANN

A political cliché is rehearsed every four years in the United States: ‘This is the most important election of our lifetime.’ Yet it *is* hard to think of a more important election in US history—rarely, if ever, has the country faced two such sharply divergent paths.

All its deep-seated divisions have been exposed in 2020. Covid-19 has foregrounded the jaw-dropping inequality, the frailty of a for-profit healthcare system and the impact of a generation-long, conservative effort to weaken the functioning of government. When Americans needed the state, the state couldn’t cope.

Economically, Wall Street hasn’t missed a beat but queues for food banks grow and ‘for lease’ signs populate vacant shop fronts. Socially, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May and the subsequent protests—believed to be the largest in US history—brought into the mainstream a conversation on systemic racism and exposed the

abusive nature of law enforcement, militarised and immunised from public sensitivity after ‘9/11’.

Globally, as Covid-19 struck, the US withdrew from the world, failing to lead or even participate in a transnational response. Indeed, in the midst of a pandemic, the administration led by Donald Trump pulled out of the World Health Organization, its ineptness an international embarrassment.

Existential election

This does make the coming election existential. If Trump were to be re-elected president, all these trends would worsen—with dire implications for the transatlantic alliance. If not, it might be thought an incoming Democratic administration, facing such domestic turmoil, would relegate foreign policy to the second tier. But that wouldn’t be the case if Joe Biden were to prevail.

The crises of the last year have been humbling for the US and there is broad recognition that it will need allies and partners as never before. Biden would be a foreign-policy president. During the administration of Barack Obama he was a central and active foreign-policy player. His experience as chair of the prestigious Senate Foreign Relations Committee was, after all, a major factor in Obama selecting him as running mate. For the last two decades, Biden has been consumed with international relations and his inner circle of trusted advisers are experienced professionals.

A new administration would therefore hit the ground running. The question is: where would they run to?

In the first Obama term, Europe felt neglected. Obama was a ‘Pacific president’ and he pivoted to Asia. That wouldn’t be the case with Biden, who is transatlantic to his core. In January 2009, after Obama’s inauguration, it was Biden, as vice-president, who went to the annual Munich security conference. During the Democratic primary campaign, he emphasised reviving the transatlantic alliance. Yet there is a soft divide among US transatlantic experts over how to revive relations with Europe.

Restoring the *status quo*

One side would seek to restore relations to the *status quo* since the end of the cold war—to renew America’s vows with Europe and to operate much in the same way as before Trump. The US would treat the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the central forum for transatlantic relations, focus attention on strengthening bilateral ties with European capitals—in particular Berlin, Paris and London—and generally consider the European Union not as an adversary but with mild ambivalence.

In this view, the EU is about economics and trade and not central to larger strategic concerns. The focus would remain on ‘burden-sharing’, encouraging Europe to spend more on defence and do more to contribute to global stability, all the while building co-operative multilateral relations. The US would work with the EU to forge more economic

co-operation, perhaps seeking an agreement on trade to reduce tariffs further, but likely lowering the ambitions outlined in the failed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) treaty. In international-relations terms, this might be called a more ‘realist’ vision for US-European relations.

The first year of the administration would see a huge outpouring of attention from Washington to reconnect and restore relations. The US would rejoin the Paris climate accords, likely on day one of a Biden presidency. US commitment to article 5 of the NATO treaty, espousing collective defence, would be affirmed—again and again and again. And the administration would end the trade war with the EU immediately upon taking office. But once relations were restored, US attention would soon shift to China and Asia. And despite best efforts to reduce the focus on the middle east the administration’s veteran foreign-policy hands, steeped in the issues of the region, would inevitably find themselves sucked back in.

Over time, Washington would likely treat Europe as it has—not necessarily as Europe hopes it would be treated. The transatlantic alliance would be restored. But it would indeed be back to the post-1989 default—with Europe feeling neglected, chafing that it wasn’t being taken as seriously as it should, and yet with Washington left disappointed that Europe still wasn’t ‘stepping up’.

Transforming relations

On the other hand, there is an emerging perspective in Washington which would seek not just to restore relations with Europe but to transform them fundamentally. This approach takes inspiration not from America's post-cold-war focus on NATO but its emphasis after World War II on fostering European integration. Putting Europe at the centre of US engagement and seeking to build a strategic partnership with the EU is central to this outlook. It views NATO as foundational to the transatlantic alliance but believes the prioritisation of defence has overly militarised the relationship. Addressing issues such as climate, technology and digital regulation, energy, the pandemic, Russia, China and Iran would all require working closely with the EU.

Moreover, Brexit, the rise of right-wing populists and the divisive efforts of Russia and China have served as a wake-up call to the threats the EU faces. Washington would through this lens see strengthening the EU as geopolitically pivotal in its global competition with China. As the two largest markets, the US and the EU could make the world safe for democracy and strengthen economic ties with other democracies, reducing dependence on authoritarian regimes. Washington would also try to use its clout and influence within Europe to push for reform to strengthen Brussels.

This alternative perspective is however less developed and ingrained in Washington. It would have no champions

within the national-security bureaucracy and it would find plenty of naysayers, claiming such an approach was unrealistic. One could imagine early debates within the National Security Council where career foreign-service officers at the State Department would argue for a traditional approach and be sceptical of the EU, highlighting policies which have targeted US companies. The Pentagon, meanwhile, would be wary of the EU duplicating NATO.

Therefore, for Washington to push for a transformation of relations it would have to have buy-in and support from incoming senior appointees—many of whom might be focused on China and become quickly exasperated with Brussels' perplexing bureaucracy. Even if such an approach were to be adopted within the White House, its success would depend on the EU taking tangible early reciprocal steps. Presidential time is a valuable commodity and should the EU dither and fail to provide much in return, the attention of the oval office would quickly turn elsewhere.

Solidity reaffirmed

There might thus be an opportunity to transform relations after a Democratic victory but such an effort could fall short. Yet, even if that were so, the result will still be quite good—a solid and reaffirmed transatlantic relationship. The demand for action on domestic issues could also organically lead to a considerable deepening of co-operation.

For instance, on climate, illicit finance and financial regulation, Washington might adopt significant legislation. On digital and technology issues, a new administration would drop the traditional US opposition to regulations and might even seek to bolster regulation itself. This could see the US working more and more with Brussels—not due to any larger strategy but by default.

The major test for how a new administration would engage Europe would however ultimately be one for Europe itself. Should the EU make good on the current commission's aspiration that Europe become a 'geopolitical' player which stands up for its interests, Washington would take note and applaud.

Max Bergmann is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He served in the US State Department from 2011 to 2017.

ARE THERE ANY PERSUADABLE VOTERS LEFT IN THE US?

KAREN NUSSBAUM

‘Voters have made up their minds,’ reads one recent headline. ‘Blue collar men ... are the core of Trump’s base of support, and their enthusiasm has only deepened,’ the *Washington Post* asserts. Scenes of crowds of white supporters at Trump rallies are in every newspaper, punctuated with pictures of white men in military gear and automatic weapons at right-wing militia shows.

America’s political institutions are more divided than they have been since the civil war and basic democratic practices are threatened, including the peaceful transfer of power. But the American people are far less polarised than we may think. If we write off the ‘white working class’ as right-wing, we’ll lose the election and the very voters who are necessary to maintain democracy.

Working-class voters have legitimate grievances with the Democratic Party, which has aligned with corporate interests on neoliberal policies. Over time, there has been a

move to Republicans. And there was a substantial shift to Donald Trump among white working-class voters in 2016—largely as a way to lash out. But it was smaller than typically suggested, according to the Center for American Progress.

Research at Vanderbilt University shows that while 60 per cent of white working-class voters supported Trump in 2016, they accounted for only 30 per cent of his vote. Trump enjoyed broad support across the social range of Republican voters.

Other demographic factors

Class and education tell us less about who is an immutable Trump supporter than other demographic factors. ‘While there is an education gap in the United States, it is nothing compared to the gap along the lines of religious affiliation,’ says Michael Podhorzer, senior advisor to Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO trade union confederation.

And in the US that matters. According to Pew Research, in much of western Europe, only one in ten describe themselves as very religious, while in the US over half say religion is very important: ‘White evangelical Protestants, who constituted one out of every five voters, consistently have been among the strongest supporters of Republican candidates and supported Trump by a 77% to 16% margin.’

Ownership of a firearm is another important predictor of vote choice. In the US gun ownership is three times as great as in the most armed country in Europe (Montenegro). Nearly half of all civilian-held guns in the world belong to people in the US. Sixty-two per cent of gun-owners voted for Trump—10 percentage points more than voted for the then Republican candidate, John McCain, in the 2008 presidential election.

Religious affiliation and gun ownership are associated with strong values such as a belief in personal liberty and distrust of government. And, of course, the biggest supporters of Trump are ‘free-market’ Republicans.

Not fixed outlook

But many voters are not committed to a fixed outlook. ‘By some measures, around half of the population is either disengaged or has ideologically inconsistent views,’ write Nate Cohn and Sabrina Tavernese in the *New York Times*. ‘Together, 54 percent of Americans either hold a roughly equal mix of conservative and liberal positions or say they don’t follow the news most of the time.’

That’s what I found when I knocked on doors with Working America, a national community organisation affiliated with the AFL-CIO. We were in Columbus, Ohio, in the industrial midwest, a few months after the 2016 election. We were talking to people who had previously voted for Barack Obama but turned to Trump. We learnt that we shouldn’t

tell people they're wrong—that Trump is bad or they're racist—but tell them something they don't know.

Gertrude, a retiree, is a good example. She was a strong Trump supporter and didn't want to hear anything bad about him. But when we told her that one of Trump's policies included eliminating public assistance to pay for home heating, something she depended on, she fell back in her chair. 'That's not what he promised,' she said.

Gertrude is one of 3.5 million Working America members, working people who aren't union members. Most—75 per cent—are white working-class and 25 per cent are people of colour. Nine out of ten are not involved with any other progressive organisation.

Battleground-state voters

Working America has combined its knowledge of its members gleaned over the last 17 years with clinical research and finds that 20 million voters in battleground states can be persuaded to be new voters for Joe Biden and down-ticket Democrats standing for Congress. Most likely to be persuaded are those without a college degree who don't watch cable TV—the low-information voters identified by the *New York Times* as those who aren't polarised. One in five will be people of colour.

Convincing these voters, regardless of race, depends on using the same approaches that broke through to Gertrude: talking about their concerns—not politics and politicians—

and finding common ground on economic issues such as healthcare. With careful identification of those voters who are most responsive and avoiding divisive content, we shall include about 5 million gun-owners among those we contact.

Just as Working America's working-class base has to be understood in a nuanced way, so do union members. There is an image of union members moving from Obama to Trump in 2016, especially among men in the building trades. But that may be changing. 'It's going to be close among my members between Biden and President Trump,' Sean McGarvey, president of North America's Building Trades Unions told *Politico*. But, especially because of Trump's response to the coronavirus, there had been 'dramatic change in the last six months', he said.

People of colour

Many of the biggest unions include people of colour as a significant part or majority of their members. The president of the Service Employees International Union, Mary Kay Henry, predicts that 80 to 90 per cent of her members will vote for Biden.

UNITE HERE is the national union representing hospitality workers, including in all the casinos in Las Vegas—they have come from 40 countries and speak 148 languages. The union is credited with turning the state of Nevada Democratic. Despite the vast majority of the union's

members losing their jobs because of the pandemic, UNITE HERE is running an aggressive election campaign.

The decline of union membership over the last 50 years has hollowed out the middle class and resulted in the loss of the ‘small-d’ democratic institutions which anchor civil society. ‘We need more organisations where people take minutes!’ a local labour leader in Minnesota insisted to me. ‘There’s a lack of opportunity for people to experience democracy—debate issues, argue about how to spend dues money, vote, take minutes—the tools of transparency and accountability. People need to experience power on issues. They need structures and systems. Unions are a place where people can get that, and can change their minds.’ This vacuum has been a breeding ground for the right wing.

Volatile voters

Reaching conflicted or discouraged voters is key to winning this election. But these volatile voters in the middle are also central to whether there will be a peaceful transfer of power. If right-wing militias take to the streets and Republicans go to the courts to contest a win by Biden, it will be the attitudes and actions of millions of non-ideological working people that will determine the outcome.

After that comes the much bigger task of rebuilding the voice of working people in a responsive democracy and economy.

Karen Nussbaum is the founding director of Working America, community affiliate of the AFL-CIO union confederation, and is on its board. She co-founded and led 9to5, the National Association of Working Women, and District 925 of the Service Employees International Union.

FREEDOM IS WHY BLACK LIVES MATTER

COREY WIGGINS

In a speech in 1964, the civil-rights activist Ella Baker declared: ‘Until the killing of black men, black mothers’ sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother’s son—we who believe in freedom cannot rest until this happens.’ The broadening conversation on race in today’s socio-political environment is deeply rooted in the history of devaluation of African Americans’ lives and experiences.

That history of degrading African-American dignity can be traced to the country’s early beginnings, when slave traders forcibly brought enslaved Africans to the country as free labour. A labour that remains without reparation.

The systemic exploitation of African America is predicated on the immoral view that African Americans’ lives can be discarded. How can a country balance the scales of justice, while it continues to devalue black lives through public poli-

cies which have adverse impacts on families, communities and the country at large?

Socio-political imbalance

Consider the emotional impetus of love. Love is an emotion capable of evoking emphatic joy and soul-shattering pain. Its ambivalence aptly describes the unpredictable socio-political imbalance African Americans experience. We love a country that does not always love us back—in painful pursuit of the unconditional love full access to justice would engender.

The issues range from the smallest racially motivated micro-aggressions to systematic challenges—such as mass incarceration—that limit the justice which should flow equally to all. Communities across the US have grown tired of the institutions and practices which—and people who—subscribe to this limiting of justice and liberty. The resulting unrest across rural and urban communities is no novelty in the historic and continued struggle for civil rights.

Only 65 years ago, two white men, full of racial hatred, brutally murdered a 14-year-old African-American boy for allegedly flirting with a white woman. Days after Emmett Till's murder, his mother could only identify his remains because of a personalised ring found on his body. His murderers, the white woman's husband and her brother, beat him, gouged his eye out, shot him in the head and threw his body in a river, tied to a cotton gin with barbed wire.

At Emmett's funeral, his mother insisted upon an open casket so the world could see what the men had done to her black son. In so doing, Mamie Till helped spark a new era in the movement for black lives. The promise of justice and liberty was not however yet available for African Americans, despite the evil darkness from whence it came.

Inflection point

America finds itself once again at such an inflection point. Though we have come far, in 2020 we still find ourselves struggling to fulfil the promise of justice and liberty for all. Much like the senseless and violent murder of Emmitt Till, the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at the hands of police only provide more evidence that the struggle to value all America's citizens is unfinished.

Even during this presidential election, the country's moral disease of devaluing black lives has been fully displayed. Articulated grievances—ranging over the response to the coronavirus, the growing racial wealth divide, the pay gap between black women and white men, disparities in access to healthcare and healthcare outcomes—have been received with empty words and few pledges.

How do African Americans engage with a system where freedom and justice are promised but remain as locked behind a door? Some will argue that structural, systemic racism does not exist and will point to individual examples of African-Americans who have succeeded. They will claim

that we live in a post-racial society which, after all, elected its first African-American president.

One cannot however judge this country's practical and moral application of equity on singular achievements. There is little to celebrate when only a select few have been granted access to the keys to liberty and justice. Especially so when many remain outside, victim to the cold and callous winds of high unemployment, inadequate housing, low wages and unaffordable healthcare.

Right and wrong

We cannot evaluate the struggle for civil rights and freedom on the outcome of elections alone. Elections serve as a reminder of what is wrong in our country, as well as what is right.

We continue to debate policy issues, such as reforming the criminal-justice system. We continue to struggle to find solutions to ensure that children in high-poverty communities have access to quality education. We continue to fight to make healthcare a right rather than a privilege. We continuously search for resources to spur inclusive economic development in communities that need it most.

We denounce language from the highest levels of government that embraces and fans the flames of white supremacy. In America's south, we are still working steadfastly to remove the Confederate symbols and monuments of our past, products of a history founded on racial hatred.

Nothing about America's struggle towards justice has been easy or free. The protests, the marches and demonstrations occurring across the country this year are part of that pursuit of unconditional love through which black America demands to be fully visible and valued. It is through these demands we continue the historic struggle for civil rights.

We will fight for freedom until Black Lives Matter.

Dr Corey Wiggins is executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Mississippi.

AN ECONOMIC RECOVERY THAT PUTS WORKERS AND THE CLIMATE FIRST

JESSICA ECKDISH

We entered this pandemic amid three interconnected crises: economic inequality, racial inequality and climate change. Covid-19 has cast a harsh spotlight on the severity and disproportionate nature of their impacts.

The pandemic has devastated the economy and workers, and the damage is not close to done. America has surpassed 8 million cases of Covid-19 and is nearing 220,000 deaths due to the virus. Millions of people have lost jobs and remain unemployed—even if we start to recover, the unemployment rate could still be around 9.3 per cent by the end of the year. Workers continue to struggle to stay safe and healthy on the job, individual states see uncontrolled surges as parts of the economy reopen without serious public-health guidance, and state and local-government budgets are being ravaged, putting the financial health of those administrations in danger.

Decreased power

According to the Economic Policy Institute, ‘the bottom 90 per cent of the American workforce has seen their pay shrink radically as a share of total income’, from 58 per cent in 1979 to 47 per cent in 2015. That is equivalent to a loss of almost \$11,000 per household, or \$1.35 trillion in all, in labour income. There is a direct correlation with the decrease of worker power over this time, as the share of workers in a union fell from 24 per cent in 1979 to under 11 per cent now.

The deck has been stacked even further against people of colour. Regardless of education level, black workers are far more likely to be unemployed than white workers, with unemployment rates historically twice as high. That disparity carries into the workplace as well, with black workers paid on average 73 cents for every dollar earned by white workers. Even with advanced degrees, black workers make far less than white workers at the same level. So while the poverty rate for white Americans sits at about 8.1 per cent, for black households it’s 20.7 per cent.

The pandemic puts an even sharper focus on the harmful impacts of this inequality. The systemic racism inherent in our society has proved deadly for black Americans: making up just 12.5 per cent of the US population, they account for 18.7 per cent of Covid-19 deaths. Among those aged 45-54, black and hispanic/latino death rates are at least six times as high as for whites.

Simultaneous solutions

We need to move urgently towards economic recovery. Yet returning to ‘normal’ is not good enough—we have to do better.

Last summer, the BlueGreen Alliance, a partnership of the some of the largest and most influential US labour unions and environmental groups, released a first-of-its-kind platform, ‘Solidarity for climate action’, recognising that the solutions to economic inequality, racial injustice and climate change have to be addressed simultaneously. We have to fight climate change, reduce pollution and create and maintain good-paying, union jobs across the nation all at the same time. With Covid-19 worsening these crises, the vision of ‘Solidarity for climate action’ is more important than ever.

We can however tackle climate change in a way that achieves multiple goals at the same time. A strong economic-recovery package can avoid its worst impacts, deliver public-health and environmental benefits to communities, create and maintain good union jobs, address economic and racial injustice head-on, and create a cleaner, stronger and more equitable economy for all. Correcting these many systemic injustices means making significant changes to all parts of our society.

Reaching the other side of the pandemic is going to take time, and we must work to come out of it with a fairer, more sustainable and more just economy than at its onset.

Covid-19 recovery efforts must take every step to protect the health and safety of frontline workers and vulnerable communities. Recovery policies must also address income inequality and climate change and have racial justice baked into their core.

Crumbling infrastructure

We must invest at scale in our crumbling infrastructure, which is in a dangerous state of disrepair. From failing roads and bridges and water systems, to buildings, the electricity grid and transport, infrastructure investments will boost our economy and create millions of jobs, while also reducing pollution and combating climate change—paving the way to a strong and equitable recovery.

We also need to support and retool America's manufacturing sector, which has taken a big hit during the pandemic. Major reinvestments in transforming heavy industry to build more of the clean products, materials and technologies of the future can provide pathways to good jobs and strong domestic supply-chains, while reducing the growing climate emissions from this sector. This must secure the manufacture and distribution of personal protective equipment and other key elements of the healthcare supply-chain.

All public investments must be tied to high labour standards, including prevailing wage requirements. We can also utilise 'buy clean' and other procurement standards that require the federal government to consider the carbon foot-

print of goods to be purchased. By enforcing strong labour, procurement, local hire and community-benefit requirements, we can grow well-paying jobs across the nation.

Hardest hit

We must prioritise equitable rebuilding and investments in those workers and communities that need it most, especially low-income communities, communities of colour and those which have experienced deindustrialisation. Generations of economic and racial inequality have disproportionately exposed low-income workers, communities of colour and others to low wages, toxic pollution and climate threats. Additionally, parts of our country went into this pandemic already economically distressed, including communities hit by the decline of the coal industry.

We must also rebuild the capacity of our public sector and services and provide critical, long-term support and protections for workers. The pandemic exposed the inadequacy of investment in our public sector. We need to rebuild and invest in our healthcare systems, public-health agencies, education and community-based services, to make us better prepared for disasters such as Covid-19 or natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. We also must rebuild and expand the social safety-net—including pensions, health-care and retirement security—and enforce health and safety at work and in the community.

By making smart investments where they are most needed, ensuring that economic and racial justice are core principles

and rebuilding with the reality of climate change to the fore, we can create a more sustainable and more just future for America.

Jessica Eckdish is legislative director of the BlueGreen Alliance.

A NEW START FOR TRANSATLANTIC SOCIAL DEMOCRACY?

KNUT DETHLEFSEN

For nearly four years, the world has witnessed the surreal dysfunction of the Trump presidency—as injured parties of its international relations and as observers of a polarising turn in American domestic politics. This year especially, as the government has failed to manage the pandemic and its attendant crises, the breakdown in the United States’ relationships with, and standing in, the world has also come home to the American people.

The coronavirus has laid bare the shortcomings of the paltry US social-security and healthcare systems, nearly a quarter of a million Americans have died from it, record unemployment and uncountable business failures have consumed working- and middle-class Americans—and all the while the stock market has carried on in relative health.

Growing inequality has effectively resulted in two United States of Americas and the political damage facing American democracy has led some experts and commentators

to speculate about a second civil war. The situation is indeed dire but such suggestions are neither realistic nor constructive in an admittedly terrible predicament. The focus should rather be on the inability of right-wing populism—especially of the kind espoused by Donald Trump—to ensure good governance or address the practical needs of citizens in times of crisis, able only as it is to inflame the emotional grievances which divide the country.

Promising restart

Tomorrow the choice facing Americans—to re-elect Trump or elect his Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, as well as filling seats in Congress—may not be inspiring but it is promising. Biden has the most progressive policy platform in electable contention in living American political memory and he proposes not the deepening of wounds but serious leadership through tangible policy. In the transatlantic context he would provide a propitious restart for social democracy.

While some progressives are disappointed that Biden won the nomination, he nevertheless has made earnest efforts to unite the progressive and centrist wings of the Democratic party, acknowledging that support and input from both sides of its big tent would be necessary to win the presidency, as well as to govern well and effectively. Policy-area ‘unity task forces’ actively integrated the suggestions and perspectives of supporters of Bernie Sanders’ campaign for the nomination, delivering a more progressive agenda than

might have been developed without the need to unify the party.

In addition, Biden is attempting to unify the country with the prospect of good governance and practical policy solutions which, as the campaign argues, would ‘build back better’. A Biden administration cannot be a restoration of the *status quo ante*: events have moved politics beyond that horizon. Proposals for expanding healthcare, strengthening labour and environmental protection and addressing falling education achievement all figure in Biden’s policy platform.

It might not be the most revolutionary platform but neither is it merely incremental. It is potentially realisable—especially if Democrats can keep the House of Representatives and take majority control of the Senate—and it would make a positive impact on those working- and middle-class Americans and residents who need more support than the current administration has been willing or able to offer. Biden has had a long career in Washington, so he also brings an experienced hand to the Resolute Desk in the event of his election.

Challenges are not lacking: the civil service has suffered under Trump’s chaotic administration and Biden will need Democratic majorities in Congress to legislate without serious impediment from the Republican party. And Trump and his campaign are keen to vilify Biden as senile and unfit for office. Yet he has demonstrated not only a compassionate intelligence but a willingness to listen and learn—to acknowledge that conventional wisdom may no longer hold

and that the present moment demands creative rethinking of solutions to America's problems.

US foreign policy

For international observers, or those who focus on America's engagement with the world, nowhere is this creative thinking more urgently needed than in US foreign policy. This has been disastrous under Trump but it remains generally defined in relationship to something which ceased to exist 30 years ago.

The details of a prospective Biden foreign policy and team are hotly speculated and debated. But while the only people who know for certain what firm and immediate goals the prospective president might have aren't currently confiding in diplomatic circles, there are clues as to the direction a Biden administration's foreign policy could take.

Keys to addressing many global problems must first be found at home—this is true for the US, as Biden has acknowledged, but it could also be said of the European Union. The EU needs to be more forceful in combating right-wing populism and extremism in Europe, calling out governments, politicians and policies that limit the rights of large swaths of the population—current protests by women in Poland come to mind as the Polish government attempts to ban abortion completely. The EU's foreign-policy aspirations are undermined by its ability to act—look at the response to the protests after the election in Belarus. In both Europe and the US, combating the effects of kleptocra-

cy on democracy would be a component of domestic policy almost hawkish in its international implications.

This could be an excellent area for European-American cooperation—creating a re-enlivened transatlantic and international regime for democracy embedded in a rules-based order. It would be an effort to reinvigorate democracy after years of struggle in the face of right-wing populism, rather than a return to democratic expansion in the mould of 1990s foreign policy after the fall of the Berlin wall.

Pivot to Europe

Following the ‘pivot to Asia’ under Barack Obama—when Biden was his vice-president—Biden’s foreign policy implies a pivot to Europe. This would not only restore friends and allies who felt alienated and begin to address the damage done under the Trump administration. The transatlantic relationship is essential to the defence of a democratic, pluralist international order and security.

There is an understanding that the American relationship to Europe is not only about military relations or economic interests but should also be key to addressing so-called ‘soft’ issues which are clearly existential: the climate crisis, this pandemic (and those to come) and standards for labour and social welfare. A new transatlantic trade agreement could not only set trade standards but social and consumer standards too. Overhauling dysfunctional multilateral institutions—the World Health Organization or the World Trade

Organization come to mind—would be another potential area for co-operation. Just imagine what could have happened in January 2020 if the US, the EU and China had been honest with each other about the novel coronavirus.

There is only so much a Biden administration alone can do to bring social-democratic policies home to America—and even less that Europe can effect directly in American politics. But Europe has its own social-democratic policy areas which demand attention. The past four years have been a disastrous flirtation with right-wing populism and extremism, in the US and in Europe. This is an opportunity to reimagine the transatlantic partnership beyond militarism and economics and to reject these siren voices on both sides of the Atlantic.

The question remains who Biden's progressive European interlocutors will be and how well they can work with—hopefully—the next American president.

Knut Dethlefsen serves as the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* representative to the US and Canada. Previously, he led FES offices in Warsaw, Jerusalem and Shanghai and was head of its Asia and Pacific Department in Berlin.

THE BIDEN VICTORY AND THE FUTURE
OF THE CENTRE-LEFT

EJ DIONNE JR

Joe Biden's defeat of Donald Trump in the presidential election has brought relief and a measure of hope to progressives across the globe. The celebration was especially enthusiastic in Europe, where the rise of right-wing nationalism was abetted by Trump's presidency. If Biden could stem the tide, others had reason to believe they might join him.

Unsurprisingly, some centre-left leaders were quick to draw lessons from Biden's triumph that best suited their domestic political needs—none more so than British Labour's Keir Starmer, who has rather quickly made his party competitive again after a disastrous defeat in 2019. He saw in the incoming president an ally for the sermon he has been preaching. The election, Starmer wrote, 'had stark lessons for those of us who want to see progressive values triumph over the forces of division and despair'.

The Democrats’ ‘path to victory’, he said, ‘was paved by a broad coalition, including many states and communities that four years ago turned away from them’. For Starmer, Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania looked a great deal like Redcar, Stoke-on-Trent, Don Valley and the other Labour bastions that had fallen to the Tories.

‘To win back the trust of voters takes time,’ Starmer argued. ‘It takes political leaders who listen, learn and renew. Biden spoke to the soul of the nation, with a focus on who people are and what they value: family, community and security.’

It was as if Biden had closely studied the thoughtful 2018 book by the Starmer adviser Claire Ainsley, *The New Working Class*. And, as it happened, Ainsley’s key themes—family, fairness, hard work and, especially, decency—were highlights of many of Biden’s speeches and his advertising.

Germany’s finance minister, Olaf Scholz, the SPD’s chancellor candidate in next autumn’s federal elections, not only congratulated Biden for opening the way to ‘a new and exciting chapter in transatlantic relations’ but went out of his way to urge Trump to drop his challenges. ‘If there are elections,’ Scholz said, ‘you have to accept them.’ For him, the ability of a candidate from his progressive party’s moderate wing to consolidate support from its left was a heartening sign for 2021.

And Portugal’s Socialist prime minister, António Costa, looked forward to a Biden administration that might foster co-operation on ‘climate change, defence of democracy

and international security'. Costa, who has successfully managed a coalition of his own centre-left with the left, may have lessons for Biden, who needs to satisfy both the centre and the left in the very big tent that is the Democratic Party.

Coalition-building opportunities

Biden's victory has made the world safer for democracy and democratic values. It suggests there is nothing inexorable about the rise of the far right and points to coalition-building opportunities for supporters of progressive policies, on climate, equal rights and the economy.

As with the victory of the New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, and her Labour Party a few weeks before Americans voted, it also points to the thirst of electorates for basic competence in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. A new popular appreciation for the rigours of governing is good news for all democratic parties confronting divisive forces that thrive on cultural division, symbolic politics and demagogic efforts to marginalise ethnic, racial or religious minorities.

But Biden's win also points to continuing problems for the centre-left. While his margin was decisive (four percentage points and over 6 million popular votes), Trump's ability to turn out 10 million more voters than he did in 2016 points to the enduring appeal of his polarising themes to a large share of the electorate and his success in casting himself and the Republicans as more competent economic

managers. This despite Trump's glaring failures in managing the pandemic and the economic history since the Bill Clinton presidency, showing the Democrats' superior record on jobs and growth.

Moreover, Biden on the whole proved more successful in converting voters in the suburban middle class than in the Democrats' former working-class bastions. He did chip away at the Trump vote in the old industrial areas. But his relative strength in the suburbs points to a challenge confronting almost all social-democratic parties: they are increasingly dependent on the university-trained middle class, as their industrial working-class base declines and shows a propensity to turn to the right for protection against the gales of globalisation.

These challenges help explain why Biden's victory did not translate into gains for the Democrats in the House of Representatives and the Senate—which will, in turn, make his governing task more difficult.

Familiar programmes

Nonetheless, the Biden opportunity should not be undervalued. His campaign managed to assemble a programme which satisfied the left and centre of his party. It included efforts to broaden the US welfare state with programmes familiar to Europeans, for universal health coverage and access to childcare.

Biden's answers to the climate crisis emphasised not just a move away from fossil fuels but also large investments in the job-creating possibilities of cleaner energy. And, in keeping with Ainsley's insights into the new, *non*-industrial working class, he laid heavy stress on the need to improve wages in the 'care-giving' sector and expand employment opportunities for the marginalised there.

A politician long comfortable in the moderate camp of progressive politics, Biden also signalled that he was not proposing a simple return to the 'third way' politics of the era of Clinton and Britain's Tony Blair—or even to the relatively middle-of-the road politics of Barack Obama.

Biden did not assail the third way (and he openly and appreciatively embraced the man who made him vice-president). But he offered a decided difference in emphasis. He pointed to his long record of support for the union movement and pledged to expand the bargaining power of workers. He criticised Trump's approach to protectionism but did not offer a full-on endorsement of free trade, promising instead a return of supply chains to the US and a 'buy America' programme to revive manufacturing.

Without a strong hand in Congress, it's hard to see how Biden can enact his entire programme. Still, it's easy to see aspects of the Biden approach translating to social-democratic parties trying to navigate between a total repudiation of the third way and an acceptance of its constraints, and between the elements of an increasingly catch-all

constituency that includes middle-class and working-class voters.

Biden's success in simultaneously mobilising black voters and the young, while maintaining sufficient support from older white voters, also bears close study from parties that need to perform similar balancing acts. And the central role of women in the Democratic voter base could point to the future for many other centre-left parties.

Socialist label

For many in Europe who still embrace democratic socialism, there may be reason for scepticism that US politics has much to teach outside its borders. After all, allegations that Democrats represented dangerous forms of 'socialism' were central to the Republican campaign all the way down the ballot. They were deployed with considerable effect against Democratic candidates in moderate states and districts.

It's no accident that these attacks have escalated at the very moment when the socialist label is embraced more widely in the US than at any time since before the first world war. Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have made the case for their brand of democratic socialism by pointing to the success of socialist and social-democratic policies in Scandinavia and elsewhere in western Europe.

Their arguments have a particular draw among younger Americans, who lived through a genuine crisis of capitalism

after the 2008 crash and are far less influenced than the older generation by cold-war memories of the Soviet Union. But Republicans have sought to tie Sanders and particularly Ocasio-Cortez to today's authoritarian versions of 'socialism'—in Cuba, Venezuela and elsewhere. This had some impact in moving Latino voters in Florida towards the Republicans and was blamed by some moderate House Democrats for their party's losses in more conservative districts.

Yet, paradoxically, these polemics only underscore how closely the situations of America's Democrats and the broad European left parallel one another. The same debates, over the third way, neoliberalism, trade policy and regulation, which split the moderate left and the left in Europe—the SPD versus *Die Linke* in Germany, the Social Democrats versus the Left Party in Sweden—define lines of division within the Democratic Party, which ranges across the entire spectrum from the centre leftwards. Here, history has much to teach.

Obvious differences

It's easy to make two, opposite, mistakes in comparing the Democratic Party and Europe's social democrats—to overstate their similarities and to understate them.

The differences are obvious enough, related to history and the structure of American political competition. The Democratic Party was formed long before there was a socialist or social-democratic movement. While the histo-

rian Sean Wilentz has underscored the importance of pre-socialist working-class movements in Jacksonian Democracy in the 1830s, before and after the civil war the Democrats were in many ways a conservative party, particularly in the south where they were allied with slavery and white supremacy.

The shift to the economic left began with William Jennings Bryan's populist campaign of 1896, continued with Woodrow Wilson's progressivism—although deeply compromised by his racism—and culminated in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Roosevelt, as the historian Richard Hofstadter famously noted, gave a 'social democratic tinge' to American politics, and FDR drew into the Democratic Party many one-time socialists, particularly in the trade union movement that he helped empower. But the Democrats, despite what conservative businesspeople often thought, always remained a reformist capitalist party.

Moreover, the structure of the US system—a powerful presidency elected separately from Congress, a two-party rather than multi-party system, a winner-take-all rather than proportional approach to elections and a Senate that over-represents thinly-populated rural areas—created strong incentives for catch-all parties and often compromised the ability of progressive presidents to enact their full programmes. Both Clinton and Obama were moderate politicians but they had little chance of enacting the more adventurous parts of their respective agendas, since they spent six of their eight years in office with one or both houses of Congress under Republican control.

Two-way traffic

Yet none of these differences should distract from a deeper history: US progressives and their counterparts in Europe—including socialists, social democrats, labour parties and the ‘New’ Liberals of Edwardian Britain—have been engaged in a two-way traffic of ideas for more than 150 years. The story of this give-and-take has been well told by the historians James Kloppenberg and Daniel T Rogers, in *Uncertain Victory* and *Atlantic Crossings* respectively.

Since the New Deal, the Democrats have broadly represented the centre-left of American opinion and often exercised enormous influence over social-democratic parties in Europe. Roosevelt was the great hope for Europe’s democratic left, as democratic socialists and social democrats found themselves crushed by Nazism and fascism. After World War II and especially after the rise of ‘revisionism’ in the 1950s, the distinctions between the Democrats’ aspirations and those of social democrats diminished further.

‘From a party of the working class the Social Democratic Party has become a party of the people,’ Germany’s SPD declared in its 1959 Godesberg programme. ‘It is determined to put the forces unleashed by the industrial revolution and the advance of technology in all spheres of life to the service of freedom and justice for all.’ Almost every American Democrat would be comfortable with such words.

The British Labour Party took a similar turn. ‘Collectivism, private ownership or a mixed economy were all consistent with widely varying degrees not only of equality, but also of freedom, democracy, exploitation, class feeling, elitism, industrial democracy, planning and economic growth,’ wrote Anthony Crosland, the giant of British revisionist thinking. ‘It was therefore possible to achieve the goal of greater equality and other desirable ends within the framework of the mixed economy ...’

Welfare state

It’s true, of course, that the welfare state advanced further in Europe than in the US—in Sweden in the 1930s and elsewhere postwar. The continuing fight for universal health insurance in the US is a marker of these different trajectories.

The welfare state’s victories were achievements not only of social democrats but also of Christian democrats, often influenced by Catholic social thought, and moderate conservatives such as Britain’s Harold Macmillan. While Dwight D Eisenhower could be viewed in the tradition of Macmillan and Konrad Adenauer, his moderate ‘modern Republicanism’ never fully took hold and the Republican Party took a sharp turn rightward after Eisenhower left office.

The relative strength of unions in Europe also explains the limits to US economic egalitarianism—enduring racism and white supremacist politics playing a central role too. As

Ira Katznelson has shown, the role of conservative southern segregationists in the Democratic Party limited the sweep of what Roosevelt and his successors could accomplish. The turn of the Democrats under John F Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson towards racial equality in the 1960s reorganised American politics and made the Democrats, over time, a more consistently progressive force.

Since the 1960s, the centre-lefts of Europe and the US have often moved in tandem. Kennedy's 1960 campaign, focused on modernity, energy and youthfulness, influenced the successful electoral strategies of Harold Wilson in Britain and Willy Brandt in then West Germany.

The third-way turn of Clinton, Blair, Germany's Gerhard Schröder and Wim Kok in the Netherlands was a genuinely transnational project and influenced parties of the centre-left elsewhere. The backlash on the left against approaches seen as too accommodating to global capitalism has been equally transnational.

So has the rebellion against austerity policies pursued, particularly by centre-right governments in Europe, after the 2008 crash. It is one of the broadly positive developments associated with the Covid-19 crisis that even conservative parties abandoned austerity in favour of massive economic intervention, which helped prevent a far worse pandemic downturn.

Reform and renewal

But where do we go from here? The Biden presidency, which is often described as restorationist in its objectives, could also be transformational if it uses the return to democratic norms as a starting point for a new era of reform and renewal, internationally as well as domestically.

In defeating Trump, he struck a blow against the rise of authoritarian populism—or ‘pluto-populism’, the apt phrase introduced by the *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf to describe the core of Trump’s approach of ‘campaigning on cultural issues while legislating for the upper 1 per cent’. The coalition Biden built modelled what the centre-left could accomplish elsewhere—even as its limits also define the work Biden and like-minded politicians need to undertake.

As we’ve seen, the challenge to parties of the centre-left within its old working-class constituencies remains. And cultural divides aggravated by economic disparities—between big, more prosperous, metropolitan areas and the small-city/town and rural areas—remain a challenge to Biden’s party and social-democratic movements elsewhere.

Biden’s embrace of democratic internationalism may be his most important immediate contribution. It matters that the US has a president who understands the importance of alliances with democratic nations, views strongmen abroad with suspicion rather than envy and sees foreign policy as more than disjointed transactions.

The European Union moved quickly to seize this opening, circulating a plan describing a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to revitalise the transatlantic partnership and seek agreement between the US and Europe, on climate, digital regulation and a shared approach to the ‘strategic challenge’ posed by China.

Biden won in part by seeking to move past the old debates about the third way and neoliberalism. He ran the most pro-union campaign of any Democrat since Truman, stressing the importance of workers’ rights and higher wages. His case was that their interest and the larger cause of American ‘greatness’ were best served through alliances, partnerships and ‘a foreign policy for the middle class’.

It’s important that this prove to be more than campaign rhetoric. Trumpian nationalism and its counterparts abroad gained traction because traditional foreign-policy elites (and, in the case of Europe, long-time supporters of the EU project) were seen as out of touch with the economically left-out in regions that were being defined as increasingly peripheral. A democratic internationalism which speaks to the discontent in such communities is the only kind of internationalism that can survive.

Biden’s national-security adviser, Jake Sullivan, was also a leading architect of his domestic policies during the campaign and paid particular attention to ‘the geography of opportunity so that all regions experience a middle class revival’. Sullivan’s influence means that the economic and the diplomatic—the cause of democracy and the impera-

tive of social reform—will not be locked into separate spheres.

Empathy and decency

To be hopeful about what Biden might achieve does not require being unrealistic about the challenges he confronts. Trump's refusal to acknowledge the outcome of a free and fair election is symptomatic of a larger disruption in American politics. A Republican Party that was ferociously oppositional to Obama, even in the face of potential economic catastrophe in 2009, shows no signs of being any more cooperative, despite Biden's efforts at outreach.

But it is not naïve to imagine that Biden's largest effect, on the world at large and on his own nation, may be his simple call for a revival of empathy and decency. This would entail a new engagement with the American tradition that struggled to overcome the burdens and oppressions of racism, celebrated the role of immigrants and refugees in our history and emphasised, as Obama always did, the call in the nation's constitution for a 'more perfect Union.' The phrase elevates a project which always assumed more work needed to be done.

Without ever calling himself a socialist or a social democrat, Biden at his best may thus find himself operating in the tradition of one of the leading US democratic-socialist thinkers, who defined himself as living on 'the left wing of the possible'. The late Michael Harrington saw the democratic left as most effective when it followed the path of

‘visionary gradualism’. The world could use a spell of realism married to aspiration and hope.

EJ Dionne Jr is a professor at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a columnist for the *Washington Post* and a visiting professor at Harvard University. His most recent book is *Code Red: How Progressives and Moderates Can Unite to Save Our Country* (St Martin's Press, 2020).

JOE BIDEN'S MISSING COAT-TAILS

MATT MAWHINNEY

International observers of the American presidential election who turned to the pundits in the first days after November 3rd could be forgiven for feeling that the commentators had been speaking about 2016 or that Joe Biden had in fact lost the presidential race. At best—even after his projected victory was announced four days later—the celebrations were muted on the Democratic side.

That is because, despite record voter turnout and his gaining more votes than any candidate in history, Biden carried no coat-tails: the states he won didn't see the same success for Democrats in down-ballot legislative races. This year's predicted 'bloodbath' for Republicans failed to materialise.

The outcomes in the state races in particular will have long-term consequences for key policy areas—including but not limited to reproductive freedom, gun control and imple-

mentation of minimum-wage laws—as well as for the Democrats' electoral prospects.

It's still early in the post-election analysis. But already some factors in the Democrats' underwhelming down-ballot performance, relative to pre-election polls, have emerged: enthusiasm and knowledge gaps affecting down-ballot candidates, structural and investment advantages for Republicans in down-ballot races, changes in Democratic voter mobilisation tactics in response to Covid-19 and the move to vote-by-mail and incorrect polls due to the increasing difficulty of polling supporters of Donald Trump and Republicans.

'Rolling off'

Generally speaking, by the time election day in the US arrives, presidential candidates have near universal name recognition from those who plan to vote. Whether or not voters are enthusiastic about those candidates, or have knowledge and enthusiasm about down-ballot candidates, is however another matter. If voters vote for their presidential candidate of choice, but don't vote for a down-ballot candidate because they don't know anything about them or aren't enthusiastic about them, we describe this as 'rolling off'.

An excellent analysis by the Sister District Project mapped out how in three key states (Pennsylvania, Florida and Texas), ballot roll-off was significantly higher than

expected. This was particularly costly in places like Florida, where in some instances races were decided by as few as 34 votes. In North Carolina and Michigan, two other hotly-contested states, ballot roll-off actually increased compared with 2016.

Republicans control 30 state legislatures, the main law-making bodies in most states. This party dominance of so many state legislatures has remained static for the first time in decades. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, ‘On average, 12 chambers change party in each general election cycle. [In 2020] the parties came to a draw.’

Legislative agenda-setting

This is bad news for progressive policy-making as well as Democrats’ electoral viability in states controlled by Republicans. With control of state legislative chambers, a party can wield outsized power for very little cost and have a disproportionate impact—not just in the state but in national agenda-setting.

Since the 1960s, nearly every major domestic political fight or crisis in the United States was initiated at state level. Encroachment on reproductive rights, financial deregulation, loosening restrictions on firearms and roll-backs of environmental protections have all tended to start in statehouses and work their way to the federal level.

The impact of state legislative control has been vastly exacerbated by gerrymandering—the drawing of districts to pack one group into one district or split them up to dilute their power. Down-ballot Republicans benefited from gerrymandering that happened in 2010—one reason for Biden's lack of coat-tails—and they will now benefit for another ten years from the gerrymandering that will take place as a result of this year's elections.

Democrats have made some efforts to counterbalance this strategy by investing in down-ballot races. Since 2017, the National Democratic Redistricting Committee has poured millions of dollars into gubernatorial and legislative races, in states including Georgia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, Texas and at least seven other battlegrounds. And some good-government groups, such as the League of Women Voters, have advocated non-partisan or more bipartisan reapportionment boards. Since 2010, Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio and others have made changes in their districting boards, from partisan to non-partisan or bipartisan—most within the past five years.

Face-to-face conversations

For several decades, Democrats have relied on face-to-face conversations with prospective voters as part of their electoral strategies. Historically, Republicans have relied more on mass media and direct mail to mobilise existing supporters, though they have been investing more in direct contact over the last 10-15 years.

Democratic candidates and aligned organisations decided early on in the pandemic not to engage in activities which would otherwise involve talking to voters in high-footfall traffic areas, such as shopping malls, or visiting voters at their homes. Out of concern for the safety of their staff and broader public health, they opted instead to focus largely on virtual registration and turnout pushes, and education around vote-by-mail. Republicans, by contrast, increased both their voter registration and canvassing efforts.

Some studies have shown canvassing can increase voter turnout by as much as 6 per cent. It's likely the effects are more limited but in races with razor-thin margins—remember that Florida Senate race decided by 34 votes—the decision not to register voters and canvass in traditional ways probably had marginal but negative down-ballot impacts for Democrats.

Poll shortcomings

The muted celebrations were also in part a reaction to pre-election polls that showed Democrats with an 80 per cent chance of taking the Senate (they still have a chance based on the outcome of the Georgia Senate runoffs) and favourable chances of winning one or both legislative chambers in states including Texas, Iowa, Arizona, Missouri, Minnesota and Pennsylvania—as it happened, they didn't win any.

Given the importance of polls in informing campaign strategy, public expectations and punditry, we should consider their shortcomings. According to analysis by the Washington Post, 2020 represented the least accurate polling since the 1996 presidential election. People are less likely to answer unsolicited calls than they were a generation ago and those who are willing to answer may not be as reflective of the electorate.

Specifically, those who identify as supporters of Trump and the Republicans may be less likely to respond to polls due to their distrust of media outlets and civil-society institutions more generally. Even with some weighting to adjust for not being able to talk to some Trump supporters, not having a baseline sample representative of them is likely skewing polls in some key states.

Buoying political fortunes

We won't have the data to analyse fully the various drivers of Democrats' down-ballot underperformance for at least a few months. But one thing is quite clear: a strong showing at the top of the ticket is not enough to buoy political fortunes for all.

Democrats need to invest further in efforts outside the presidential races, particularly in those for the statehouses. And they need to consider their strategy and tactics on voter registration, contact, persuasion and polling—if they want to have a chance of countering Republicans' down-ballot advantages.

Matt Mawhinney is the co-founder of Generation Data, a mission-driven non-profit focused on training the next generation of leaders in progressive data management and analytics.

WHAT SAVED AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

BO ROTHSTEIN

Democracy is a fragile form of government. History has shown democracies can be undermined in several ways. It can happen quickly, as in a coup, but democracies can also erode more slowly, as is now taking place in Poland and Hungary.

Based on research on how democracies have collapsed, political science has highlighted what to be especially wary about. If political leaders do not unequivocally take a stand against political violence, do not respect the democratic rights of their opponents and refrain from promising to respect an election result that goes against them, then democracy is in danger.

During his election campaign and even more during his time as president, Donald Trump undoubtedly violated these three principles. His many false claims that the election was rigged, and that he actually won, his support for his Republican party colleagues' efforts to impede minority

turnout and his incitement to the mob that forcibly broke into Congress on January 6th were clear examples.

But despite this, American democracy seems to have survived. The institutions of democracy ‘stood their ground’. Yet we need to analyse what principles and institutions in fact saved the day. Some often taken-for-granted rationalisations can be dismissed.

Luck on its side

It’s not that this democratic election as such was decisive. Admittedly, the Democratic challenger, Joe Biden, won but in many of the crucial states his win was extremely narrow. Despite Trump’s pathological lying and his many attacks on the basic principles of democracy, he received more than 11 million more votes than in 2016. Apparently, we did not hear a resounding defence of democracy from the American electorate. Democracy had luck on its side this time but, as is well known, luck is an unreliable partner.

Nor did the principle of media freedom save US democracy. Until very recently, Trump has had free access to ‘social media’ and several important television channels have supported him. And nor did freedom of association turn the trick: Trump has drawn significant support from many non-governmental organisations—think of the National Rifle Association—and the powerful evangelical churches.

Nor can a free party system be said to have rescued democracy, because Trump's constant lies about a manipulated election have been widely supported by many prominent Republican politicians. To this must be added that the Republican Party's efforts to make it difficult for minorities to vote and to manipulate the construction of electoral districts in their favour began long before the Trump era and will in all likelihood continue. Nor, either, did 'free enterprise' make the difference: Trump and his party were flooded with huge amounts of money from big business.

Public impartiality

Instead, two other, less well-known principles saved US democracy. One is impartiality in the implementation of public policies; the other is knowledge realism.

In terms of impartiality, witness the surprisingly large number of local and state election officials, many of them Republicans, who opposed the repeated attempts from the White House to persuade (and in some cases threaten) them into rejecting election results that did not hand Trump victory. In a now-famous recorded telephone conversation, Trump sought to persuade the person responsible for the counting of votes in Georgia to 'find' the number of votes that would make him the winner in the state.

A large number of reports in the US media testify to the election officials' strong will to live up to the principle of impartiality in the counting of votes, regardless of their party affiliation. Political-science research more generally

indicates that an impartial and professional election administration is a condition of a functioning democracy.

In addition, the courts in the US, including its Supreme Court—despite those judges to a large extent being appointed on political grounds—refused to comply with Trump’s demands to reject the result, because he could not prove any decisive irregularities in vote-counting.

Knowledge realism

The principle of knowledge realism is about the concept of truth: simply put, it is possible to know whether something is true, rather than this always being determined by power relations or by notions dominant in the culture.

Obviously, the election officials, the judges and, moreover, the journalists who claimed that there were no irregularities in the election (at least not to an extent that might have affected the result) were inspired by a realistic view of the possibility of gaining assured knowledge of what is true and what is not. Their determined dismissal of the Trump administration’s allegations of vote-rigging must have been based on the idea that what is true and what is false, in a case like this, can be established by reference to the evidence.

Had the courts and election officials given up on the principles of impartiality and knowledge realism, so as to reject the election result for party-political and/or ideological reasons—or considered that there existed ‘alternative elec-

tion results’—American democracy would probably have been beyond rescue.

Strongly questioned

Yet both these principles—of public impartiality and knowledge realism—are strongly questioned, in general and specifically within parts of the research community.

Concerning impartiality, consider the significant strand in economics and political science usually called ‘public choice’. This takes as its starting point that everyone who holds public office only strives to use this to serve their (economic or political) self-interest. In this often-invoked theory Impartiality null and void.

The same holds for the theory of identity politics, which has become widespread in large parts of the humanities. According to this view, a person with a certain identity (ethnic, religious, sexual, cultural, ideological) can never relate impartially to something or someone with another identity.

As for knowledge realism, here too large parts of the humanities but also parts of the social sciences have been infused by relativistic views that go under the name post-modernism. Within this approach, it is generally considered impossible reliably to determine by any methods what is true—what is deemed true being purportedly a product of established power relations or personal and ideological perceptions.

Impartiality in the performance of public tasks and epistemological realism thus constitute the cornerstones of a secure, functioning democracy. It is therefore worrying that significant sections of the academic community have distanced themselves from these fundamental democratic principles.

A Swedish version of this article appeared in Dagens Nyheter.

Bo Rothstein is professor of political science at the University of Gothenburg.