

Social Justice Watch 0809

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**Being a stereotypical
“alpha male” with lots of
toxic traits is so normalized
that guys who actually
respect women are being
called simp. Respectful
men are being ridiculed
by toxic men for not being
toxic men.**

@ The Feminist Vibe

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If any fields on a form are left blank, it will automatically be rejected. Even if it makes no sense for the applicant to fill out that field. For example, if "Apt. Number" is left blank because the immigrant lives in a house: rejected. Or if the field for a middle name is left blank because no middle name exists: rejected, too. . . .

It's hard not to see this as a preposterous new layer of red tape designed to deny visas to legally eligible applicants . . .

The policy change, at first affecting just asylum applicants, was announced without fanfare on the USCIS website sometime in the fall. "We will not accept your [application] if you leave any fields blank," reads a note you wouldn't know existed unless someone told you where to find it. "You must provide a response to all questions on the form, even if the response is 'none,' 'unknown' or 'n/a.'"

Then, days before the New Year, USCIS added a similar notice for U-visa applications. In both cases the processing changes were effective immediately — even if documents had been mailed in before the policy was announced.

That's the truly Kafkaesque touch.

Rampell continues with the story of the rejected visa applicant:

To be clear, the absence of a son's middle name wasn't the only blank on her application. As many attorneys told me has always been common practice, she also left other fields unfilled if they didn't apply.

For example, she checked the boxes saying each of her sons is "single." A subsequent section says: "If your family member was previously married, list the names of your family member's prior spouses and the dates his or her marriages were terminated." Because no "prior spouses" exist, she didn't enter anything; USCIS cited this, too, among the reasons for rejection. . . .

The news report was actually from Feb but I've just been aware it. Crazy... [link source](#)

The municipality used for mailing purposes, when different than the municipality of residence, is not sufficient.
The name of the municipality of residence (voting municipality) must always be listed.

Signature of Electors	Printed Name of Elector	Street & Number or Rural Route Rural address must also include box or fire no.	Municipality of Residence Indicate Town, Village, or City	Date of Signing (m/d/y)
1.	Whitney Payne	9261 Co West Atlyn	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8-3-20
2.	Kanye West	10436 N DANZER WISCONSIN	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8-3-20
3.	Bernie Sanders	716 W. 1st Ave.	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8-3-20
4.	Christian Vennett	1117 W. Oklahoma	<input type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> City	8/3/20
5.	Carolina Andrade	2956 A S. 14th St. Milwaukee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Town <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input type="checkbox"/> City	8/3/20
6.				
7.				

looks like GOP operatives forged signatures in order to put Kanye West on Wisconsin ballot (why am I not surprised? [link source](#)



Munich, Germany [@antifastreet](https://www.instagram.com/@antifastreet)

伊宁市各族妇女载歌载舞庆节日

2018-03-09 11:52 伊犁晚报

字号： ... A⁺ A⁻

摘要：3月8日是三八妇女节，在这个属于女同胞的特殊日子里，伊宁市各族妇女以歌舞表演、赠送礼物、表彰、趣味游戏等喜闻乐见的庆祝形式，让女同胞们尽享节日的快乐。

伊犁新闻网讯（记者李亚锋 记者顾雪）3月8日是三八妇女节，在这个属于女同胞的特殊日子里，伊宁市各族妇女以歌舞表演、赠送礼物、表彰、趣味游戏等喜闻乐见的庆祝形式，让女同胞们尽享节日的快乐。





伊宁市委宣传部下沉干部给妇女送节日礼物。

在伊宁市发展乡街古勒拜克热木·麦米提敏家，市委宣传部下沉干部与各族居民欢聚一堂，唱红歌、做游戏，庆祝妇女节，抒发了对党的感恩之情和对美好生活的祝愿。

“干部们邀请左邻右舍来家里做客，一起开展活动，为我们献上了一场丰盛的文化盛宴……”活动现场，古勒拜克热木·麦米提敏激动地说，她希望通过一首首歌曲，表达妇女同胞们乐观的生活态度、和谐的文明新风，展现她们积极向上的精神风貌，用自己的一言一行争作社会主义核心价值观的践行者、推动者和传播者，凝聚起民族团结和社会稳定的强大正能量。

Thread by a Uyghur woman whose mother had to perform as a "happy" Uyghur for Chinese propaganda despite being put under house arrest and having cousin under arrest for sending money abroad. [link source](#)

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telegra.ph/Trans-Traveller-reveals-the-harsh-reality-of-living-through-the-pandemic-08-05

Telegraph

Trans Traveller reveals the harsh reality of living through the pandemic
A solidarity fund to combat the effect of the pandemic on isolation and mental health has been launched by Traveller Pride to support trans and non-binary Travellers. Traveller Pride, which made history at Pride in London last year as the first Gypsy, Roma...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrn5in0iBd8>

YouTube

Is WeChat a problem for democracies?

Politicians from Canada, the US and Australia have all turned to Chinese “super app” WeChat to reach Chinese voters in their countries.

In this latest episode of Because China, we go to Australia to understand how WEChat could affect elections and democratic...

telegra.ph/Facebook-takes-down-inauthentic-pro-Trump-Romanian-network-targeting-the-United-States-08-06

Telegraph

Facebook takes down inauthentic pro-Trump Romanian network targeting the United States

Inauthentic assets posted pro-Trump, Christian imagery, and QAnon content

telegra.ph/Georgia-teens-shared-photos-of-maskless-students-in-crowded-hallways-Now-theyre-suspended-08-07

Telegraph

Georgia teens shared photos of maskless students in crowded hallways. Now they're suspended.

At least two North Paulding High School students have been suspended after sharing images of a school hallway jammed with their mostly maskless peers, and the principal has warned other students against doing the same. North Paulding High School in Dallas...

The latest in Hong Kong: 24 people charged for joining this year's Tiananmen vigil. A longtime organizer who's facing 9 charges over 4 different protests—including 3 just for the vigil—says the latest charges are clearly meant to chill peaceful rallies: [link source](#)

NY Times

Dozens Charged in Hong Kong for Taking Part in Tiananmen Protest

The charges against 24 people for attending an annual vigil are the latest signs of an intensifying crackdown on the pro-democracy movement.

telegra.ph/Anti-maskers-explain-themselves-08-07-3

Telegraph

Anti-maskers explain themselves

“If I’m going to get Covid and die from it, then so be it”: What it’s like to be against masks.

“Childcare care is basic infrastructure. If you want this economy to work, if you want to boost our G.D.P., or now, during a pandemic, if you want to get people back to work, then we need to make a national investment.” [link source](#)

Nytimes

Elizabeth Warren on Child Care in a Pandemic

The senator says child care is crucial for bringing the economy back: “Women continue to have to manage it all.”

When we lived in public housing my mom started a community garden to grow food to save money and to occupy the kids that lived there and the public housing authority came & pulled out all the plants and poured bleach into the ground to destroy it. Because gardens weren't allowed. [link source](#)

Twitter

Armani

what radicalized you?

As the incarceration rate increased, Blacks' confidence in courts & the legal system fell while Whites' confidence grew.

[#SocSciResearch](#)

[link source](#)

Sciencedirect

Racing justice: Mass incarceration and perceptions of courts

This article examines how the emergence of mass incarceration in the United States affected public perceptions of its judicial institutions. Analyses ...

[Warning: Controversial Content] [telegra.ph/INTERVIEW-Sam-Nele-and-Ellie-transitioned-as-young-women-living-as-men-before-realizing-theyd-made-a-mistake-08-08](#)

Telegraph

INTERVIEW: Sam, Nele, and Ellie transitioned as young women, living as 'men' before realizing they'd made a mistake

Sam, Nele, and Ellie all lived as transmen before realizing they had made the wrong decision. Chantal Louis interviewed the three women, after they contacted EMMA, a German feminist magazine. This interview was published in EMMA in March 2020 and translated...

[telegra.ph/Books-pulled-from-library-shelves-songs-bannedits-the-new-normal-in-Hong-Kong--Hong-Kong--The-Guardian-08-08](#) | [source](#)

Telegraph

Books pulled from library shelves, songs banned...it's the new normal in Hong Kong | Hong Kong | The Guardian

Beijing has lost its patience with the former colony. Its repression may ignite fresh civil society fury Pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong on Friday after his ban from standing for the council. Photograph: Anthony Kwan/Getty Images
Pro-democracy activist...

telegra.ph/Many-Americans-Are-Convinced-Crime-Is-Rising-In-The-US-Theyre-Wrong-08-08 | source

Telegraph

Many Americans Are Convinced Crime Is Rising In The U.S. They're Wrong. Will you get robbed this year? How would you rate your chances? Over 10 years, from 1994 to 2004, the national Survey of Economic Expectations asked respondents to do just that. People estimated their risks for a whole host of bad-news life events — robbery...

<https://lausan.hk/2020/opposing-chinese-american-conservatism/>

Lausan

Opposing Chinese American conservatism - Lausan

When pro-NYPD Chinese immigrants rallied against the Black Lives Matter movement, a coalition of Asian grassroots organizations held a counter-protest.

[Atlantic] telegra.ph/The-GRE-Fails-at-Predicting-Who-Will-Succeed-08-08

Telegraph

The GRE Fails at Predicting Who Will Succeed

Early one Saturday morning last year, Christian Vazquez hopped on his bicycle and pedaled from his Highland Park home to the campus of Cal State, Los Angeles, one of many designated testing facilities for the Graduate Record Examination. The GRE, as it's...

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Anti-maskers explain themselves

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“If I’m going to get Covid and die from it, then so be it”: What it’s like to be against masks.



Supporters and members of Patriot Prayer and People's Rights Washington take part in a rally against Washington state's mask mandate on June 26, 2020, in Vancouver, Washington.

At the outset of the pandemic, Amy, a 48-year-old mother of two from Ohio, was afraid. When the government began recommending people wear masks, she not only complied but also made masks for others. “I was like, oh, this is scary, this could be really bad,” she said.

But when Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced the state would extend its lockdown for the month of May, she’d had it. Pandemic over or not, she was done. After that, Amy became vehemently anti-mask and began to doubt

whether the coronavirus was really that big of a deal. Her mother unfollowed her on Facebook over her “anger posts” about masks, and she hasn’t heard from her in a month. She carries a homemade mask with her, just in case, but she doesn’t believe in them.

“It’s a violation of my freedom, I think, and then also I just don’t think they work,” Amy said. “A lot of stuff says it does, but then some doesn’t.”

Masks have become an extremely heated point of contention during the Covid-19 outbreak. Viral videos of people having meltdowns over masks are commonplace, and in many parts of the country, it’s not abnormal for strangers to confront each other publicly over the issue. A small but vocal segment of the population has dug in and ignored the growing evidence that masks make a difference in combating the coronavirus. For those who believe that at the very least wearing a mask can’t hurt, it’s hard to not develop some animosity toward those who refuse. The question I keep hearing from pro-mask friends and family is always the same: What are these people thinking?

In recent weeks, I spoke with nearly a dozen people who consider themselves anti-mask to find out just that. What I discovered is that there is certainly a broad spectrum of reasons — some find wearing a mask annoying or just aren’t convinced they work, and others have gone down a rabbit hole of conspiracies that often involve vaccines, Big Pharma, YouTube, and Bill Gates. One man told me he wears a mask when he goes to the store to be polite. A woman got kicked out of a Menards store for refusing to wear a mask amid what she calls the “Covid scam garbage.”

But there are also many commonalities. Most people I talked to noted government officials’ confusing messaging on masks in the pandemic’s early days. They insist that they’re not conspiracy theorists and that they don’t believe the coronavirus is a hoax, but many also expressed doubts about the growing body of scientific knowledge around the virus, opting for cherry-picked and unverified sources of information found on social media rather than traditional news sources. They often said they weren’t political but acknowledged they leaned right.

Most claimed not to know anyone who had contracted Covid-19 or died of it, and when I told them I did, the responses were the same: How old were they? Did they have preexisting conditions? They knew their position is unpopular,

and most spoke on condition of anonymity and will be referred to only by their first names. Amy told me people are “not very nice about this.”

The mask debate is complex. As much as it’s about science, health, and risk, it’s also about empathy. If someone doesn’t personally know anyone who died from Covid-19, does it mean those lives don’t matter? Are older and immunocompromised people disposable? Does one person’s right to ignore public health advice really trump someone else’s right to live?

“Death is happening in these wards where even family members can’t visit their loved ones when they’re sick with Covid, so the death and the severity of this disease are really invisible to the public,” said Kumi Smith, an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota who studies infectious diseases.

It leads some people to brush the issue aside.

“I’m empathetic that anyone has to die ever, but that’s the reality of our lives. And I almost feel like if I’m going to get Covid and die from it, then so be it,” said Gina, a Pennsylvania real estate agent who wears a mask at work but otherwise opposes mask mandates.

“I’M EMPATHETIC THAT ANYONE HAS TO DIE EVER, BUT THAT’S THE REALITY OF OUR LIVES”

But the empathy question also works the other way — attacking people for not wearing a mask doesn’t change minds. An open, more forgiving conversation might. That’s what happened with Scott Liftman, a 50-year-old man from Massachusetts who read a story in the Atlantic about men who won’t wear masks. He contacted the article’s author, Harvard epidemiologist Julia Marcus, and has come around — somewhat — on the idea of putting one on, at least in certain situations.

“I want to be sensitive, I want to follow scientific principles, but I also want to exercise common sense, too,” Liftman told me. “You never want to read something that just shames you. I really think that no two people are so different that they can’t find some common ground.”

“These people are part of our community, and they are putting other people at risk,” Marcus said. “If you can inch some people, you will see risk reduction overall.”

Freedom, but for your face

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spin out of control in the United States, many states, localities, and businesses have turned to requiring people to wear masks in the hope the measure will slow the spread of infection. Currently, 34 states have mask mandates, and polls show a hefty majority of Americans would support a national mask mandate, as well.

For those who disagree, that's partially where the problem resides: They insist they're not anti-mask, they're anti-mandate. "If you want to wear a mask, great. I will never look down on you, have anything bad to say to you, do what you want. But the mandates are what I disagree with and I don't think are right, especially now," Gina said.

Rallies against mask mandates have popped up across the country, much like the protests to reopen the economy that took place at state capitols earlier this year. People wanted the freedom to get a haircut; now they want the freedom to go to the grocery store without covering their face.

Some of the people I spoke with drew the line, specifically, at government mandates. It's one thing for a private business to require customers to wear a mask, they said, but another thing for a state government to do it. Private establishments "have a right to do so, and you should respect those rules," Jason, a paramedic from Michigan, said.

Others, however, chafed at rules from businesses, too. Members of one Facebook group circulated a list of stores with mask requirements, chatting about boycotting those retailers or visiting to try to challenge the rules.

When I spoke with Jacqueline, who lives in Wyoming, she was upset over the mask requirement at her local Menards. She'd been to the home improvement store, sans mask, twice in recent days — the first time, she was allowed to make her purchase despite ignoring the rules, but the second time, she had no such luck. She was asked to leave the store after a physical altercation ensued — Jacqueline says a worker pushed her, the store says she rammed someone with a cart — and management called the police to file a report. She's now banned from the store. "They don't have to ban me because I'll never go back again," Jacqueline said. She told me she'll go to Home Depot instead. (It also appears to require masks for customers.)

As to why she believes she's exempt from the rules, Jacqueline cited the 14th Amendment of the US Constitution. "No states are allowed to make laws that take our freedoms and liberties away," she said.

But then she mentioned a mask exemption card she got — not from a doctor, but from a friend. It appears she has one of the fake cards some people are using to try to get out of wearing a mask by claiming they have a disability. "I get overheated really easy," she explains.

The issue with the freedom argument is that wearing a mask is about more than protecting yourself — there's growing evidence masks are useful for protecting others from those who may have Covid-19 and not know it. Not wearing a mask may encroach on another person's freedom to go out in relative safety.



An anti-mask protester holds an American flag during a rally on July 18, 2020, at the Ohio Statehouse.

Part of the problem is the facts have changed. Another part is where the facts are coming from.

There is no denying that Covid-19 messaging from official channels has, at

times, been confusing and contradictory. Early on, people were told not to wear a mask, but now that's changed. Scientific consensus evolves with new information, this is a new disease, and like it or not, the world is full of uncertainty.

Given that uncertainty, it makes sense people would have doubts. If officials changed their minds on masks before, what's to stop them from doing it again? Some people also feel the pandemic isn't as bad as it was made out to be in the spring. They don't know very many people, if anyone, who have gotten sick, and in some places, especially more rural areas, masks just aren't that common.

Among those I spoke with, however, I noticed that while the conversation might begin with contradictory messaging and doubts about efficacy, it often devolved into conspiracy theories. The mainstream media was lying, they said, asking whether I'd seen this video on YouTube or followed that person on Twitter. Jacqueline's Facebook timeline was filled with posts the platform had flagged as false, and with diatribes that the company was censoring her. She told me she hurt her hand several weeks prior, and that she had weighed going to the emergency room but decided against it: She's 65 and believes she'd automatically be given a positive Covid-19 test and placed on a ventilator to likely die.

Bryan, who lives in New Jersey, declined to speak on the phone for this story out of concern I might misconstrue his words. He opted to communicate via LinkedIn, sending over several days more than 4,000 words explaining his thoughts on masks and the pandemic. Initially, he said his main issue was the mandate.

"What the mandates have done is scare people into believing they are a must if they are to avoid catching the virus. And because those scared few feel that way, they become angry and vile towards anyone who does not share in their fear," he wrote.

Bryan told me that he and his fellow "truth seekers" have always questioned the numbers on Covid-19's mortality rate, and he expressed doubts about government officials' advice and the media's coverage of the pandemic. He acknowledged that some of what he was saying made him sound like a conspiracy theorist, but also leaned in: He believes masks are a step in "getting people into compliance so that they can make vaccines mandatory as well." His

theory: “Soon it will be, ‘take the vaccine,’ or you can’t travel, shop, etc.” Or worse, he said, digital IDs or “health care passports.”

Certain theories and conspiracies came up over and over again. Nearly everyone I spoke with referenced a single Florida man whose death in a motorcycle crash was erroneously listed as a Covid-19 death, saying it was evidence the virus’s fatality count was vastly overstated. (Research has shown that coronavirus deaths are likely underreported.) Many said that hydroxychloroquine is the miracle cure for Covid-19, despite evidence it is likely ineffective, and that efforts to develop other drugs or a vaccine are simply a ploy by Big Pharma to make money. Sometimes Bill Gates was involved, though exactly why he was painted as a nefarious figure was somewhat unclear.

Bryan mentioned an event related to pandemic preparedness, hosted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in October 2019, as evidence of activity that seems “strangely coincidental” given current events. “Who is one of the ones backing all of that ‘preparedness?’ Good ole Bill Gates, a man who not long ago had a huge image problem due to some monopolistic practices, etc. Now he seems to have revived his image because he is a ‘virus and vaccine expert?’” Bryan wrote.

Most of the people I spoke with got their information from their own “independent investigations” or content they found on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

“YouTube is where alternative thinkers are going to do their thinking,” Mak, whose hot yoga studio in British Columbia was shut down due to the coronavirus, told me.

“There’s definitely some sort of an agenda here to initiate control upon the people and to make people more obedient and compliant, and see which people are going to comply with some directives,” he said.

“I KNOW THEY’RE LYING TO THE MASSES”

Some anti-maskers have turned to making content of their own. Tanya, also from British Columbia, had gone to local hospitals to try to record what was going on and prove that media stories about the outbreak were false.

“I know they’re lying to the masses,” she told me. “I don’t know anybody who

has had coronavirus, I don't know anybody who knows anybody, and I know a lot of people."

"Anti-maskers will say masks are making you breathe in your own carbon dioxide," said Eleanor Murray, an epidemiologist at Boston University. "That's not at all a thing, because we know ... there are plenty of people whose occupations require them to wear a mask."

Politics is part of it, but not all of it

Like so many things, masks have become a politicized issue. President Donald Trump and many Republicans have spent months using them as a political lightning rod. Some have since changed their tune — the president has begun recommending masks, though his message hasn't been consistent or wholehearted.

"The challenge is that when you had political leaders early on saying we are not wearing masks, we don't think it's important, we don't think it's a good idea, there are a lot of people in the country who very, very seriously follow President Trump," said Catherine Sanderson, a professor of psychology at Amherst College. "When you have somebody in that sort of a vivid role saying, 'I'm not going to do this,' it creates a norm people are motivated to follow."

Jacqueline told me she believes the pandemic death count has been inflated in an effort to undermine the president. "They're all saying this so that they can make the president look bad, so they can cause the problems they are causing," she said.



After months of refusing to wear a mask in public, President Donald Trump wears one on July 11, 2020, while visiting Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Politicization is playing out at a much more local level, too. I spoke with Anthony Sabatini, a member of the Florida House of Representatives who has filed multiple lawsuits over mask mandates. Ahead of our interview, he emphasized he's worried about mandates and government overreach, not the masks themselves.

During our discussion, he initially claimed that police would be going into businesses and homes, checking to see whether people were wearing a mask. When I asked for evidence, he referenced to an ordinance against gatherings of more than 10 people — not masks — but claimed they were “part and parcel” of the same issue. When I asked Sabatini whether he personally wears a mask, his initial response was, “Where? In my bed?” I clarified: when he goes out, like to the grocery store. Sabatini, who is 31, told me he doesn’t go to the grocery store because he’s “too busy” and “a millennial,” and therefore eats out all the time. He conceded he sometimes goes to the grocery store, so when I asked whether he wears a mask there, he insisted I name which specific store.

Sabatini said older people are generally most at risk of dying of Covid-19, adding that he is “very careful” around them — specifically those 82 or older. The majority of deaths have been in nursing homes, he explained, and he doesn’t know anyone personally in a nursing home. “Anyone in my age group, it’s just rare that you know anybody that’s in that age group,” he said.

According to the Florida House of Representatives’ website, there were more than 500 people residing in nursing facilities in Sabatini’s district as of the 2010 census, and about 5 percent of the population he represents is age 80 or older.

“Grandmas and grandpas die all the time”

Spring outside of my Brooklyn apartment had been a symphony of sirens. If there’s a chance wearing a piece of cloth over my face will do something to help stop that, that’s fine by me. It was an issue I posed to many of the anti-maskers: If I’m wrong, the worst that happens is I was a little uncomfortable at the grocery store in July. If you’re wrong, you and others could get sick and die. Is that worth the risk?

“I don’t want to be responsible for killing anybody,” Gina, the Pennsylvania real estate agent, told me, though she still insisted the virus is overblown. “If the cases weren’t reported on anymore and talked about, coronavirus would be gone.”

“I hear all the time, people are like, ‘I’d rather be safe than sorry, I don’t want to be a grandma killer.’ I’m sorry to sound so harsh,” Mak said, chuckling. “I’m laughing because grandmas and grandpas die all the time. It’s sad. But here’s the thing: It’s about blind obedience and compliance.”

“WHEN THERE IS A VACCINE, THESE ARE THE SAME GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE SAYING THEY’RE NOT GETTING A VACCINE”

As tempting as it is for many people to write off the anti-mask crowd, it’s not that simple. As Lois Parshley recently outlined for Vox, enforcing a mask mandate is a difficult and complex task. But it’s an important one: A lot of anti-maskers also have doubts about a vaccine, which public health experts say will be a crucial part of moving past the pandemic.

“Masks are actually probably a proxy for not believing in science, not believing

in experts,” Amherst College’s Sanderson said. “The challenge, of course, is when there is a vaccine, these are the same group of people who are saying they’re not getting a vaccine.”

So how do you break through? As enticing as it may be for some people to shame and attack people who won’t wear a mask, it’s probably not the answer.

“One of the challenges is that you need to bring people to your side without saying, ‘You’re stupid,’ because when it’s, ‘You’re stupid,’ it’s very hard to convince someone,” said Sanderson, who’s also the author of *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders Into Moral Rebels*, a book about social norms.

As difficult (and at times contentious) as some of the conversations were, across the board, everyone was extremely nice. They also sent follow-up information to try to get me to see things their way. It’s easy to see how, for someone who’s on the fence, you might get sucked in: If pro-mask Bob tells you you’re a murderer but anti-mask Sue tells you she’s got a video you should see, you might prefer to deal with Sue.

Masks aren’t a panacea, Smith, from the University of Minnesota, said. But that doesn’t mean they’re not worthwhile. “We’re at this point where we are desperate in the United States,” she said. “I’m not about to argue anti-maskers down and say, ‘No, this will save everybody’s lives most definitely,’ but I think to reject it wholesale because some scientist changed their mind is really problematic.”

Like it or not, we’re all in this together, mask on or mask off. And just like the science can change, minds can too.

Liftman, the Massachusetts man who spoke with the Harvard epidemiologist who wrote about men who won’t wear masks, told me his conversation with the writer changed his mind. He felt like she showed compassion and didn’t condemn him. He’s still a little skeptical — he thinks it’s bad he’s supposed to wear a mask when ordering from the ice cream truck outside. But when he’s inside a store or in a crowded area, he gets it. While he still believes in individual liberty, he says it’s not just about himself, it’s also about the worker at the grocery store who doesn’t have a choice, and the person next to him in line.

“I was kind of very skeptical about the whole thing. Is this about government control? Do we really need it? As the science has evolved, I’ve become more in

line with the idea that we really should protect ourselves more often than I initially thought,” Liftman said. Speaking with Marcus, and another virologist he reached out to, made a difference. “It opened my eyes up to being a little bit more sensitive.”

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Books pulled from library shelves, songs banned...it's the new normal in Hong Kong | Hong Kong | The Guardian

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Beijing has lost its patience with the former colony. Its repression may ignite fresh civil society fury



Pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong on Friday after his ban from standing for the council. Photograph: Anthony Kwan/Getty Images

Pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong on Friday after his ban from standing for the council. Photograph: Anthony Kwan/Getty Images

Published on Sun 2 Aug 2020 02.45 EDT Beijing's assault on Hong Kong is unfolding at such a pace that the daily news has become a horror show of epic proportions. July began with the imposition of draconian national security

legislation enacted sight unseen, even by Hong Kong's leader, chief executive Carrie Lam. It ended with the sacking of a tenured professor, the arrests of four students for social media posts, the electoral disqualification of 12 pro-democracy politicians, the delay of legislative elections for a year and the issuance of arrest warrants for pro-democracy activists overseas under the new legislation.

In normal times, each of these acts would spark outrage and protests, but this onslaught has been too fast and too overwhelming to fully report, let alone counter, especially during a pandemic when gatherings of more than two people have been banned. Put simply, within a single month, Beijing has dismantled a partially free society and is trying to use its new law to enforce global censorship on speech regarding Hong Kong.

Beijing is trying to use its new law to enforce global censorship on speech about Hong Kong

In delaying Hong Kong's legislative elections, scheduled for September, the authorities are showing their disregard for external voices. The US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, had warned that any delay would prove that China's Communist party was turning Hong Kong into just another communist-run city. In Hong Kong, a democratic coalition cautioned that any postponement would mean the "complete collapse of our constitutional system". Parsing its actions, Beijing's intentions seem to be exactly that.

In the past year, millions of people have marched to protect those things that distinguish Hong Kong from China: the constitutional system that prizes an independent judiciary and the rule of law; competitive elections; the freedoms of speech, thought and assembly. The developments of the past week destroy even the semblance of those freedoms. The sacking of Benny Tai, a Hong Kong University law professor, for criminal convictions relating to the Occupy Central movement marks the end of academic freedom. The manner of his sacking, against the wishes of the university senate, highlights just how little autonomy academic institutions enjoy.

The late-night detentions in unmarked cars of four people, including a 16-year-old, on suspicion of inciting secession in social media posts were the first moves by the police's new national security department. Although the four have been released on bail, the criminalisation of certain political posts and slogans heralds

the advent of thought crime to Hong Kong.

Every day, the rules of political life are being drastically rewritten and the contours that are emerging are of a system that brooks no dissent. On Thursday, 12 pro-democracy politicians were disqualified from running for election, including four incumbent legislators generally seen as moderates. The reasons given show how far the authorities are willing to go to tame the legislature into compliance.

Activist Joshua Wong, who won the most votes in unofficial democratic primaries, says he was barred for using the #internationalbattlefront hashtag in Facebook posts. Some were excluded for actions taken before the national security legislation was even enacted. Others had applications invalidated for criticising the legislation or, in the case of the lawmaker Dennis Kwok, for vowing to vote down the government's budget or other proposals. The new legislation even classifies "seriously interfering in, disrupting or undermining" the government's business as subversion, which means filibustering could theoretically earn an elected politician life in prison. The very act of practising politics as normal could be a national security threat.

On Friday, Lam used colonial-era emergency regulations to delay the September elections for a year because of a recent Covid-19 rise. The suspicion remains that she is trying to buy time to avoid a stinging defeat of pro-government forces, following the landslide opposition victory in November, when pan-democratic forces won 17 out of 18 district councils.

The new normal is abnormal in the extreme, a city where library books have been pulled from the shelves and a protest song banned in schools. Beijing has lost patience both with Hongkongers and with the Hong Kong government's own inability to restore order after months of sometimes violent street demonstrations. Before the national security law was introduced, Lam promised it would target only "an extremely small minority of illegal and criminal acts", leaving the basic rights and freedoms of the overwhelming majority protected. The hollowness of these words reveals the impotence and irrelevance of her administration.

The criminalisation of certain political posts and slogans heralds the advent of thought crime to Hong Kong

On Saturday, it emerged that Beijing is pursuing national security cases beyond China's borders. Six pro-democracy activists overseas, including US citizen Samuel Chu, are facing warrants for their arrest for allegedly inciting secession and collusion with foreign forces. The act of lobbying overseas has effectively been criminalised. With this application of the law, Beijing is making it clear there are no red lines when it comes to speech about Hong Kong.

The exiled politician Nathan Law, now in the UK, has announced that he will cut off ties with his family in Hong Kong to protect them. The extraterritorial aspect of Beijing's strategy echoes its actions targeting Uighurs in exile, and elements of the national security solution imposed on Xinjiang could foreshadow the government's next steps. The law mandates the introduction of national security education in Hong Kong's schools, as well as moves to strengthen the supervision and regulation of foreign media and the internet in Hong Kong. Foreign businesses, already spooked, may withdraw, but the events of the past month show Beijing's determination to exact its will on Hong Kong, no matter the price.

One academic, Victoria Tin-bor Hui, has commented that writing about Hong Kong today is like writing obituaries one after the other. But Beijing might be overplaying its hand; the ferocity of its assault on Hong Kong's freedoms can only re-energise civil society at home and may just prompt reluctant governments overseas into action in the interests of defending global freedoms.

- Louisa Lim is the author of *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* and a senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne

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Facebook takes down inauthentic pro-Trump Romanian network targeting the United States

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Inauthentic assets posted pro-Trump, Christian imagery, and QAnon content



(Source: @zkharazian/DFRLab via Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia)

On August 6, 2020, Facebook announced the removal of a network of assets based in Romania engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior and targeting the United States. Prior to their removal, the DFRLab had access to a subset of assets — two pages, 22 individual Facebook accounts, and 78 Instagram accounts — that largely posted content supporting U.S. President Donald Trump. A few of the assets also referenced QAnon, the sprawling far-right conspiracy theory that has moved from the fringes to the mainstream in recent months. Although the conspiracy was not a significant focus of the network, its inclusion is noteworthy given *NewsGuard*'s recent report on QAnon's spread to Europe.

In a statement, Facebook indicated:

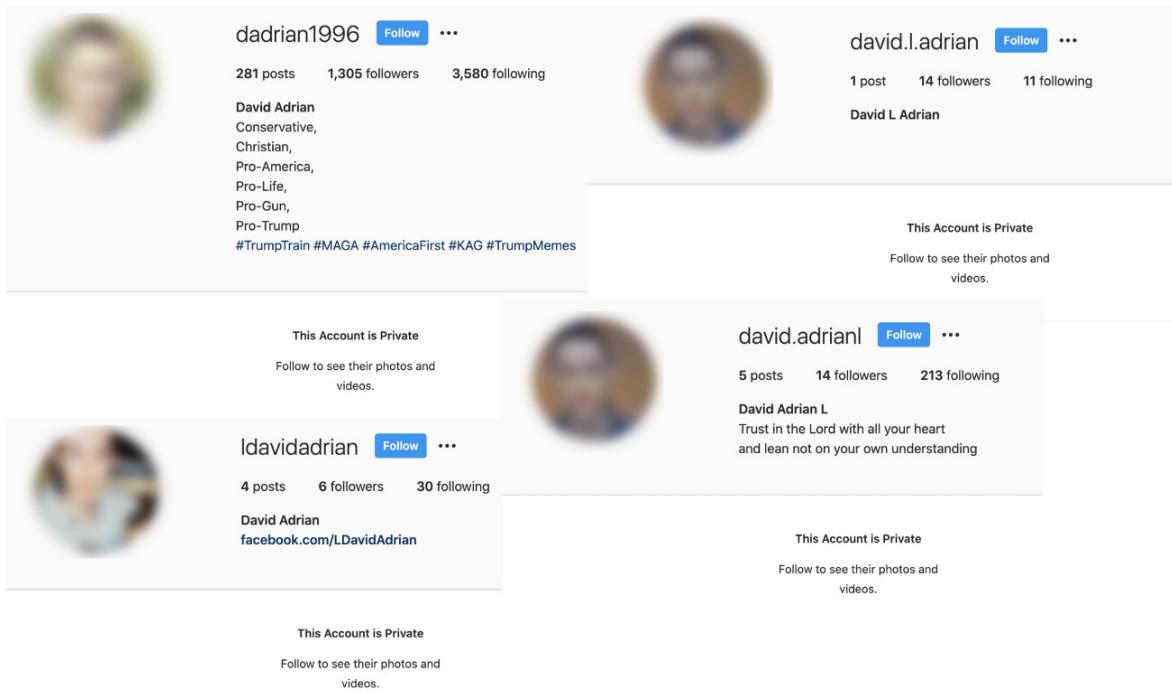
The people behind this network used fake accounts — some of which had

already been detected and disabled by our automated systems — to pose as Americans, amplify and comment on their own content, and to manage Pages including some posing as President Trump fan Pages. This network posted about US domestic news and events, including the upcoming November election, the Trump campaign, support for the campaign by African Americans, conservative ideology, Christian beliefs, and the QAnon network known to spread fringe conspiracy theories. They also frequently reposted stories by American conservative news networks and the Trump campaign.

The open-source clues this network left behind as to its operators or motivations were sparse — but there was ample evidence that it was misrepresenting itself and engaged in inauthentic amplification of pro-Trump messages and imagery. The overall impact of this effort appears limited, as many of the accounts primarily interacted with one another's posts. Some user profiles on both Facebook and Instagram, however, had built up several thousand friends or followers. While many of these followers appeared inauthentic, others seemed like real people. Overall, the network appeared to be targeting pro-Trump conservatives in the United States.

The many versions of David Adrian

A persona named “David Adrian” appeared to be central to the network, with several assets bearing variations of the name across Facebook and Instagram. It is against Facebook’s Community Standards to maintain more than one personal account.



David Adrian's various Instagram profiles. (Source: Instagram)

On his primary Facebook account, David Adrian primarily posted official Trump campaign content. He also frequently posted memes to a pro-Trump group called “Trump Train,” a group he apparently joined three weeks ago.

David Adrian 1d

AMERICA WILL PREVAIL IN NOVEMBER. THE DEEP STATE WILL LOSE IN A LANDSLIDE!

FOUR MORE YEARS!

David Adrian 7 hrs

David Adrian 7 hrs

David Adrian July 11

TEAM TRUMP
★ ONLINE ★

SPOTLIGHT: NEW HAMPSHIRE

Saturday, July 11th 8:00 pm EDT

Hosted by Corey Lewandowski

TRUMP PENCE
KEEP AMERICA GREAT!
2020

Team Trump July 11

TONIGHT: Join Team Trump Online - Spotlight: New Hampshire hosted by Corey Lewandowski with special guests Pam Tucker and Ray Chadwick at 8:00 pm ET!

RSVP: bit.ly/32besNc

#MakeAmericaGreatAgain

Like Page

1 Comment 6 Shares

David Adrian 3h

Important message from The Obamas

VOTE for TRUMP 2020

1 Comment 6 Shares

David Adrian primarily reposted official Trump campaign content and pro-Trump memes. (Source: Facebook)

David Adrian consistently portrayed himself as a pro-Trump conservative — he even maintained an account on Parler, a “pro-free speech” conservative social network that has recently gained notoriety as a number of high-profile Republicans have allegedly reduced their Twitter use for the supposedly more

free-speech environment of Parler. On Twitter, a matching account to David Adrian had been suspended, but the DFRLab found a cached version. He tweeted pro-Trump and Christian content and participated in “Trump Trains,” a social media follower growth hacking strategy that independent researcher Erin Gallagher has previously documented as unique to pro-Trump Twitter. The fact that he had a nearly identical number of followers (8,911) and accounts he was following (8,910) indicated that this growth hacking strategy worked — for nearly every follow, he got a follow-back.

There were other signs of inauthenticity across David Adrian’s accounts. For example, while on Facebook, he indicated he was from and living in Romania, on Twitter, he indicated he was in “Montana, USA.” The DFRLab could not confirm that “David Adrian” was a real person — other than his Parler and suspended Twitter account, there were no corroborating records of him online — either in Romania or in Montana, USA. There was also no evidence, however, that his profile content was stolen from somewhere else. As of publication, Adrian’s Parler account is still active and posting content.



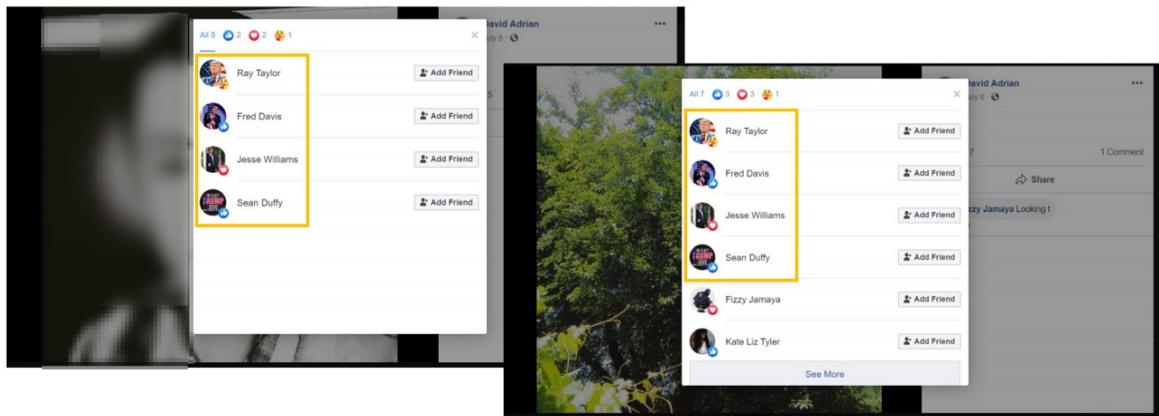
David Adrian’s Parler and (now suspended) Twitter accounts. (Source: Parler, left; Twitter via Google Cache, right)

Coordinated behavior

In addition to the multiple David Adrians on Facebook, other Facebook profiles

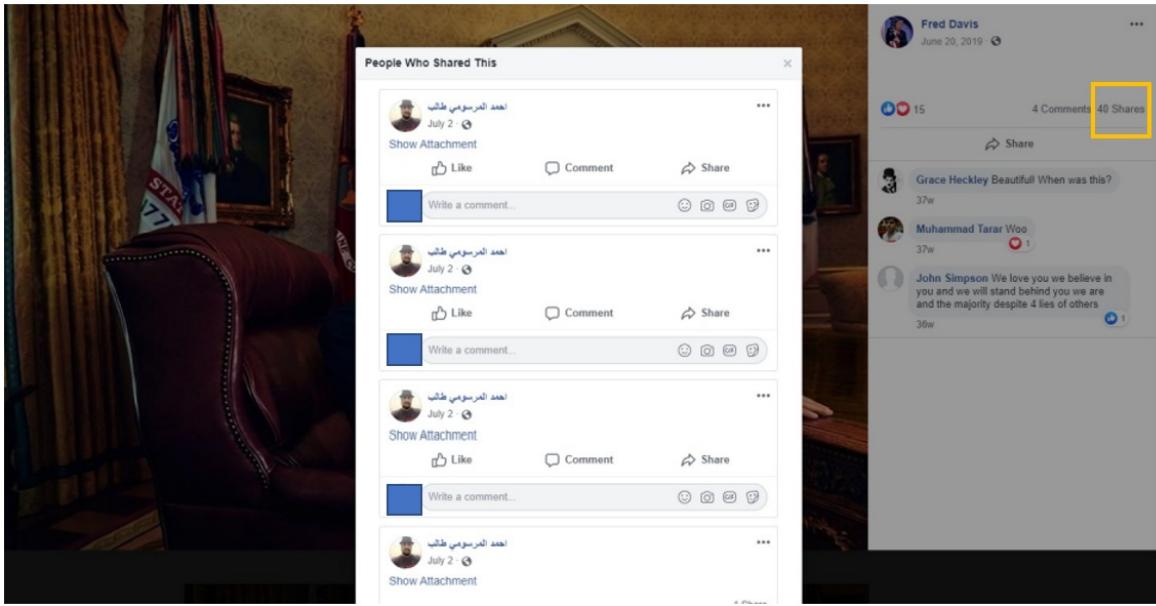
in the network had similar names, such as “David White,” “David Black,” “Dave Black,” “Adrian Adrian,” and “Ady Adrian.” Although some of the profiles did not have public posts, several of the profiles that did largely shared pro-Trump content and a couple shared Christian imagery.

There was some coordinated behavior among many of the accounts, including accounts liking each other’s pictures, identical pro-Trump profile imagery, and friendship ties.



Coordinated likes among accounts on the profile of David Adrian. The yellow box indicates accounts that were in the network. (Source: Facebook)

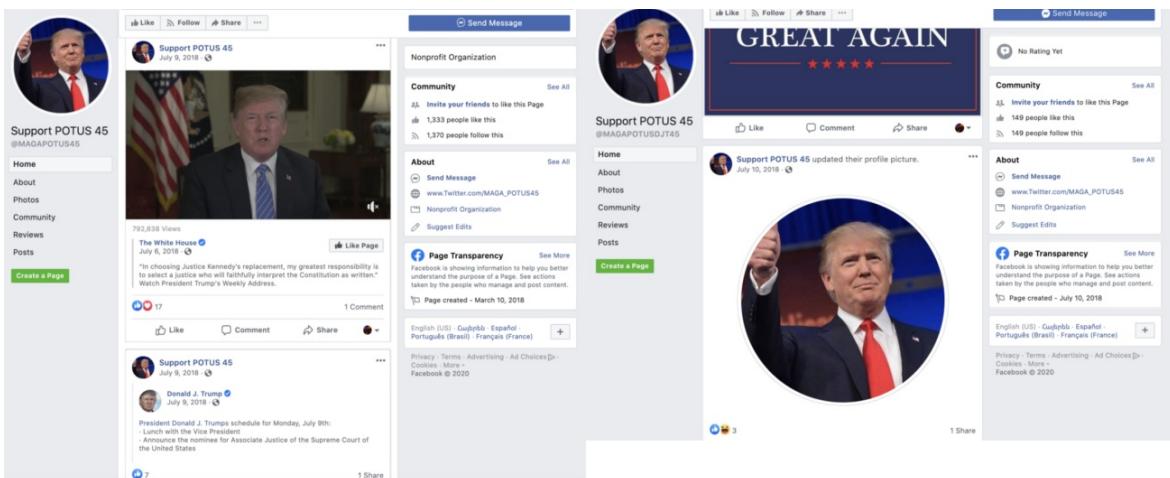
Some of the accounts in the network had posts with numbers of shares that were disproportionate to the other engagement they received. For example, one profile, Fred Davis, had 40 shares on one picture, but the picture only garnered 15 reactions and four comments.



A profile in the network with a disproportionate comment/like-to-share ratio. (Source: Facebook)

Pro-Trump pages

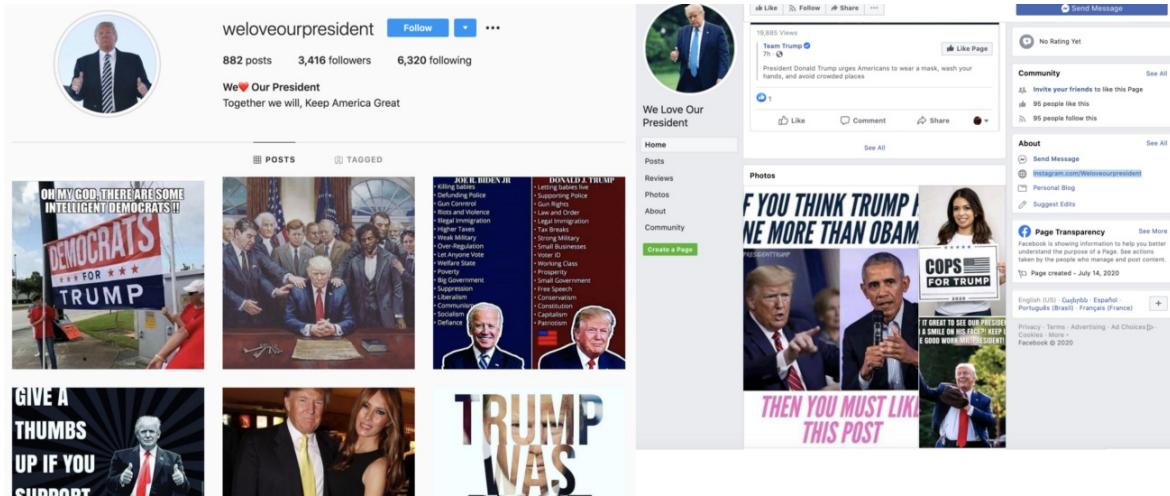
The Facebook pages posted and amplified pro-Trump content. Two of the pages, @MAGAPOTUS45 and @MAGAPOTUSDJT45, almost exclusively shared posts from Trump's official page, with occasional shares from the official White House page. Both pages were active solely in July 2018.



Two duplicate pro-Trump pages created by the network that were active in 2018. (Source: Facebook)

Another page, "We Love Our President," was created in mid-July on Facebook,

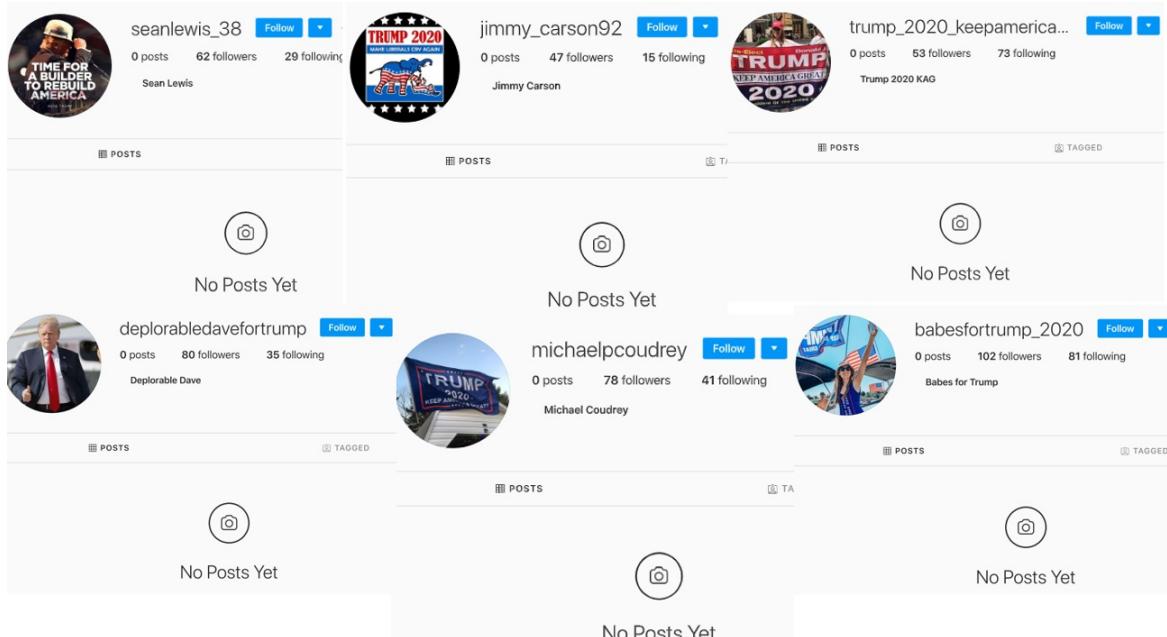
but had a matching Instagram with over 3,000 followers.



An Instagram account in the network, *weloveourpresident*, which that primarily posted pro-Trump memes and, had a matching Facebook page. (Source: Instagram, left; Facebook, right)

Pro-Trump content on Instagram

Out of the 77 Instagram accounts the DFRLab analyzed, only 15 accounts had public posts the had content the DFRLab could access. A majority of the Instagram accounts — seventy 70 percent — had no posts; it is unclear if these accounts deleted previously existing posts or if the accounts never posted at all. Despite the lack of posting, many of these accounts indicated they were pro-Trump through their bios, profile pictures, or handles like “4moreyears_trump.”



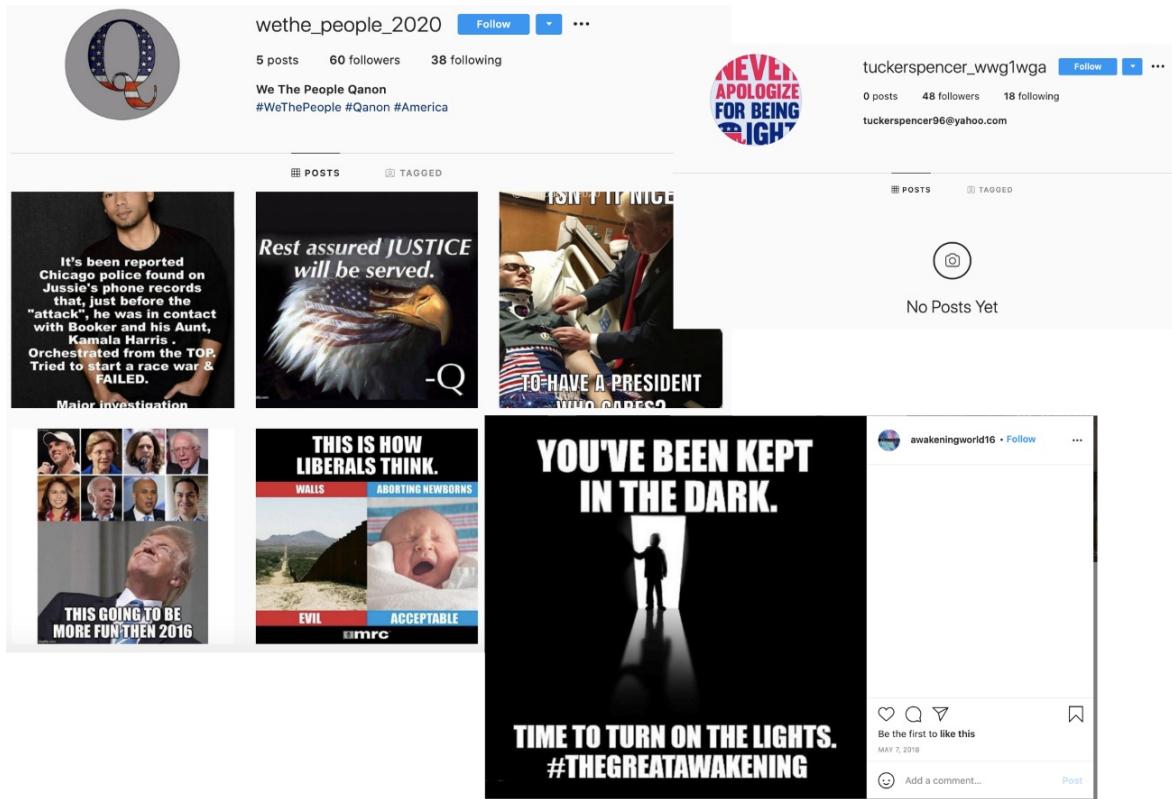
Accounts in the network with no posts that indicated they were pro-Trump through their profile information. (Source: Instagram).

One Instagram account, “blackpeoplevotefortrump,” had two posts, both of which were allegedly of pro-Trump Black people.

Some of the assets posted content that seemed extraneous to the general pro-Trump nature of the network. For example, one account was devoted solely to the television show 13 Reasons Why; another, “veteransfortrump45,” posted more general content about different national days than about political affairs. These accounts may have been intended for audience-building purposes.

QAnon content

On Instagram, several accounts in the network posted QAnon content or invoked the conspiracy theory in their handles. These accounts all had only a few dozen followers each, but they were tied to rest of the network via their follower-following relationships. Curiously, the QAnon accounts were primarily active in 2018 to early 2019, and largely stopped posting after that time.



Instagram accounts tied to the network that invoked QAnon. (Source: Instagram)

This network largely posted pro-Trump memes and amplified Trump campaign pages, adding little, if any, original commentary that would indicate the operators' objectives. It was primarily active in the early half of 2018, but some profiles on both Facebook and Instagram continued to actively post until their removal. Its consistent and enduring devotion to amplifying official pro-Trump campaign content is curious, given Facebook's attribution of the network to Romania.

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Follow along on Twitter for more in-depth analysis from our #DigitalSherlocks.

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Georgia teens shared photos of maskless students in crowded hallways. Now they're suspended.

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In this photo posted on Twitter, students crowd a hallway on Tuesday at North Paulding High School in Dallas, Ga. (AP)

At least two North Paulding High School students have been suspended after sharing images of a school hallway jammed with their mostly maskless peers, and the principal has warned other students against doing the same.

North Paulding High School in Dallas, Ga., about an hour's drive from Atlanta, was thrust into the national spotlight this week when pictures and videos surfaced of its crowded interior on the first and second days of its first week back in session. The images, which showed a sea of teens clustered together with no face coverings, raised concerns over how the district is handling reopening schools during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Facing a fierce online backlash, Paulding County Schools Superintendent Brian Otott told parents and guardians in a letter that the images “didn’t look good.” But he argued that they lacked context about the 2,000-plus student school, where masks are a “personal choice.”

Hannah Watters, 15, wore a mask as she captured the inside of her school. On Wednesday, she ended up with a five-day suspension for violating the district’s student code of conduct, BuzzFeed News reported. The rules bar students from using social media during the day or using recording devices without the permission of an administrator.

“Not only did they open, but they have not been safe,” Watters told BuzzFeed News. “Many people are not following CDC guidelines because the county did not make these precautions mandatory.”

The teen, who said she’d never before run afoul of the code of conduct, told the news outlet that she understood she broke the rules. But she also said she viewed her punishment as overly harsh.

Another anonymous student told BuzzFeed News that he, too, faced disciplinary action for the same reasons.

On Wednesday, Principal Gabe Carmona warned students about “consequences” if they copied Watters and the other student, according to audio obtained by CBS 46.

“Anything that’s going on social media that’s negative or alike without permission, photography, that’s video or anything, there will be consequences,” he told students over an intercom announcement.

Carmona and Otott did not respond to requests for comment.

Watters told BuzzFeed that she and her family intend to fight the suspension. Paulding County’s school code of conduct says the penalty for using social media or recording devices can range from in-school suspension to expulsion, according to the degree of the offense.

On the basis of the district’s policy, Watters’s speech probably would have been better protected had she been off school grounds when she posted a social media message about what happened, said Fred Smith Jr., an associate professor of law

at Emory University.

“From a rights perspective, the question I would have is whether or not the school has exercised similar discipline for other students who have posted anything during the school day, especially instances of people posting favorable things,” he told The Washington Post on Thursday.

A lack of equal enforcement of the rules could pose a potential First Amendment problem for the school because it could show that the institution applies the rules selectively to speech, he said.

“Schools have a compelling interest in ensuring that there are not substantial disruptions on school grounds,” he said. “As long as that’s what going on, the school’s within its rights.”

Otott, the superintendent, emailed a letter to parents on Thursday that stated the district will be providing all staff with cloth masks and face shields and will try to reduce crowding in school hallways during class changes.

Social distancing and the wearing of masks are “strongly encouraged,” but the district has not required either. It notified parents this month that both would be nearly impossible to enforce on school buses and in classrooms.

Otott said he and his staff will be “reviewing student discipline matters” that happened this week, perhaps referring to Watters and the other student.

“This is a new environment for all of us, but I want to reassure our community that we are addressing the issues that have come to light,” he wrote.

The school district is also gaining more unwanted attention after a video shared on Snapchat allegedly showed a student in a virtual classroom using a racial slur, WXIA-TV reported.

One parent told The Post that her daughter wanted to return to North Paulding High School because she missed the social aspect of her schooling. Michelle Salas said her daughter, Chelsea, has been horrified by how the school has handled reopening and by some of her fellow students’ dismissal of safety concerns.

Salas said her daughter has been bullied by classmates for being vocal about her

disappointment in the school's response to the virus and to Watters. But, she said, that will not prevent her from speaking out about what she sees wrong in the school — even though punitive consequences are possible.

Chelsea Janes and Haisten Willis contributed to this report.

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Many Americans Are Convinced Crime Is Rising In The U.S. They're Wrong.

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Will you get robbed this year? How would you rate your chances?

Over 10 years, from 1994 to 2004, the national Survey of Economic Expectations asked respondents to do just that. People estimated their risks for a whole host of bad-news life events — robbery, burglary, job loss and losing their health insurance. But the survey didn't just ask respondents to rate their chances: It also asked whether those things had actually happened to them in the last year.

And that combination of questions revealed something important about American fear: We are *terrible* at estimating our risk of crime — much worse than we are at guessing the danger of other bad things. Across that decade, respondents put their chance of being robbed in the coming year at about 15 percent. Looking back, the actual rate of robbery was 1.2 percent. In contrast, when asked to rate their risk of upcoming job loss, people guessed it was about 14.5 percent — much closer to the actual job loss rate of 12.9 percent.

In other words, we feel the risk of crime more acutely. We are certain crime is rising when it isn't; convinced our risk of victimization is higher than it actually is. And in a summer when the president is sending federal agents to crack down on crime in major cities and local politicians are arguing over the risks of defunding the police, that disconnect matters. In an age of anxiety, crime may be one of our most misleading fears.

Take the crime rate. In 2019, according to a survey conducted by Gallup, about 64 percent of Americans believed that there was more crime in the U.S. than there was a year ago. It's a belief we've consistently held for decades now, but as you can see in the chart below, we've been, just as consistently, very wrong.

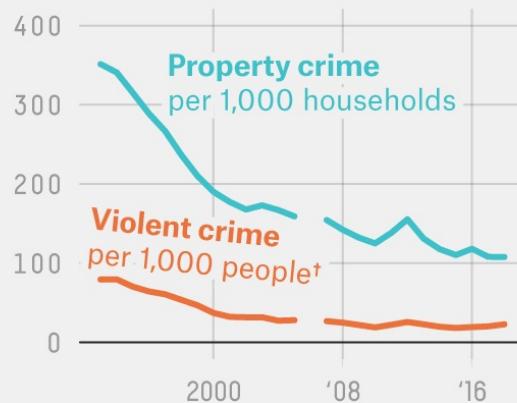
Crime is steadily falling, but Americans don't believe it

Share of respondents* who believed U.S. crime had increased from the previous year



*Polling limited to adults

Victims of violent crime (per 1,000 people) or property crime (per 1,000 households)



[†]Polling includes those 12 and older

Estimates for victims of crimes in 2006 aren't comparable because of methodological changes.

FiveThirtyEight

SOURCES: GALLUP, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS

Crime rates do fluctuate from year to year. In 2020, for example, murder has been up but other crimes are in decline so that the crime rate, overall, is down. And the trend line for violent crime over the last 30 years has been down, not up. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that the rate of violent crimes per 1,000 Americans age 12 and older plummeted from 80 in 1993 to just 23 in 2018. The country has gotten much, much safer, but, somehow, Americans don't seem to feel that on a knee-jerk, emotional level.

"The biggest challenge really, and we're seeing this as a society across the board right now, is that even though our organizations, our businesses, our government entities are becoming more data driven, we as human beings are not," said Meghan Hollis, a research scholar at the Ronin Institute for Independent Scholarship.

That's not to say that Americans are completely clueless about crime. When we spoke to John Gramlich, a senior writer with the Pew Research Center and one of the people who has been tracking and writing about this disconnect for years, he was quick to clarify that Pew didn't like to frame Americans' apparent inability to register their own increased safety as a product of being uninformed

or misinformed. The reality, he told us, is that the nature of data collection makes it hard for the public to really assess crime rates *and* for experts to assess what the public knows or feels about crime rates.

Even the concept of a “crime rate” is messy. When we talk about crime rates in the context of an article like this one, what we’re actually discussing is the number of crimes, in a set of particular categories, that get reported to the police and, from there, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation — or results from a government survey about whether people have experienced crime. These stats document murder, rape, robbery and assault, among others, as well as several property crimes, including burglary, theft, car theft, and arson. That covers a lot of ground, and it gives us a pretty good idea what the crime rate truly looks like — enough that experts feel comfortable saying things like “Hey, look, the crime rate has been going down for 30 years.”

But those statistics don’t tell the whole story, and that matters in ways that become important when you’re trying to understand the difference between how people feel and what the data say. Not all crimes are reported to the police. Sexual assault, in particular, is notoriously underreported. And there are plenty of crimes we don’t really track well in data — like vandalism, drug use and sales, or public intoxication — which can affect how safe people feel in their neighborhoods, even if the crimes aren’t serious.

Wesley Skogan, professor emeritus of political science at Northwestern University, spent much of the 1990s attending neighborhood-level public meetings around Chicago and documenting the issues that residents told police were problems they wanted solved. Some of these issues weren’t even, strictly speaking, crimes, at all. In 17 percent of the meetings, residents asked police to do something about litter. Loud music or other noise-related problems were discussed in 19 percent of the meetings. Residents complained about abandoned cars more often than they complained about gang problems. Skogan thinks about these factors as measurements of social disorder, and has found evidence that these things affect how safe people feel. If violent crimes are down, but there’s still a good deal of social disorder in an area, people’s responses to a survey might reflect how they feel about litter more than how they feel about a reduced murder rate.

The way the polls are worded also don’t help. “The polling tends to be pretty generic,” said Lisa L. Miller, a political scientist at Rutgers University who

studies crime and punishment, which makes it hard to capture the difference between how Americans think about murder and litter when it comes to how safe they feel. More importantly, she said, questions like “Do you think crime has gone up or down?” is not the same thing as measuring fear. “When people are genuinely worried about crime and really fearful, it tends to be in relation to violent crime. That’s the thing I’ve found really drives public pressure for the government to do something,” she said.

This whole thing is further complicated because crime is extremely localized — and estimates about the national crime rate are, well, not.

“All the homicides in Chicago occur in about 8 percent of the city’s census tracts,” Skogan said. For almost everybody, he said, that means “the crime you hear about is crime somewhere else.” And that matters because research suggests people are a lot better at estimating the crime rate in their own backyard than they are at estimating what it’s like across town, or across the country.

Finally, there’s the question of race, which permeates and complicates everything surrounding crime. It’s not just trash and loitering that make people perceive a neighborhood as more dangerous regardless of the crime rate. When Lincoln Quillian, a professor of sociology at Northwestern University, analyzed data from three surveys of crime and safety in cities across America, he found that people perceive their neighborhood as more dangerous — regardless of the actual crime rate — if more young Black men live there. That was true for both Black and white respondents of the surveys, but in some cities the effect was significantly more pronounced in white people.

This is all a long-winded way of saying the situation is messy on many levels, but it remains true that people’s personal fear of being victims of crimes and their perceptions of national crime rates are far from accurate.

So why do Americans still think crime is high?

Turns out, the local news may be responsible for convincing Americans that violent crime is more common than it really is. Researchers have consistently found that “if it bleeds, it leads” is a pretty accurate descriptor of the coverage that local television broadcasters and newspapers focus on. For years, rarer crimes like murders received a lot more airtime than more common crimes like physical assault. And that hasn’t changed as the crime rate has fallen.

Understandably, seeing stories about violent atrocities on the news every night seems to make people afraid that the same thing could happen to them.

According to one study conducted in California, consumption of local television news significantly increased people's perceptions of risk and fear of crime. "The news is not going to report on things that are going really well very often," Hollis said. "It's not like 'Hey Austin, Texas doesn't have a whole lot of crime and that's our news for the day!'" Stories about gun violence grab attention, so you get more stories about rare, but serious, crimes. "You can have people perceiving areas of cities as much more violent than they actually are because that's what they see in the news," she said. "It really amplifies that view of criminal activity beyond what it really is."

There's a significant amount of evidence, too, that reporting on crime can prop up harmful stereotypes: Studies have found that local news media disproportionately portray Black people as perpetrators of crime, and white people as victims.

There's also plenty of fodder for this kind of coverage because even though crime has fallen a lot over the past few decades, the U.S. is still a pretty violent country, at least compared to other developed nations. "Violence remains an American problem," Miller said. "Just think about mass shootings. So in that sense it's not irrational for people to be somewhat fearful of violence."

But often, those fears can be blown out of proportion — not just by wall-to-wall murder coverage on the news, but also by politicians who bring up the crime rate in press conferences and interviews. President Trump is far from the first president to paint a dark vision of crime in American cities, but he is singularly obsessed with the topic, especially now. According to a HuffPost analysis, the vast majority of the ads his campaign aired in the month of July dealt in some way with public safety. In one ad, an elderly woman is robbed as text flashes across the screen reading, "You won't be safe in Joe Biden's America."

And a recent study suggests that Trump's words could have an effect.

Researchers found that news coverage and political rhetoric — as measured by mentions of crime in presidential State of the Union speeches — were significant indicators of whether Americans thought crime was a pressing issue facing the country. The actual crime rate was not. A HuffPost poll conducted from July 22 to 24 found something similar: Only 10 percent of Americans correctly believe that crime has fallen over the past decade, while 57 percent think crime has

increased.

Some Americans may be more receptive to tough-on-crime rhetoric than others, of course. Republicans are generally more apt to say that crime is a serious problem facing the country than Democrats. And although Pew analysis of polling data doesn't uncover big racial differences in perceptions of crime, white and Black Americans likely think about crime very differently because criminal justice has become so inextricably tied to race.

Hakeem Jefferson, a political scientist at Stanford University who studies race and justice, told us that Black people's views on criminal justice are complex, in part because they're likelier than other demographic groups to actually live in high-crime neighborhoods and to be victims of crime. In other research, he's found that some Black people have also internalized negative stereotypes about who commits crime, and may be more likely to embrace punitive solutions as a result. Those perceptions and experiences are hard to capture in public opinion data, but they can do a lot to shape what Black people mean when they tell a pollster that they think crime is a serious issue facing the country. And that's important, because as the past few decades have shown, Black people are also much likelier to be mistreated by police, experience incarceration or grapple with the challenges of a criminal record.

Regardless of what's driving fear of crime, though, the fact that it is so out of whack with reality can make it really hard to change people's minds or reform the criminal justice system. It's not that an out-of-proportion fear of crime automatically leads people to support more punitive policies — right now, for instance, Americans are mostly not in favor of more money for policing. But these misperceptions can make it harder for reforms to gain traction, particularly if politicians with a big national platform — like Trump — are talking about out-of-control crime at every turn.

It's not hard, for instance, to imagine that kind of rhetoric being used as a wedge against efforts to restructure local funding for the police. Especially considering that in the past, a fear of crime has been used politically as a reason to oppose criminal justice reforms like reducing incarceration or changing the bail bond system — even though research suggests those reforms don't increase crime in the long term.

The history of "law and order" campaigns is riddled with dog whistles, and

Trump's recent rhetoric about sending federal agents to combat crime in cities like Chicago arguably falls into this category, according to Justin Pickett, a criminologist at the University of Albany who studies attitudes toward crime and justice. Talking about the dangers of crime, he said, can turn into a cover for racist attitudes.

None of this has made us safer. And ironically, fear of crime can actually lead to other behaviors that put us at greater risk, like buying and carrying guns. If anxiety about crime keeps Americans from embracing different ways of thinking about criminal justice, that may be doing more harm than good, too. For instance, there's no real evidence that putting more people behind bars contributed to the decrease in crime or that imprisoning fewer people will raise crime. Instead, a mountain of research points in the opposite direction to problems and inequalities linked to mass incarceration.

The trouble is that fear about crime isn't rational, and it's hard to convince people to think differently about a problem that they don't experience on a day-to-day basis anyway. "You can tell Americans that the crime rate is lower today than it was in the 1990s, but it won't feel real to them," said Kevin Wozniak, a sociologist at the University of Massachusetts Boston. "That is, unless politicians stop drumming up the crime rate and people stop hearing about murder every night on the local news."

And that seems unlikely to happen in 2020.

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The GRE Fails at Predicting Who Will Succeed

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Early one Saturday morning last year, Christian Vazquez hopped on his bicycle and pedaled from his Highland Park home to the campus of Cal State, Los Angeles, one of many designated testing facilities for the Graduate Record Examination. The GRE, as it's better known, is a test required for admission to what may amount to thousands of Master's- and doctoral-degree programs—from astronomy and English to journalism and zoology—in the United States.

Vazquez, 24, who studied for the GRE over the course of about four months using a free study guide, was already an academic success story. Raised in east L.A. by a mother who worked full-time as a bank-loan processor, he was the first person in his family to attend college. During his undergraduate education, Vazquez lived at home and commuted via bike or bus to California State University Northridge four days a week, a two-hour trip each way, and paid his way through school by working as a cashier at a Kohl's department store.

Vazquez graduated in 2013 with a B.A. in English, earning mostly As. When he went job hunting, he had one thing in mind: “I knew I wanted a job where I made an impact on other people’s lives,” he says. He ended up with two part-time positions, as a teaching assistant at an elementary school helping mainly at-risk Latino children and as a tutor at Pasadena City College, where he also enrolled in literature and writing classes for fun. On his commutes to work, Vazquez dreamed of a grander future: becoming a college English professor.

Not able to afford the thousands of dollars often required for a prep course, he studied for the GRE on his own. But his test results weren’t what he hoped: “I didn’t feel like they were good enough to be sent in to any of the programs I was considering.”

Stories like Vazquez’s highlight the limitations of standardized admissions tests like the GRE—or at the high-school level, the SAT and ACT—and the obstacles they can pose to otherwise talented students, many of whom are disadvantaged minorities. Most graduate programs accept or require GREs as part of a prospective student’s admissions-application package and the stakes are well-known. Grad-school admissions is a competitive venture; researchers call grad school a “high-status opportunity.” For Fall 2014 admission, 2.15 million students applied to graduate school in the U.S. Only 22 percent of the doctoral applicants and about 48 percent of the Master’s-degree applicants were accepted, however. Score well on the GRE and your odds of entry to this high-status opportunity look better. Don’t score well, and—at least traditionally—you may have to consider something else to do with your life. Critics say an over-reliance on these tests leaves people like Vazquez—somebody who has demonstrated grit and passion for his field and a dedication to learning and teaching—out in the cold without just cause.

“In our society we put a huge premium on the kinds of analytical problems the GRE measures. So if you’re a good abstract analytical thinker, you’ll do well on these tests,” says Robert J. Sternberg, a cognitive psychologist and professor of human development at Cornell University. “The GRE is like taking a cancer test that was invented in the 1940s, though. Most of us wouldn’t have confidence in the results from a cancer test developed then. We have more knowledge and a far better understanding of intelligence and ability now.” Some students simply don’t achieve stellar GRE results although they may be intelligent and exceptionally capable, says Sternberg, who has studied both intelligence and college admissions for more than three decades.

In 2014, professors from Vanderbilt and the University of South Florida published a column in the science journal *Nature* denouncing the GRE as a test that fails because it takes a toll on student diversity—mainly the numbers of women, minorities, and economically disadvantaged students with high academic potential but relatively low GRE scores. Last December, the president of the American Astronomical Society posted an open letter asking chairs of university departments that grant degrees in the astronomical sciences to reconsider the use of the GRE.

One of the problems critics cite is that as a predictive test the GRE is something of a flop, only managing to (weakly) predict those who will do well in their first year of grad school. That's it. GRE scores say little about whether a student has the perseverance, creativity, and intellect required to finish a graduate program or, more importantly, to add something to their professional world afterward.

Even the nonprofit creator of the GRE, Educational Testing Service (ETS), warns that there's only a tenuous connection between test scores and success in graduate school. According to the ETS report, "Toward a Description of Successful Graduate Students," "The limitations of graduate school admissions tests in the face of the complexity of the graduate education process have long been recognized." The report acknowledges that critical skills associated with scholarly and professional competence aren't measured by the GRE. Despite this report, David Payne, the vice president of ETS and chief operating officer for the Global Education division, told me in an email that he believes the GRE "measures the skills that are important for success at the graduate level: verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing."

Perhaps more alarmingly, as with the SAT, high GRE test scores time and again tend to correlate with a student's socioeconomic status, race, and gender. Research dating back decades from the University of Florida, Stanford, New York University, the University of Missouri, and ETS has shown that the GRE underpredicts the success of minority students. The University of Missouri study looked at GRE scores and first-year graduate school GPAs of 160 minority students who earned graduate degrees from distinguished universities focused on research. The average first-year graduate-school GPA of these students was decent at 3.51, and they all ultimately finished their programs. But, according to the researchers, "in observing the range of GRE scores of these graduate students, it becomes clear that according to some graduate-school admissions policies, some students should not have been admitted to graduate study let

alone actually graduate. This strongly suggests the necessity of focusing on other factors besides the usual criteria and to look beyond the talented top 20% of applicants.”

ETS studies have also concluded the GRE particularly underpredicts for women over 25, who represent more than half of female test-takers. Research from as far back as the 1960s leads experts to believe that the inconsistencies in GRE performance trace to a combination of factors including access to coaching, a disparity in educational opportunities that better prepare some students for the test, the content of the test, the way students are tested, and even the student’s own insecurities regarding race and gender. Sternberg puts it bluntly: “The GRE is a proxy for asking ‘Are you rich?’ ‘Are you white?’ ‘Are you male?’”

Payne argued that the score discrepancies are largely attributable to forces outside of the ETS's control and rejected the notion that they imply bias. "There are a number of factors that contribute to observed differences in scores, such as variation in course-taking patterns, interests, knowledge and skills, or differential educational, economic, and social systems in which everyone does not receive equal opportunity," he said, stressing that the tests' "fairness and validity" are one of ETS's top priorities. He cited a number of safeguards on which the ETS relies to ensure those goals are met, including a rigorous auditing process and a "meticulous system of checks and balances."

Still, the differences in performance are what most trouble Julie R. Posselt, an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Michigan and the author of *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping*. “The GRE adds information, but it is a noisy signal that says little about a student’s ability to be successful as a scholar. Yet in many programs it’s treated as a very significant piece of information. And unfortunately, requiring very high GRE scores for admissions undermines diversity,” says Posselt, who recently studied the admissions process at 10 top-ranked doctoral graduate programs.

In her research, Posselt found that mediocre GRE scores were often used as reason to immediately eliminate students in a highly competitive admissions process. And Posselt also found that more than half of the faculty members who sat on the admissions panels she studied erroneously equated GRE scores with a student’s native or raw intelligence. Google “how to raise GRE test scores,” however, and you’ll find the most common recommendation is to hire a private

tutor or attend one of the many pricey GRE-prep classes offered by companies such as Princeton Review or Kaplan. It's widely acknowledged that test-takers can be coached to do well on the GRE if they're able to fork over the hours and thousands of dollars for prep classes or tutoring. For many students, though, the mere cost of taking the GRE—about \$205, roughly 20 hours of minimum wage work in California—is prohibitive enough.

Recently, some programs have become “test-optional,” meaning students choose whether to submit their GRE scores. However, test-optional isn’t a quick fix for increasing diversity, warns Posselt. “When liberal-arts colleges go test-optional with the SAT, it doesn’t necessarily increase diversity the way you’d like it to. What it almost always does is increase the college’s image regarding selectivity because more people apply and those who do report scores tend to have higher ones.”

In an ideal world, Posselt would like a better test—say, something that consistently shows people who score well are more successful as graduate-school candidates. For now, though, she’d be thrilled if ETS simply provided better information to the people charged with making admissions decisions. “ETS score reports could provide the percentile ranking based on the test-taker’s national origin, field of study, and maybe parent education, race, and gender. That at least would allow faculty on the admissions panels to compare students with similar test-takers versus all test-takers.”

Too many graduate schools, says Posselt, are overly focused on snapping up already successful “winners”—falsely accepting high GRE scores as part of the evidence that these students are indeed winners—and avoiding the perceived risk of imperfect test-takers. But she warns against deciding not to apply to graduate school just because of your GRE scores, like Vazquez did.

“So much about [graduate] admissions is idiosyncratic,” says Posselt. “Depending on where you’re applying, who the other applicants are in a given year and who happens to be sitting on the admission committee, your odds of admission or rejection could be wildly different.” Students shouldn’t view any one factor, says Posselt, as a certain deal breaker.

Robert Sternberg’s work on intelligence concludes that practical intelligence, the ability to experience setbacks and changes and still figure out how to have a fulfilling and purposeful life, is one of the key indicators of high overall

intelligence. Vazquez has replaced his dream of grad school and professorship with something he feels even better about, and is now gearing up to take the CBEST, the standardized test required to become a public-school teacher in California. “I’ve decided I want to be an elementary-school teacher and be that person who inspires kids to go on, do something that matters in this world,” he says. In the meantime, he’s helping kids in El Sereno learn to read and write. “The kids I work with helped me change my perspective. Maybe I’ll try the GRE again sometime, but right now it’s not worth it.”

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Trans Traveller reveals the harsh reality of living through the pandemic

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A solidarity fund to combat the effect of the pandemic on isolation and mental health has been launched by Traveller Pride to support trans and non-binary Travellers.

Traveller Pride, which made history at Pride in London last year as the first Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) group to march in a UK Pride parade, announced the new solidarity fund this week.

The UK's network for LGBT+ Gypsies and Travellers said the trans solidarity fund was aimed at counteracting the negative effects of COVID-19 on people's wellbeing, especially given the current negative discourse about trans people in the UK and uncertainty for Travellers with "the Home Office's renewed interest

in criminalising Nomadism”.

“The situation for many of us is bleak right now,” said Tyler Hatwell, the founder of Traveller Pride. “There’s a hostility in the air around our identities which is worsened by the isolation and fear due to COVID.

“Many of us have jobs which have been gutted by lockdown and so we’re pleased to be able to offer some tangible services to people in this moment.”

Traveller Pride also announces free, ‘culturally aware’ LGBT+ therapy service.

As well as the trans and non-binary solidarity fund, Traveller Pride is also launching a free therapy service for LGBT+ Travellers, where people can “be heard”.

“A lot of people may be reluctant to engage in therapy,” Tyler said, “worrying that they will be rejected due to their sexuality or because they’re a Traveller. We are first giving free training to any interested therapists to ensure we are getting people with a good level of cultural awareness.”

Trans Travellers can apply for the solidarity fund – with pots of up to £50 per person available – on the Traveller Pride website. The idea is for funds to be used for something material that will help people feel more at ease in themselves, such as binders, packers, make-up, clothes or anything else that makes transitioning more accessible to trans and non-binary Travellers.

James*, a trans man who wished to remain anonymous out of concerns his neighbours would find out he is trans and a Traveller, told *PinkNews* that being a trans Traveller in the UK right now is like “how a mouse feels when it’s standing on the trap, but hasn’t sprung the wire yet”.

“Any little movement is going to inevitably trip the spring, and we’ll be blamed for not stepping carefully enough, or for being too keen on cheese, rather than putting the blame squarely on the person who chose to convince the public that we’re dangerous vermin, and set the trap,” he said.

Living at the intersection of two minority groups is also “a bit of a lonely feeling”, James added. “There’s a common stat that comfortable, safe,

appropriate housing and land could be provided for every Traveller in the UK with a square mile of land. I worked out that, statistically, every trans Traveller in the UK could fit into an average-sized church hall.”

Travellers ‘particularly vulnerable’ during pandemic, government admits.

In April, the government admitted that Travellers are “particularly vulnerable and have the potential to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19”, but left providing support up to local authorities.

While James told *PinkNews* he’s been “extremely lucky to be housed in bricks”, his friends and family living roadside or on sites have suffered violence, water supplies being turned off – making it difficult to control the spread of COVID-19 infection – evictions, and “blanket injunctions”, which are when a council bans Travellers from stopping anywhere in the local area, often at short notice.

“Obviously,” he added, “during the pandemic, if you’re not allowed to travel, but not allowed to stop, you quickly end up in sticky legal and practical territory.”

And for Travellers who are also trans, there can also be pandemic-related challenges relating to their gender identity.

“Many trans Travellers who usually wouldn’t spend much time at home with their parents have been crammed back into close quarters with them, which is inconvenient at best and an absolute nightmare if your family isn’t supportive, or don’t know that you’re trans,” he said.

Tyler added that the community-led Traveller Pride hopes that the trans solidarity fund and free therapy sessions will “provide some relief, either a space where you can be heard or something material to help you feel more at ease as yourself which can be so vital at a time when we’re so often stripped of personhood in the popular imagination.”

“As a trans person,” James said, “it can feel very vulnerable and disorienting to be seen ‘wrongly’ by others – not to mention that it’s dangerous, when safety can rely on passing as cis.

“Being unable to get away from other people can really heighten that stress – I

know trans men who have gone from binding just at work, to staying in their binder from when they get up at 8am to when they go back to their trailer at bedtime, which is incredibly dangerous, and trans women reporting going through make-up at twice the normal speed, from never getting time alone to go bare-faced.

“Hopefully, the trans solidarity fund will help to cover that kind of expense, as well as maybe providing a bit of a bright spot in a dark time – letting other trans GRT people know that they’re not alone, there are more of us out here, and we want to help them.”

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