

*Undergraduate students at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania prepared these Election Day reflections on Tuesday night, November 3, 2020 for a course on the History of US Elections (History 211 with Prof. Pinsker). Dickinson is totally remote this semester so these selected experiences occurred all across the country.*

## **ELECTION DAY REFLECTIONS**

November 3, 2020:

As of yesterday, I became a first-time voter and circled in the bubble for my candidate. Those little bubbles represent the voice of the American people and their desire to choose a leader. I did not have to wait in any lines regarding my voting place, and the process took around twenty minutes. There was no chaos or merchandise displayed at my voting place. Unsurprisingly, Joe Biden won Connecticut by almost 300,000 votes and gained the seven electoral votes as well. Throughout the election, Connecticut has consistently remained civil in terms of liberal versus republican conflict. Citizens in Connecticut tend to be liberal and enjoy keeping their political opinions to themselves. Therefore, a Biden win in Connecticut was a given and projected majority opinion of the state. I am proud that I could express my voice in this election, and I cannot wait for the elections to come.

Outside of Connecticut, other states handle varying political opinions differently, and it shows throughout this election. Many countries have allowed their voters to walk into polling places wearing politically affiliated merchandise and holding guns to intimate other voters. There have been photographs and video evidence of Trump supporters driving down streets blazing music and parading they're Make America Great Again or Trump 2020 flags. Some of these parades have received police escorts, and in individual states, the police stopped their acts of intimidation. President Trump's campaign has centered around dismantling Joe Biden's reputation and pushing his supporters to force violence onto others who disagree with them and how the media is twisting his words. Many of his supporters have discussed holding a civil war if he loses the election because of fraud. Though there will probably not be a civil war, it will be interesting to see how his supporters will react to the election results.

It has been a pivotal night in terms of the candidate's numbers in swing states regarding election night. The night started vital for Joe Biden because he led in Florida, Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, and Georgia, which are usually Republican states. He kept a lead in early votes throughout the night but lost momentum as the same day votes came into the polls. This trend stayed consistent throughout the night, and around ten o'clock, many were convinced Trump would be the winner. Both candidates remained pretty tied in all the swing states, and Trump declared victory in Ohio, Texas, and Florida later. Biden gained many electoral votes around eleven o'clock because of Oregon, Washington, and California. Throughout the night, the news anchors kept discussing the differences between this election and the election of 2016 in terms of Clinton numbers and Biden's and Trump's loss of votes in individual states. Unlike the Election of 2016, many critical swing states claimed they would not have all their votes counted until Wednesday

or Thursday. Therefore, they did not declare a winner. As the night dragged on, there continued to be tight races in these swing states despite missing votes, and the race got more confusing. The race is ongoing on Wednesday, leaving Americans exhausted, stressed, and nervous about this country's future.

November 3, 2020:

This election cycle was my first chance to vote in presidential election. To say I was disappointed by both candidates would be an understatement, but nevertheless I chose to vote for the candidate that I felt would help this country recover from the past four tumultuous years. Looking back on some of the topics that we discussed in class, I am reminded of Abraham Lincoln's letter to his friend Williamson Durley about the outcome of the presidential election of 1844. I wrote a paper on this election as well, and it truly opened my eyes to see the bigger picture and what was truly at stake during this election. In the letter, Lincoln asks Durley about his choice to vote principle over party, choosing to vote for the abolitionist James Birney over the Whig candidate Henry Clay. With that election ending up in a victory for the party that would expand slavery, I felt as though the stakes this election, while not as high as ending slavery, were still very important. I felt that if I were to vote on principle, I would vote for a progressive candidate. I voted for the lesser of two evils, and in my eyes, this is not an evil act. I did what I felt would be the best and most likely outcome for our nation. Looking at how elections have changed throughout the years, I'm very worried for how polarized our nation has become. I am reminded that we have had a president serve non-consecutive terms in office, and that worries me deeply. Hopefully, we can adopt new methods of voting and counting votes in this country to prevent such confusion in the future.

Election Day November 3rd, 2020:

As a citizen of the United States, and as a voter in the 2020 presidential election, I am exhausted. I am exhausted from property bylaws being used as an excuse, forcing me to remove my signs from my front lawn. Why should my neighbor's needs preside over one's freedom of speech to express their support for a candidate? I am exhausted from the political harassment and hostility of people driving by, flags waving, revving the engines of their trucks and blaring the name of their candidate through a loudspeaker. Finally, I am particularly exhausted from the effects that COVID-19 has had on everyday life. Over nine million cases of COVID-19 have been counted in the United States, and over 200,000 people have died from the virus. If that does not say we are doing something wrong, then I am uncertain if anything will. But what has become even worse than my exhaustion is my growing fear for the future of the country. After all, American democracy is young. With the outcome of this election potentially soiled by lies and the legitimacy of mail in voting having been challenged before the election even began, I fear that America is on the verge of a Civil War and I fear that the outcome of this election could result in the death of American democracy as we know it. The one bright side of today is the incredible voter turnout all around the country. It gives me hope that people are beginning to wake up and

are beginning to truly understand the severity of the election as it relates to democratic values. My only hope is that this realization did not happen too late.

November 3, 2020:

Upon waking up this past Tuesday, I felt very excited and optimistic of the voting that I had ahead of myself. I had class all throughout the morning, so I had to settle for going to vote around noon, which is when I figured the lines at the polls would be at their longest. My polling place had a nanny cam style livestream that people could tune into and watch the lines to see when things were calming down, and despite a line that curved around the block when the polls opened, they quickly shortened along with the time it took for people to get in and vote. I was greeted by enthusiastic and smiling volunteers taking temperatures and registering people showing up. More cheering and waving volunteers stood outside with signs and posters, the strong majority of which were for democratic candidates. People consistently and smoothly flowed in and out of my polling place and it took me no time at all to get in, vote, and leave. Everyone working seemed very eager to help out and do their job, which made everything much more streamlined and successful. I left the polling place feeling proud and confident in the democratic nature of the country and that feeling lingered with me up through that night of reading the first results. It was a very peaceful and rather cathartic experience and a meaningful one at that too.

November 3, 2020:

The snow was supposed to have ended by 7:30 on the morning on election day in Charlestown, New Hampshire. It did not start until 7:30, just as people began to line up to vote. The 28 mile per hour wind gusts had it snowing sideways and contributed to the bite in the air. Nevertheless, the line continued to grow as people awaited the 8 a.m. poll opening. The line stretched out of the parking lot and turned down the street, where it disappeared out of my view. I arrived at 7:15 with my family and friends supporting my father, a candidate for the New Hampshire State House. We set up a tent for people to gather under to try to avoid the snow and brought out hot apple cider (not spiked as our Founder's would have wanted it). The early morning rush continued until about 9 a.m. and made it apparent that the turn-out would be large. Compared to most of the country, absentee ballot requests were quite low in Charlestown, but with enthusiasm high we expected a high turnout on election day. Finally, the snow stopped falling, as did the pace of voters. All throughout the day people would come and join us under the tent to tell stories and give encouragement. Most voters walked by and gave a warm greeting. On just one occasion, when a man yelled at another for being a Trump supporter, was the atmosphere discourteous. The man was kindly asked to leave by the police chief, who spent the day wandering the parking lot and engaging in friendly conversation. When 7:00 p.m. came and the polls closed my family was asked if we would like to come inside to get warm and watch the count. About 10 counters diligently got to work and within about a half hour we were presented with the final results. 2,503 people voted in person, about 85% of them on election day, the

second highest turnout in Charlestown behind the 2008 election. My dad won his race by a margin of 101 votes. At eight, we congratulated other candidates, thanked the poll workers, and returned home to spike what was left of the cider.

November 3, 2020:

This is my first time voting in an election – that is to say, a real election. I'd voted in school races before, and I'd voted on the playground for kickball teammates, but this time was different. Different because of not only the gravity of this race, but because the results were not immediately known to all parties (I must disclose that I could have voted last time in the 2018 midterms, but could not really be bothered as I knew who would win and lose in the NC races). The voting itself was not busy or difficult, with it being one of the least memorable parts of this whole endeavor. I actually remember the drive to the election center more vividly than I do voting. In the weeks leading up to the election, I spoke with my grandparents (all four of them are staunch Republicans). In 2016, three of them voted for Trump and one for Hillary, but this time around, all voted for Biden. Some described it as a mistake they would not make again, others simply said they preferred Biden this time. If anything, this prepped me to expect a better turnout of undecideds and moderate conservatives for Biden than what was seen on Tuesday. What I had failed to consider was Trump's appeal to the black community as well as the Hispanic community (both of which are still somewhat beyond me).

Election Day (for 11/3)

My alarm goes off at 4:15 in the morning. I get up in the dark, rushing to get ready. By 5:00, I am inside Lake Shore Harley-Davidson, signing into my pollbook as I run through a mental list of directions. The moment the clock hits 6:00, I run outside and yell to the growing line, "The polls are open!" The sun is just rising, illuminating the faces of the crowd as they shuffle in from the cold. My hands shake as I smile beneath my mask at the first voter. "Could I get your first and last name, please? ... Okay, and your address?" I rip the signature slip in half by mistake, and I feel like crying. "Sorry about that." By 8:30, everyone's faces are blending together and the numbers are rising fast. The other check-in judges are placing bets on how many people will vote by the end of the day. I bet my Reese's on 500. Around 9:00, a woman comes to me with a spoiled ballot; she marked two candidates for president. Our table gossips about her choices when she leaves. We aren't technically meant to say anything, but we can't help finding little things to entertain ourselves with. Over the next few hours, we get a steady crowd: an excited immigrant voting for the first time, a man bringing his sister to get registered, a mom with her young daughter who keeps stealing stickers for her stuffed animals. By noon, there are 309 voters in the pollbook.

It's quiet until 5:30, so I keep busy by wiping down every possible surface, rearranging the free masks by the door, and taking a moment outside just to breathe. It feels like the weight of democracy is on our shoulders, but it somehow doesn't feel like Election Day. People start to drift in after work. Suddenly, a stressed woman comes rushing through the door. She says she came in the morning, but didn't have time to vote, so she's back to do it now. The pollbook won't let me check her in unless we spoil her ballot, but she never got one. She's insistent. She immigrated from Mexico several years ago, and she always votes; it's her civic duty, her right. "I need to vote. I have to." I go running across the store, coordinating the ballot issue judges, the site manager, and the voter services judge, and after about 15 minutes, we reset her check-in. I watch her from across the room as she meticulously reads through every part before finally casting her ballot. She grins beneath her colorful mask as she proudly accepts her sticker.

At 7:00, I yell out to the deserted parking lot, "The polls are closed!" We tear down the site at record speed, counting the ballots carefully by hand, checking again and again with every list and tally. 459 voters total, 29 of them newly registered. I lose my Reese's, but I couldn't care less about the candy. I glance at my pollbook. I've checked in 108 voters alone today. I breathe a sigh of relief as we carry our supplies back to our cars, turning the lights out behind us. We made it. As everyone else drives away, I sneak to the edge of the no-electioneering zone, grabbing a lone Biden-Harris sign as I try not to think about the sheet on the door declaring a Trump victory for our three precincts. I take one last look at the site, "Vote Here" signs barely visible in the darkened building. *Now* it feels like Election Day.

For the past several weeks, I've been genuinely scared that I might encounter resistance, intimidation, or even outright violence at the polls. Every day, I've watched my friends and family slowly lose faith in our democracy, disgusted by the intense partisanship that surrounds us. Even at the primaries, the people I assisted were so intensely partisan. But now, I've spent the last 15+ hours holding in my own views, assisting hundreds of Trump voters as they smile back at me beneath the masks that all but two of them wore willingly. Yes, we're all partisan, but we don't have to be awful because of it. We're boxed in by our assumptions about others solely based on the way they vote, but when you take away the ability to jump to conclusions for just a little while, everything changes. We get along and we help each other, and it's our willingness to be civil that matters. My experience working the polls proves it can be done and that our differences are not irreconcilable. We can all still be entitled to our own opinions without hatred or division keeping us from taking part in our constitutional right to make our voices heard, no matter who we are. *(At the end of the count, Biden won Lake County, Illinois by 39,258 votes, having received 144,674 in total, according to the Associated Press.)*