

Romero Journal

2020 Election Edition



The Romero Journal seeks to amplify the voices of the marginalized in our communities and promote social justice. Inspired by Saint Oscar Romero, a martyr and exemplary justice-seeking catholic, the The Romero Journal strives to deliver the stories that inspire solidarity, compassion, and action. As a branch of Political Advocates of the Sacred Heart, The Romero Journal also serves to inform the SHP student body about opportunities of activism and advocacy.

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Introduction to This Edition of the Romero Journal

By: Zoe Schneider ('21)

Less than a month away from a historic election, Political Advocates of the Sacred Heart feels an strong responsibility to utilize the platform of the Romero Journal to educate the Sacred Heart community on what we feel are crucial subjects to consider when voting, reading the news, watching debates, and having discussions about current events. Our goal for this edition is simply to encourage critical thinking and participation, which we believe are two of the most core components of being an effective member of a democracy. As always, we approach each article with the perspective of advocates -- advocates for empathy, for inclusion, for open-mindedness, and for solidarity. We also give reverence to the Sacred Heart Peaceful Discourse Pledge, recognizing that our community is one made up of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and beliefs. We hope that these articles prove to be useful to you as you nuance your thinking around certain candidates and policy issues, so that you may make informed decisions and have productive, enriching conversations.

Each of these articles is political in nature, but in the same way that we are the Political Advocates, we strive to reclaim the definition of politics so that it is not a word that evokes division and discomfort, but rather a word that sparks curiosity and activity around and within our governmental system. In times like these where the landscape of our political system is charged with hatred, fear, and uncertainty, it is vital that we remember one another's human dignity and right to forming our own informed opinions while maintaining hope. However, the manifestation of hope requires effort and action, and so we are compelled as students, educators, and parents to learn as much as we can so that we can act in effective, responsible, and thoughtful ways. If you are under 18, you are not exempt from the political process nor are you exempt from the responsibility of active investigation; these are pivotal times for you to ask questions, form an opinion, change your mind even. The decisions being made now directly impact your future. You can research, volunteer for a campaign, write postcards encouraging others who are eligible to register and vote -- whatever your call to action is, answer it. If you are 18 or older, you have a distinct responsibility to participate in this election through voting. Remember that this is a privilege thousands have been and are currently denied, and that your vote carries that weight. Embrace the opportunity to learn and weigh each decision carefully, and then embrace the opportunity to act. This power belongs to you.

Regardless of what choices you make, we hope that the Romero Journal teaches you something new, leads you down a path of discovery, and inspires you to act with confidence, empathy, and hope.



Voting During a Pandemic, Voter Suppression, and Saving the USPS

By: Sofie Wheeler ('21)

We are on the brink of an extremely hyper-partisan Presidential Election amongst a global pandemic. So what does this mean for voters? First, it means that voting dynamics are the most complicated they've ever been. Knowing how, where, and when to vote is important, but the information is hard to find and is always changing. Second, it is crucial voters know how to protect their vote from voter suppression. Laws and regulations have been passed to target certain groups, specifically minorities, from being able to vote. However, these tactics to dampen voters can be avoided. Finally, a fair election won't be possible if the USPS cannot stay afloat. The Trump Administration refuses to acknowledge the crisis the Postal Service faces and is more than willing to let them go bankrupt.

In California, all registered voters will be sent vote-by-mail ballots for the election this year – without having to request them. This is different from previous years when voters had to request a vote-by-mail ballot. Voting by mail is a safer alternative to in-person voting this year, especially for at-risk groups of the pandemic, like elders. Vote-by-mail ballots must be postmarked on or before November 3rd in order to be counted. For those who choose to vote in person, they must turn in their ballot to their county elections office or polling place in their county before 8pm on November 3rd.

However, in order to vote, you must understand voter suppression laws, and how to avoid them. Voter suppression tactics can manifest themselves in many ways including voter ID laws, cuts to early voting, gerrymandering, and systematic disenfranchisement. Although everyone is affected by voter suppression, people of color, students, the elderly, and people with disabilities, are specifically targeted.

Voter ID laws are just one way that voter suppression manifests itself. 36 states have identification requirements at the polls, including 7 states that have strict photo ID laws, “under which voters must present one of a limited set of forms of government-issued photo ID in order to cast a regular ballot – no exceptions” ([ACLU](#)). These laws suppress the vote by reducing voter turnout by about 2-3% ([ACLU](#)). This small percentage turns into tens of thousands of votes lost in a single state. Over 21 million U.S. citizens do not have government-issued photo identification due to factors such as the cost of ID cards, the documentation required to get an ID card, and the travel requirements that burden certain groups ([ACLU](#)).

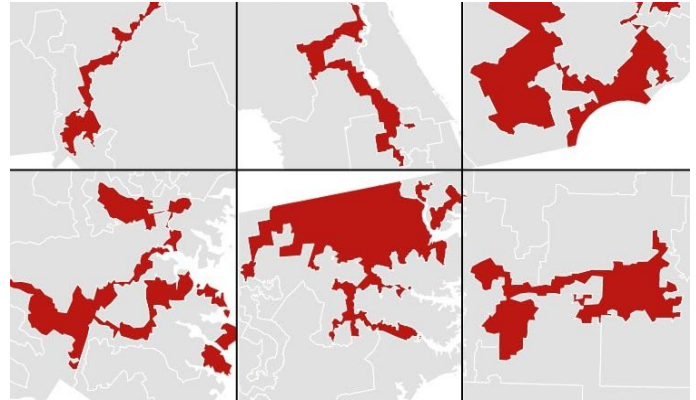
The changing registration requirements and restrictions are one of the most common forms of voter suppression. Registration restrictions include limited time windows for registering and requiring documents to prove citizenship or identification. Politicians often cry “voter fraud” to justify burdensome requirements; this evokes fear and therefore support for tougher voting laws. States can also require voters to register to vote long before election day (or even election month).

Varying felony disenfranchisement laws are another form of voter suppression. In some states, people with felony convictions are banned from voting for life, while in other states, they are only banned while incarcerated or when they're on probation or parole, while some states never ban their

right at all. This confuses voters, which is another form of suppression in itself. Additionally, discrimination in the criminal justice system allows for felony disenfranchisement laws to disproportionately affect black people. States like Iowa, who are known to target minority votes, uphold felony disenfranchisement laws because they know it will suppress the black vote ([ACLU](#)).

Most Gerrymandered Districts in the US:

Another common form of voter suppression is gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is when congressional districts are geographically manipulated to benefit or disadvantage one party, race, or class. District lines are redrawn every 10 years according to the census in order to reflect population changes and racial diversity. However, redistricting can be taken advantage of in order to suppress the votes of certain groups.



The most accessible way to protect your vote from voter suppression is by voting early. Many counties are offering early voting this year which helps with travel and accessibility restrictions. Get your vote in as soon as possible to ensure that your vote will count.

Vote-by-mail ballots are going to be more popular than they have ever been in this election due to the dangers of the pandemic. However, vote-by-mail will not be possible if the USPS goes bankrupt. USPS postal workers have been working valiantly throughout the pandemic. However, like all other institutions, the USPS has been devastated by the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic. The Postal Service is in dire need of funding – \$25 billion in appropriations to be exact ([ACLU](#)). The House of Representatives has approved the funding, but the Senate has not. With the election nearing closer every day, it is essential that the USPS stay afloat in order to provide our country with a fair election. Without the Postal Service, voter suppression will increase even more.

The most important election of our lives is coming up in less than a month. But it is also the most complicated and unpredictable election. Looking ahead at the next month, no one is really sure at what's going to happen. However, as US citizens, we have the right and the responsibility to perform our civic duty by voting and/or doing whatever possible to ensure a free and fair election. Our generation has the potential to turn this country around. What will you do to save it?



What Fascism in America Looks Like and its Place in the Election

By: Jack Richardson ('23)

Fascism is a unique political ideology in that it is not derived from a written doctrine, rather it surfaces from certain material conditions and actions, as first experienced by the Italians under Mussolini. Fascism is seldom outspoken, meaning that no party has to call themselves fascist to be fascist, nor do they have to start out as a fascist one. This makes people dangerously susceptible to the spectre due to its subtlety. That said, it does create some malleable and relevant pillars. Famously noted by political scientist Dr. Lawrence Britt in his list of [The 14 Characteristics of Fascism](#), these pillars are warnings that are to be recognized and aware of, especially as they grow more prevalent in our country.

I'll only explore a few of the aspects and their relation to our country, but I implore you to check out the list and do your own research.

Characteristic 1: Disdain for Human Rights

America has a long-standing history of human rights violations domestic and abroad, from [Guantanamo Bay](#) to our own [Police](#). But for our purposes, we'll be focusing on the current situation in our border camps, one that has severely escalated under the residing power.

The immigration detention centers did not begin under the Trump administration, however, the policies regarding anti-immigration efforts and the conditions of the centers have been widely embittered and revamped under it. According to UC Davis law professor Kevin Johnson, Trump has employed "systematic efforts to dramatically escalate immigration enforcement", and according to holocaust survivors, the detention centers qualify as concentration camps due to draconian conditions and human rights violations. These violations include the nature of torture facilities, displaying things like "extreme cold temperatures, lights on 24 hours a day, no adequate access to medical care, basic sanitation, water, or adequate food." in professional inspections.¹

Over the past few years, the circumstances have escalated so much so that a genocide is transpiring under the discretion of our country. Characterized with such crimes like abusive chemical agents, coercion, slave-like labor, forced hysterectomies, and more alongside previously listed conditions. Private prison companies like GEO work with, and are contracted by, the Trump administration to create such facilities, in turn exploiting the immigrants for profit.

One way they're able to do this is through coerced labor. At these temporary holding places, tens of thousands of people are held much longer than is permitted, and subsequently work much longer. As many as 60,000 immigrants have worked for less than \$1 a day.

¹ Marshall, Serena, Lana Zak, and Jennifer Metz. "Doctor Compares Conditions for Unaccompanied Children at Immigrant Holding Centers to 'torture Facilities'." *ABC News*. ABC News Network, June 2019. Web. 04 Oct. 2020.



But this story does not stop at forced labor, it delves into the horrors of chemical h ICE processing centers, staff are spraying a chemical called HDQ Neutral, which is harmful if inhaled or exposed to skin and eyes. It's been used in poorly ventilated areas where immigrants have reported "bloody noses, burning eyes and coughing fits, among other symptoms" that are not only individually awful, but further the spread of Covid-19.

Lastly is the forced hysterectomies These reports and allegations claim that a doctor was performing "unauthorized medical procedures on women detained by U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement". These efforts have been decried as "subhuman" treatment and yet they transpire with little resistance.²

Not only did Trump run on and retain support for such actions, but the government funds and works in tandem with private corporations who own many camps as well, serving as an axiomatic disdain for human rights in our country. One can only expect for such xenophobic policies and practices to continue, were he to be re elected.

Characteristic 2: Fraudulent Elections

Albeit America is not an autocracy and still holds periodic elections, it is in no way a democracy; not only is the general populace hindered from voting in innumerable ways, but their (our) voice has *zero* effect on policy. Because of this, there is a formidable case for the illegitimacy of our elections. However, the contemporary worries over electoral fraud via domestic interference and illicit ballots could create an undeniable and much more blatant notion of America's elections being fraudulent.

First, voter suppression has been a very relevant topic in our politics and for a good reason. However, what is seldom discussed is the austerity and bi-partisan nature of this issue. The prevalence of voter suppression is no secret and is seen through policies like [voter ID laws](#), [voting roll purges](#), and [felon disenfranchisement](#). But those examples are often portrayed as products of republican policy, ones fought by democrats. And while this synthesis isn't necessarily incorrect, it omits the democrats history of voter suppression.

Take New York, for example, a consistently blue state in the past few years. As confirmed by [Politifact](#), New York voter turnout consistently ranks as one of the worst in the nation. The DNC clings to rules that exclude independent voters. They do this by making sure it's very difficult and inconvenient to switch parties to participate in primaries. While registering with a party takes about one month, switching will take *eight*, largely disenfranchising independent voters who are more sympathetic to candidates who may be more "harmful" to the Democratic party and it's donors.³

Next is the near-zero or obsolete role the American voter's voice plays in policy. America heralds itself as a beacon of democracy, a shining example to be instilled in the rest of the world. However, contrary to this dogmatic belief, America is much closer to a plutocracy or an oligarchy, meaning it is ruled by a very small and/or very wealthy minority. Rather than the majority of the population deciding what is to come of the nation,

² Flores, Jerry. "ICE Detainees' Alleged Hysterectomies Recall a Long History of Forced Sterilizations." *The Conversation*. 28 Sept. 2020. Web. 04 Oct. 2020.

³ Weaver, Jeff. "Democrats Need to Fix Their Own Voter Suppression Problem." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 20 July 2018. Web. 04 Oct. 2020.



It is the lobbyists and interest groups who work in tandem with politicians and corporations further their agenda rather than that of the American people's, and it works. It works so well, in fact, that

“When the preferences of economic elites and the stands of organized interest groups are controlled for, the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.”⁴

In spite of this truth, our elections (effective or not), still have integrity. That is what hangs in the balance in the impending election. For example, the Pennsylvania supreme court recently ruled to invalidate any “naked” ballots, or ones that were not concealed in a second envelope. This would invalidate 1 in 16 of that state's votes, which would disproportionately benefit the GOP, as democrats are 3-4 times more likely to vote by mail.⁵

Characteristic 3: Obsession with Crime and Punishment

The American Culture of crime and punishment which has recently become much more prevalent in the eyes of the average citizen, as police brutality and other oppressive apparatuses of the state have once again come into the political spectacle. From our punitive and ineffective prison system to the President tweeting the words “Law and Order” multiple times without any regard to the Emmy award winning show, this obsession with crime and punishment is very real.

Not only is our prison industrial complex absolutely massive (making up ¼ of the world's prisoners despite the US making up about 4% of the world's total population), it's also morally corrupt, placing punitive exercises over more effective rehabilitative ones.

Two thirds of American prisoners reoffend within *three years* of being released, often with a more serious offense than before. But according to James Gilligan, a clinical professor of psychiatry at NYU, “intensive re-educational program[s] with violent male offenders in the San Francisco jails [reduced the level](#) of violence in the jail to zero..” and that just “...four months reduced the frequency of violent reoffending after leaving the jail by 83 percent, compared with a matched control group in a conventional jail.”⁶

Despite this data, the notions of punishment and alienation of criminals from society are feverently maintained and little change is realized. The recent protests have uncovered a layer of state violence that displays how little integrity our justice system has. This contemporary obsession with crime and punishment comes from every city that was shrouded in a haze of tear gas, or in cities where citizens and press were swept into unmarked vans just to be detained against their will.

One thing rings true throughout all of the unrest and injustice- the incumbent president has only [exacerbated](#) these reckonings. Although neither candidate supports abolition or defunding of the police, Trump has made it clear he does not seek unity, rather he promotes the crushing of an opposition via state power.

⁴ Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I. Page. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups and Average Citizens” 2014. Web. 3 Oct. 2020.

⁵ Thompson, Derek. “How Voting by Mail Could Cost Biden the Election.” *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 01 Oct. 2020. Web. 03 Oct. 2020.

⁶ Gilligan, James. “Prison Could Be Productive.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 2012. Web. 04 Oct. 2020.



America exercises fascistic tendencies and these tendencies have recently intensified leading to the forthcoming election. Although both parties have historically acted similarly in policy, there does appear to be a dichotomy between the two parties in this election. That being that one candidate will not commit to a peaceful transfer of power and has expressed a yearning for an autocratic rule, one that is often supported for his base. The integrity of our elections and values will be tested in the coming weeks, whether or not Trump wins. It is important to recognize that while voting is an important civic action, these issues *do not disappear* alongside a vote. It is imperative to organize, protest, and push for a better world outside the realm of the overton window, so to speak.

Trump's Patriotic Education Campaign: Moral Patriotism includes Vulnerability

By: Kate Newton ('22)

Malcolm S. Forbes once said, “the purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one,” and yet the more I read about President Trump’s patriotic education campaign, I couldn’t help feeling that his plan for school curriculums would result in closed minds. After a packed summer during which thousands showed up for Black Lives Matter protests across the nation, some people were left feeling restless and uncomfortable. According to President Trump, the BLM protests, and the few that resulted in riots, were merely a result of our education system that “overly stresses the legacy of slavery, racism and sins of America’s past” ([NPR](#)). He expects that many patriotic parents do not want their children being told “hateful lies about this country” ([NPR](#)). Schools that teach U.S. history by deeply acknowledging slavery and systemic racism do so in order to embrace the past with the hope of changing the future. Yet President Trump feels that “teaching this horrible doctrine to our children is a form of child abuse” ([NPR](#)). Overall, President Trump would like to put our skeletons back in the closet and move forward without fully and truthfully acknowledging our past. However, if we hope to change the future, we cannot ignore our past. Instead we need to learn about the wrongs in our country so we are able to change ourselves for the better.

President Trump fears that some white voters are uncomfortable with the country’s changing demographics and evolving culture. Also, in his opinion, a progressive curriculum could end up “corrupting” innocent children. In an effort to make our education system pro-America, he has used an executive order to promote his new patriotic curriculum. It will still teach our history, but instead of the gruesome truth, it would simply reflect a more flattering version. The main focus will be our split and independence from Britain; he wants it to be a hero narrative of American progress. Unsurprisingly, not everyone feels this is how we should go about educating our children. An objection to his pro-white American curriculum is the New York Times’ 1619 Project; an ongoing venture with the intent on placing the consequences of slavery and the contribution of Black Americans at the very center of the U.S. history narrative. The 1619 Project is quite the opposite of President Trump’s proposed



curriculum. It has become quite obvious that he is aiming to make America white again in curriculum. If he achieves this, America will no longer be a safe environment for many, and, as a result, it will take away many people's thrival rights, which are the rights that allow people access to successfully grow in their community.

Luckily, the New York Times' 1619 project isn't the only hope against the installment of President Trump's proposed patriotic education. Many teachers feel that we need to embrace our whole past, not just the pretty parts. As I have personally heard throughout my time at the Prep, many of my teachers tell me their job is to provide me with information, and my job is take it all in and decide for myself what to make of it. Everyone deserves a shot to make their own decisions, no matter the circumstance. If President Trump's patriotic education curriculum is installed, we will be taught biased and censored information. As a result, we will miss out on an opportunity to make a decision on how we want to embrace our past and change our future for the better.

Yet no matter the situation, it is hard to be vulnerable. When it comes to teaching and learning about our national historic events, it can be hard to think that our home and its leaders were capable of such immoral actions. As Ms. Benjamin once told me, "we feel naked when we expose ourselves, but by allowing ourselves to be seen it cultivates connection." It can be hard to be open about our country's oppressive past. However, if we are not given the opportunity to acknowledge, accept, and embrace our country's wrongdoings, how will we ever learn from our mistakes? How can we be sure our oppressive history is not repeated? President Trump's so-called pro-American curriculum being solely focused on our country's past will leave no room for vulnerability; it will not teach future generations to learn from our past and change for the better. To be proud to be American is one thing, but to be proud to cover up our mistakes to boost your reputation, that is not who we should be. A real 'patriotic' curriculum would focus and acknowledge the bad elements of our past and recognize that our country's greatness came from, and hopefully will continue to come from, the fact that we were able to admit our faults and give our best to overcome them.

The New York Times' 1619 Project is not the only way to protect our current curriculum. One of the main principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), is solidarity. CST teaches that humans are interdependent of each other, and as a result we need to share both our struggles and our joys with one another. One quote stands out from a certain CST article that mentioned, "although we cannot avoid the shadows of suffering in this world, we can choose how we respond to that suffering". We can choose to respond to that suffering through solidarity. Standing together while learning and teaching about the good and the bad elements of our past can only benefit us to change for the better. Overall, education is a big part of life, for most of us, and when it comes to history, specifically our history, it should one hundred percent be a truthful reflection. Nelson Mandela said it best: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."



The Notorious RBG

By: Samir Ravi ('24)

At 87 years old, Ruth Bader Ginsburg tragically and unexpectedly [passed away](#) from complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer. Appointed by Bill Clinton in 1993, Ginsburg [championed](#) abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and voting rights, among other women's rights issues. Her vacancy in the Supreme Court has stirred a variety of conflicts between Democrats and Republicans—especially with a nearing Presidential election. Shortly after Ginsburg's death, Trump [mentioned in a tweet](#) that filling her seat quickly is an "obligation" for the Republican Party. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) also promised that he plans to work "full steam ahead" on the nomination. Not all Republicans approve of their intentions, though; Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) expressed that the next President should have the authority to decide "in fairness to the American people." [Sen. Murkowski \(R-AK\)](#) also supported this opinion.

However, the hypocrisy of this situation is undeniable. In 2016, after Justice Antonin Scalia—who was conservative—passed away, McConnell [asserted](#) that "the American people should have a voice in the selection of their next Supreme Court justice." Obama later nominated Judge Merrick Garland to fill the vacancy; however, he received backlash from Republican senators since it was an election year. Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) [contended](#) "that the only way to empower the American people...is for the next President to make the nomination to fill this vacancy." After McConnell refused to consider conducting a hearing for Garland, he noted that "all we are doing is following the long-standing tradition of not fulfilling a nomination in the middle of a presidential year." This "[tradition](#)" he cited is virtually nonexistent, let alone "long-standing." 25 Presidential elections have occurred over the course of the past century, and only four Supreme Court vacancies opened during these periods. The Senate confirmed the President's nominee three out of those four times. [Since 1796](#), 14 Justices have been confirmed during Presidential election years. Additionally, by proceeding with the process of confirming Barrett, McConnell is effectively denying the population's "voice in the selection of their next...Justice." This is especially ironic, considering that he used this argument to justify his decision in 2016. However, he has the legal authority to continue, regardless of its implications.

Following the death of Ginsburg, McConnell [rephrased his previous statement](#), saying that "since the 1880s, no Senate has confirmed an opposite-party President's Supreme Court nominee in a presidential election year." In other words, he tried to justify his change of opinion by noting that the Senate majority and the President align politically this year. Again, this claim is historically inaccurate. For example, [in 1988](#)—which was a Presidential election year—a Democrat-majority Senate confirmed Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy under Ronald Reagan. Many Democratic senators have criticized McConnell, including [Sen. Chris Murphy \(D-CT\)](#), who said that "the precedent Republicans set in 2016 requires the Senate to wait to consider a nominee until a new President is sworn in." He also added that he hopes that "at least a few of my Republican colleagues understand this" in his official statement.

Recently, President Trump selected his nominee: Circuit Court Judge Amy Coney Barrett. Most notably, she is known for vocally supporting a pro-life stance on abortion since she considers it "always



immoral." She initially clerked for Scalia, and while on the Circuit Court, she favored res
abortions in two cases. If Barrett joins the Supreme Court, six out of the nine Justices will represent
Republican views—which is a significant imbalance. The Supreme Court already has a history of
narrowly deciding against abortion restrictions. For example, in May, the Supreme Court closely struck
down an [abortion restriction in Louisiana](#), with Chief Justice Roberts dissenting. However, with six
Justices on the conservative bloc, rulings regarding abortion are much more likely to tilt to their favor.
In addition, seven would be Catholic, despite that roughly twenty-two percent of Americans identify
with this religion. Concerns over whether Barrett's faith would influence her political work have spread
recently, but she [is confident](#) that "she would never impose her personal convictions on the law."

Before officially nominating Barrett, Trump promised that his choice would be "a very talented
woman." Several Republican senators applauded his decision at that time, and many people viewed this
as a way to empower women. However, it is absurd to compare Barrett to Ginsburg merely because she
is a woman. If confirmed, Barrett's presence will possibly unravel her predecessor's legacy of supporting
women's rights; for example, some of her previous decisions on the Circuit Court were meant to limit
access to abortion. In her writing, Barrett has also repeatedly expressed disapproval of Obama's
Affordable Care Act--which has helped millions of Americans gain coverage. On the contrary, Justice
Ginsburg's work on the Supreme Court was indicative of her careful studies of reproductive rights and
its relation to the law. She was also an advocate of feminism before her confirmation on the Court. In
the 1970s, she co-founded the [A.C.L.U. Women's Rights Project](#), and she won five out of six
discrimination cases that she presented to the male Justices of the Supreme Court. Perhaps President
Trump intends for people to view Barrett as an appropriate replacement for Ginsburg and hopes to
subdue accusations of hypocrisy among her supporters. Barrett's gender is irrelevant, though. The
possibility of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned is now looming; this would entirely restrict access to
abortion and leave generations of women extremely vulnerable. The Affordable Care Act is also in
danger of being repealed, which would disproportionately harm women of color and other marginalized
groups. Regardless of Trump's motives, it is crystal clear that years of reform could be reversed with a
single vacancy on the Supreme Court.