



Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.

important for women with low income and women of colour. Second, end the Hyde Amendment, which prevents public funding for abortion services—a commitment in the Democratic Party platform since Hillary Clinton's 2016 campaign—and assure Medicaid funding to cover abortion services. Third, ensure patient non-discrimination protections that were reversed by the Trump administration.¹² Finally, limit the religious exemptions to providing abortion services that the Trump administration sought to broaden under the so-called “conscience rule”.

Importantly, appointments to the courts, from the Supreme Court all the way down to states and courts, are key.¹³ Trump has put justices who oppose reproductive rights not only on the highest court in the land, but also at state and local levels, leading to major roll-backs on women's reproductive rights across the country. This concerning situation for reproductive justice will be redressed—or exacerbated—with new judicial appointments. The death, on Sept 18, 2020, of gender equality champion and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has put this challenge into sharp view.

Finally, passage of the Global Health, Empowerment and Rights Act, or Global Her Act, would reverse the Mexico City Policy (Global Gag Rule) and end the Helms Amendment that restricts international funding for organisations that fund abortions.¹⁴ Multiple studies have shown that the Global Gag Rule has increased unsafe abortions and worsened maternal health outcomes worldwide, especially among women in rural areas.¹⁵

I declare no competing interests. The views expressed in this Comment are strictly my own personal views and do not represent those of the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security. I am grateful to Kate Fin and Elena Ortiz for research assistance, and to Ema Klugman, Tresa Udem (PerryUdem), and Bill Wasserman (M+R) for feedback and advice in preparing this Comment.

Jeni Klugman

jeni.klugman@gmail.com

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057, USA

In the 2020 US election, we can choose a just future

When US voters go to the polls (what few are left) or attempt to mail our ballots (with what remains of the US postal service) in the 2020 election, we are not simply choosing between two parties or posturing about partisan politics. We are making a choice about the future. On the one hand, are the dangers of white

- 1 Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP). Gender differences in voter turnout. 2019. <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/genderdiff.pdf> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 2 CNN. Exit Polls. Cable News Network, Nov 23, 2016. <https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls/national/president> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 3 Melnick RS. Analyzing the Department of Education's final Title IX rules on sexual misconduct. Brookings Institution, June 11, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/analyzing-the-department-of-educations-final-title-ix-rules-on-sexual-misconduct/> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 4 Guttmacher Institute. Trump Administration's domestic Gag Rule has slashed the Title X network's capacity by half. Feb 26, 2020. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2020/02/trump-administrations-domestic-gag-rule-has-slashed-title-x-networks-capacity-half> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 5 Guttmacher Institute. Unintended pregnancy in the United States. Jan, 2019. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/unintended-pregnancy-united-states> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 6 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. The best and worst states to be a woman: introducing the US Women, Peace and Security Index 2020. Washington, DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2020. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/usa-index/> (accessed Oct 8, 2020).
- 7 National Women's Health Network. Health facts: no, abortion doesn't cause breast cancer. 2015. <https://nwhn.org/abortion-and-breast-cancer-2/> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 8 Allyn B. Biden reverses position, rejects Hyde Amendment, cites attacks on abortion access. National Public Radio, June 6, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/06/730515910/biden-reverses-position-rejects-hyde-amendment-cites-attacks-on-abortion-access> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 9 Siders D. Biden calls for enshrining Roe v. Wade in federal law. *Politico*, June 22, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/06/22/biden-roe-v-wade-2020-1376712> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 10 Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website. The Biden Agenda for Women. 2020. <https://joebiden.com/womens-agenda/> (accessed Oct 9, 2020).
- 11 National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda. In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda. HERStory. 2020. <https://blackrj.org/about-us/herstory/> (accessed Sept 22, 2020).
- 12 Simmons-Duffin S. Transgender health protections reversed by Trump administration. *NPR*, June 12, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/12/868073068/transgender-health-protections-reversed-by-trump-administration> (accessed Oct 9, 2020).
- 13 Administrative Office of the United States Courts. FAQs: Federal Judges. United States Courts, 2020. <https://www.uscourts.gov/faqs-federal-judges#:~:text=federal%20magistrate%20judges%3F,-Who%20appoints%20federal%20judges%3F,as%20stated%20in%20the%20Constitution> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 14 Boonstra HD. The Global HER Act would repeal the harmful Global Gag Rule. Guttmacher Institute, Feb 7, 2019. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2019/02/global-her-act-would-repeal-harmful-global-gag-rule> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).
- 15 Center for Health and Gender Equality. Prescribing chaos in global health: the Global Gag Rule from 1984–2018. June, 2018. <https://srhrforall.org/download/prescribing-chaos-in-global-health-the-global-gag-rule-from-1984-2018/?wpdmml=1064&refresh=5f4044d9870511598047449> (accessed Sept 21, 2020).



Published Online
October 19, 2020
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)32140-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32140-1)

In terms of health, the current US administration has intentionally lied about the grave risks of COVID-19, failed to implement a coherent national pandemic strategy, hamstrung and underfunded public health agencies, initiated the process to withdraw the USA from WHO, reversed and weakened health regulations, attacked abortion and contraception access, eroded transgender health protections, and aired racist, anti-Asian, anti-science views.¹⁻⁷ Furthermore, the US administration under President Donald Trump has cut food stamps, denied climate change, jeopardised the 2020 Decennial Census, undermined Indigenous sovereignty, imposed discriminatory anti-Muslim travel bans, unleashed federal force on peaceful protesters, openly appealed to white supremacists, and separated immigrant families and caged their children.⁷⁻¹⁰

While Black and Indigenous communities, and people of colour more generally, are made vulnerable under the current US administration (panel), no one

is fully immune to its harms. Ultimately, unfettered racism, truncated rights, anaemic protections, and the resource inequities these exposures create shorten lives. Anyone who doubts this needs to only consider the past 9 months.

Home to only 4% of the world's population, the USA accounts for about a fifth of global COVID-19 deaths. Since February, 2020, we have buried more than 215 500 of our beloved neighbours, co-workers, family members, and friends.¹¹ The age-adjusted COVID-19 mortality rate among Black and Indigenous communities and people of colour in the USA is up to three times higher than among non-Hispanic white populations.¹² Latinx and Black children account for an astounding 74% of COVID-19 deaths among people aged 21 years and younger in the USA.¹³ As of Oct 3, 2020, more than 102 200 non-Hispanic white people have also died from COVID-19 in the country.¹⁴ And every untimely death has occurred within the

Panel: Selection of Trump administration policies and proposals that disproportionately impact the health and wellbeing of Black and Indigenous communities and people of colour

Civil rights

- Undermined voter protections and worsened voter suppression
- Rolled back civil and human rights protections, including prioritising conservative religious beliefs over sexual, reproductive, and LGBTQ rights

Climate

- Cut Environmental Protection Agency funding and undermined and overturned environmental regulations
- Withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement and promoted coal and fossil fuels, including the Dakota Access Pipeline

Criminal justice

- Reinstated the federal death penalty and stalled important criminal justice reforms
- Increased prosecutorial discretion and enacted harsher sentences for offences

Economy

- Provided multiple tax cuts to the richest Americans and corporations
- Before COVID-19, cut food stamps and welfare programmes, and further failed to provide adequate financial support to low-income households and small businesses during the pandemic

Education

- Attacked affirmative action, reinforced school segregation, and decreased funding for public schools

- Rescinded school discipline reforms that protected Black and Latinx students from criminalisation

Health care

- Worked to overturn the Affordable Care Act, discouraged Medicaid expansion, limited Medicaid eligibility, and tried to cut funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program
- Attempted to defund Planned Parenthood and undermined federal provisions for family planning and reproductive services

Housing

- Dismantled the Obama-era Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule
- Advocated for residential segregation

Immigration

- Enacted policies to discourage immigrants' use of public benefits, such as food stamps, Medicaid, and welfare
- Rescinded humanitarian protections to immigrant families and blocked efforts to grant citizenship to individuals who were children when their parents arrived as undocumented immigrants

Public safety

- Worked to undo critical police reforms and encouraged police brutality
- Dismissed the threat of domestic terrorism by white supremacists

nation that spends more money on health care than any other country in the world.¹⁵ More exposure and less protection—eg, from racism, resource inequities, inadequate housing, and occupational and environmental hazards—not genetic differences, drive premature mortality from COVID-19 and chronic illnesses such as heart disease and cancer.¹⁶⁻¹⁹

To make matters worse, in the face of the nation's cavernous inequalities, widespread economic immiseration, and the highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression, the current administration has proffered a one-time payment of US\$1200 to limited households while giving tax breaks to the nation's wealthiest elites.^{20,21} Now, up to one in eight US households are food insecure.^{22,23} An estimated 30–40 million people could risk eviction in the coming months.²⁴ And in July, 2020, the US gross domestic product had the largest drop on record. Yet a month later, the stock market peaked. All of this is not a coincidence. It is a consequence of racial capitalism, the profitability of inequality, and the deadly policies of the current administration.^{25,26}

When it comes to this administration, "it is what it is".²⁷ But seeing it clearly is essential. When torrential rain flooded parts of Louisiana, extreme winds decimated parts of Utah, and the US western seaboard spent weeks aflame, it is important to see this administration's enshrinement of fossil fuels as accelerants for climate catastrophe.⁷ When Vice President Mike Pence asserted that "We will have law and order" as a condition of a second term of a Trump presidency, it is crucial to see the rise in hate crimes, white vigilante terror, and human rights abuses that have been a condition of the first term of this administration.^{28,29} Seeing this clearly prevents tacit acceptance of a dangerous diversion. This type of diversion is how Indigenous dispossession becomes "discovery", "settlement", and "Columbus Day". It is how vigilante mob violence against Black communities become "race riots" with "fine people on both sides".³⁰

In 2020, US voters can choose a just future by first confronting our past. The USA began as a slave-ocracy, built on expropriated land and Indigenous genocide. Its first ruling class were white colonisers. Its first enterprises were powered by slavery and premised on the ideology of white supremacy, environmental exploitation, and systems of governance, voter suppression, and policing

that protected the right of the white, male, property-owning class to unilateral social, economic, and political control.³¹ This is the bedrock on which the "founding fathers" built their attempt at democracy. It is plutocracy perched atop precarity. The current administration only makes that more evident.

But while the "founding fathers" anchored their fledgling democracy in inequality, the expansion of US democracy owes its fragile progress to many forebearers, chief among them are the Indigenous, the formerly enslaved, and women. Starting from this fuller, more inclusive understanding of who we are as a nation and how we got here, the possibilities for who we can become and where we can go are profound.

Racism saps the strength of the whole of society.¹⁸ And we each live within the limitations of the worlds we build for each other. But another world is possible. Building on that conviction, since May, 2020, Black Lives Matter, a Black-led, multiracial uprising for racial justice, has become one of the largest movements in US history.³² Together, demonstrators across the country are asserting that our collective losses are not inevitable and our nation's deep grief need not be immutable.

So whether shrouded in a booth or the privacy of our own homes this November, US citizens who can vote must affirm these self-evident truths: white nationalism and authoritarianism imperil democracy; democracy and equality are co-constitutive; equality is essential to health; the social, economic, and political conditions necessary to advance equality safeguard the planet; and thriving societies require sustainable environments and equitable economies. All these issues are on the 2020 ballot. We hope US voters choose a just future.

We declare no competing interests. The views expressed in this Comment are our own personal views and do not necessarily represent those of the institutions to which we are affiliated.

*Rhea W Boyd, Nancy Krieger, Camara Phyllis Jones
rhea@cachildrenstrust.org

Palo Alto Medical Foundation, San Francisco, CA, USA (RWB); Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA (NK); Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA (CPJ); and Morehouse School of Medicine, Atlanta, GA, USA (CPJ)

- 1 Haberman M. Trump admits downplaying the virus knowing it was "deadly stuff". *The New York Times*, Sept 9, 2020.
- 2 Krieger N. Enough: COVID-19, structural racism, police brutality, plutocracy, climate change—and time for health justice, democratic governance, and an equitable, sustainable future. *Am J Public Health* 2020; published online Aug 20. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305886>.

- 3 The Lancet. Reviving the US CDC. *Lancet* 2020; **395**: 1521.
- 4 The Editors. *Scientific American* backs Joe Biden. *Sci Am* 2020; **323**: 12–13.
- 5 Thorp HH. Trump lied about science. *Science* 2020; **369**: 1409.
- 6 Sanger-Katz M, Weiland N. Trump administration erases transgender civil rights protections in health care. *The New York Times*, June 12, 2020.
- 7 Popovich N, Albeck-Ripka L, Pierre-Louis K. The Trump administration is reserving 100s of environmental rules. Here's the full list. *The New York Times*, July 15, 2020.
- 8 Liptak A. Census count can be cut short, Supreme Court rules. *The New York Times*, Oct 13, 2020.
- 9 Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Trump administration civil and human rights rollbacks. 2017–2020. <https://civilrights.org/trump-rollbacks/> (accessed Sept 29, 2020).
- 10 USA Today Staff. Read the full transcript from the first presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. *USA Today*, Sept 30, 2020.
- 11 The New York Times. Covid world map tracking the global outbreak. Oct 14, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html> (accessed Oct 14, 2020).
- 12 APM Research Lab. The color of coronavirus: COVID-19 deaths by race and ethnicity in the US. Sept 16, 2020. <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race> (accessed Oct 1, 2020).
- 13 Bixler D, Miller AD, Mattison CP, et al. SARS-CoV-2-associated deaths among persons aged <21 years—United States, February 12–July 31, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020; **69**: 1324–29.
- 14 National Center for Health Statistics. Deaths involving coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by race and Hispanic origin and age, by state. Oct 7, 2020. <https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Deaths-involving-coronavirus-disease-2019-COVID-19/ks3g-spdg> (accessed Oct 13, 2020).
- 15 Bradley EH, Taylor LA. The American health care paradox: why spending more is getting us less. New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2013.
- 16 Michaels D, Wagner GR. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and worker safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. *JAMA* 2020; published online Set 16. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.16343>.
- 17 Jones CP. Coronavirus disease discriminates. Our health care doesn't have to. *Newsweek*, April 7, 2020.
- 18 Jones CP. Levels of racism: a theoretic framework and a gardener's tale. *Am J Public Health* 2000; **90**: 1212–15.
- 19 Chen Y, Freedman ND, Rodriguez EJ, et al. Trends in premature deaths among adults in the United States and Latin America. *JAMA Netw Open* 2020; **3**: e1921085.
- 20 Bureau of Labor Statistics. The employment situation—August 2020. Sept 4, 2020. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empisit.pdf> (accessed Sept 29, 2020).
- 21 Sloan A. The CARES Act sent you a \$1,200 check but gave millionaires and billionaires far more. *ProPublica*, June 8, 2020. <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-cares-act-sent-you-a-1-200-check-but-gave-millionaires-and-billionaires-far-more> (accessed Sept 29, 2020).
- 22 The New York Times Magazine. America at hunger's edge. *The New York Times Magazine*, Sept 2, 2020.
- 23 US Census Bureau. Measuring household experiences during the coronavirus pandemic. 2020. <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products/household-pulse-survey.html> (accessed Oct 6, 2020).
- 24 National Low Income Housing Coalition. The COVID-19 eviction crisis: an estimated 30-40 million people in America are at risk. Aug, 2020. https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/The_Eviction_Crisis_080720.pdf (accessed Sept 29, 2020).
- 25 Laster Pirtle WN. Racial capitalism: a fundamental cause of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic inequities in the United States. *Health Educ Behav* 2020; **47**: 504–08.
- 26 The New England Journal of Medicine. Dying in a leadership vacuum. *N Engl J Med* 2020; **383**: 1479–80.
- 27 Baker S. Trump: Coronavirus is "under control". *Axios*, Aug 4, 2020. <https://www.axios.com/trump-coronavirus-under-control-5f114a16-9952-428c-bc07-3cfa360b0977.html> (accessed Oct 13, 2020).
- 28 Epstein RJ. Full transcript: Mike Pence's R.N.C. speech. *The New York Times*, Aug 26, 2020.
- 29 Hassan A. Hate-crime violence hits 16-year high, F.B.I. reports. *The New York Times*, Nov 12, 2019.
- 30 Gray R. Trump defends white-nationalist protesters: "some very fine people on both sides". *The Atlantic*, Aug 15, 2017.
- 31 Anderson, C. One person, no vote: how voter suppression is destroying our democracy. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018.
- 32 Buchanan L, Quoctrung B, Patel JK. Black Lives Matter may be the largest movement in US history. *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020.



Lebanon's humanitarian crisis escalates after the Beirut blast



Joseph Eidi/Getty Images

Lebanon is a fragile state whose political elite have long neglected to protect its people. With the Aug 4, 2020, devastating explosion in Beirut, Lebanon's dire health and humanitarian crises have escalated. The blast left 190 dead and more than 6500 injured.¹ Senior Lebanese officials reportedly knew for 6 years of ammonium nitrate storage at Beirut Port but failed to act,² showing blatant disregard for public safety. The destruction from the explosion has been widespread, with about 40% of Beirut severely damaged, leaving around 300 000 residents with devastated dwellings.³ According to WHO reports, impacts on health infrastructure include three hospitals rendered non-functional, three substantially damaged, 500 hospital bed equivalents lost, and many primary care facilities damaged.⁴ Essential food and medical supplies were also affected, including damage to grain silos and the destruction of 17 containers of medical supplies and a

shipment of personal protective equipment.^{3,4} Other infrastructures, including roads, businesses, educational facilities, and cultural heritage buildings have also sustained damage.³ Initial World Bank estimates cost the physical damage at US\$3.8–4.6 billion and economic losses at \$2.9–3.5 billion.⁵ The blast has generated a new humanitarian emergency in Lebanon.

Lebanon's context is one of chronic development challenges. The country's health, social, and transport systems are overburdened and its infrastructures struggle to accommodate growing population needs and the influx of more than 1 million Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Corruption is rife.⁶ Long-standing economic and fiscal mismanagement have rendered Lebanon the third most indebted country in the world.⁷ Clientelism and widespread *wasta* (favours by personal connections) offered by political factions in exchange for allegiances and a confessional, sectarian

Published Online
September 10, 2020
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31908-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31908-5)