



Have Zoom discussions and clubs eased or heightened political tensions at SHP?
Drawing by Axel de Vernou '21

SHP Reflects on the Political Climate Following the 2020 Presidential Election

News - Eric Bollar '22

On the 20th of January, Joseph R. Biden Jr. was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States, marking the end of one of the most controversial and influential elections in the country's history. With different political standings across campus, how will the political climate at SHP be affected now that the election has passed?

To begin, it is necessary to understand how political discourse between students has changed given the online format of the school year. The political climate at SHP would stagnate without the opportunity or space to have thorough and honest discussions, which is why students and faculty alike have put in great efforts to ensure these opportunities arise, whether through class discussions or clubs. Mr. Ben Hunter notes how "in the AP Gov classes, a number of students hosted discussions, and they were really well done." Furthermore, on the student side, Theodore Purcell '21, a leader of SHP Politics, mentions how "the online portion has been a struggle for all clubs" but that "students have done a great job handling differing opinions and disagreements." Similarly, PASH leader Zoe Schneider '21 remarks on the diversity of these political spaces and that they "cover a pretty wide swath of political perspectives, so you can actively choose to seek out opinions that both support and challenge your own."

Given that students have a multitude of opportunities to engage in political discourse with their peers, the question arises as to how the tension involved in political discussion will be affected since the election cycle has ended. Ultimately, this is not certain, and members of the community disagree on if it will change, as

well as how it will change. Mr. Hunter says that the political climate at SHP will not change significantly, and that "it's going to remain kind of polarized. This is all through Zoom, and a lot of students are very hesitant to speak about politics in certain climates. I think the upperclassmen are a little bit more willing to but the freshman and sophomores are really hesitant... They're afraid that they're going to get in trouble." Reluctance to contribute to political discussions is a major obstacle for discourse, and it is apparent that the online format has only amplified this issue.

On the contrary, students at SHP remain hopeful that the potency of political disagreements will subside. Teddy believes that "the intensity will definitely calm down. Generally, political discussions had the nature to get heated or intensified in the last 4 years. I think a lot of that will be gone now." Zoe says that "not being in the height of political partisanship and anxiety like we were during the election will probably help the SHP climate feel less charged" but that "there are still so many important issues left to be discussed, like COVID relief, climate change, and immigration that we haven't reached a bipartisan consensus on." Overall, students seem to have mixed feelings about the state of politics at SHP, but they still remain hopeful that peaceful discourse will remain.

Due to the heightened polarization of politics in the past year, students wonder if disagreeing political groups at SHP will grow more unified now that the election has finished. Community members believe that a political divide will still be apparent but that unification will be possible if both sides work together. Teddy says

that despite any political disagreements between students, "there definitely is a moral unification that will be present as a community." Zoe adds that "being out of the crux of political tension should help calm things at SHP ... but with the amount of disinformation on the election persisting and the ongoing impeachment hearings, the aftershocks of this election are going to be felt for a long time." Hopefully, peaceful discourse and joint moral values as a part of SHP's community will help lessen the political divide and animosity.

The religious aspects of SHP's community could help unite students of different political perspectives. Mr. Hunter says that although "certain groups are pretty entrenched in their positions and it seems like they're not really open to truly examining their own beliefs and where they come from," the fact that "we're in a Catholic institution and we're coming from a position of Catholic social teachings makes it all the more complex." He adds, "As an institution, we stand for certain things, so how do we imbue those beliefs in the students without being seen as having a political agenda?" Encouraging students to recognize their moral beliefs as separate from politics is an important step to unifying the community.

While students and faculty are hopeful that the completion of the 2020 presidential election will lower the aggressive intensity of certain political discussions, they are still working towards political unity by setting up discussion spaces and practicing peaceful discourse. This effort has continued over Zoom and will hopefully carry over into the next phase of the school's reopening.