

The Latest

Lenses' Monthly Newsletter

May 2021



In this issue:

- Chauvin's Appeal
- CDC's New Guidelines
- Modi Fails India
- Oregon's Incoming Cases
- Pandemic Learning
- Extension of Test-Optional Policy
- Increase in AAPI Hate Crimes
- U.S.-Mexico Border Crisis
- Biden's Infrastructure Plan
- Cultural, Religious Festivals



A Message From Lenses

Lenses is a 100% teen-organized news platform that provides teenagers with the chance to share their thoughts and beliefs about the headlines that we see on a daily basis. Our community aims to get teenagers' ideas on 'adult issues' and provide accessible and simplified news to our readers, who may not always have the chance to stay up to date with the daily news.

Lenses intends to highlight the fact that though we all have different perspectives and 'lenses' when it comes to various issues, each of our beliefs matter and are worth sharing with the community. Through a combination of long and short-form articles, as well as short descriptions of important daily news on our social media, we intend to help all teenagers stay informed about the world around them and learn about what other Gen-Z members think when it comes to each of these issues.



ISSUE 1

Chauvin requests new trial after facing guilty conviction in George Floyd case

Sheoli Lele

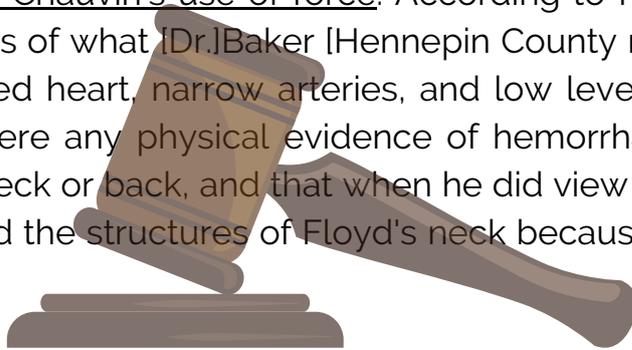
On May 25, 2020, 46-year-old George Floyd passed away after a police confrontation in Minneapolis, Minnesota. What followed was a weekslong trial that led to Chauvin being charged with three crimes: second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder, and second-degree manslaughter. After the trial ended, Chauvin appealed the guilty verdict.

The prosecution began Chauvin's trial with a discussion of the prerequisites associated with becoming a police officer and how Chauvin infringed on them by "employing unnecessary force or violence." Throughout the trial, the prosecutors zeroed in on the officer's time spent depriving his detainee of air, which they stated was 9 minutes and 29 seconds, as opposed to the recorded time of 8 minutes and 46 seconds.

The prosecution reasoned that the amount of time Chauvin's knee was on Floyd's neck triggered an anoxic seizure, which led to Floyd's death. "Mr. Floyd was no longer breathing when he's making these movements; you will learn about something, in this case, called an anoxic seizure. Not only that, you're going to learn about something that's called agonal breathing. When the heart has stopped, when blood is no longer coursing through the veins, you will hear the body gasp as an involuntary reflex," prosecution lawyer Jerry Blackwell told the jury at the trial.

"We'll point out to you when Mr. Floyd is having the agonal breathing again, as a reflex, involuntary reflex to the oxygen deprivation. So we learned here that Mr. Floyd, at some point, is completely passed out. Mr. Chauvin continues on as he had, knee on the neck, knee on the back. You'll see he does not let up, and he does not get up for the remaining, as you can see three minutes and 51 seconds."

The defense countered that the evidence collected against Chauvin wasn't enough for him to be considered guilty of Floyd's death. Chauvin's lawyers determined that Floyd passed away due to his use of drugs rather than Chauvin's use of force. According to NPR, "[Eric] Nelson [Chauvin's attorney] reminded jurors of what [Dr.] Baker [Hennepin County medical examiner] did find in Floyd's body: an enlarged heart, narrow arteries, and low levels of fentanyl and methamphetamine. Neither was there any physical evidence of hemorrhaging, bruising, or life-threatening injuries to Floyd's neck or back, and that when he did view the video, it didn't appear as if Chauvin's knee affected the structures of Floyd's neck because he was still able to move it around."



Before the trial came to a close, Democrat Maxine Waters publicly pushed for Chauvin's guilty conviction. The defense requested Judge Peter Cahill to declare a mistrial over Waters' comments. He argued that any polarizing say from an authority figure would inevitably sway the jury. While Cahill denied the request, he openly called Waters' remarks "abhorrent," disapproving her bias and potential influence on the jury.

As a result of the conviction, Chauvin could be facing years of prison time. However, his lawyers are using their initial arguments against Waters' statements to appeal for his conviction. Although the motion doesn't include information about Waters' statements, it includes the defense's belief that the jury felt threatened or felt race-biased pressure during the proceedings. Chauvin's attorney requested a new trial on "the interests of justice; abuse of discretion that deprived the Defendant of a fair trial; prosecutorial and jury misconduct; errors of law at trial; and a verdict that is contrary to law."



Photo used with permission from Google Commons

People gather at a Black Lives Matter protest.

Latest Headlines

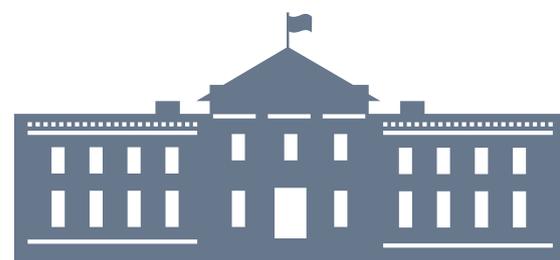
- Travis McMichael, Gregory McMichael, and Roddie Bryan were charged by a federal grand jury for murdering Ahmaud Arbery
- Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed an executive order lifting the mask mandate in Texas and increasing the capacity of all businesses and facilities in Texas to 100%.
- Three people were wounded in a shooting in Times Square on May 8.

Flickering Through

Lenses Articles You Need to Read

Read About Biden's Cabinet

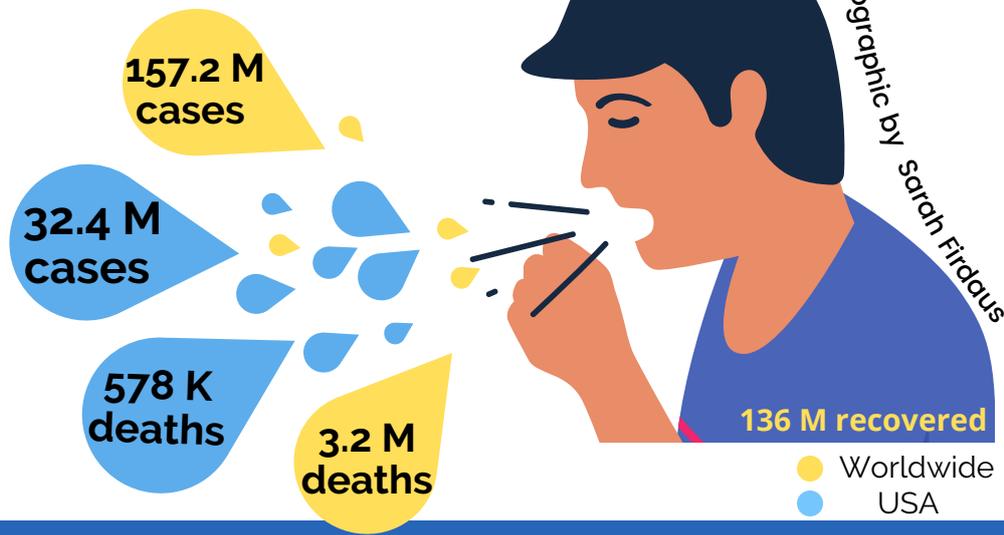
- Attorney General Merrick Garland
- Secretary of Defense General Lloyd Austin
- Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona
- Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm
- Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg



COVID-19 Updates

As of Saturday, May 8, 2021

Sources: CDC, NYT, Worldometer



Overview of U.S.'s Vaccination Campaign:

329 M

Total Doses Delivered

34.4 %

of Population Fully Vaccinated

259 M

Total Doses Administered

45.8 %

of Population with At Least One Dose

Infographic by Ben Ringel



CDC releases new guidelines

Samir Chowdhury

Due to the public implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a new set of [guidelines](#) on Monday, March 8. These guidelines outline activities that fully vaccinated individuals can pursue.

The public health recommendations inform the public of who is considered fully vaccinated and update fully vaccinated people about where it's safe for them to spend time without a mask. The guidelines do not apply to people who may have immunity protection after recovering from a prior coronavirus infection. According to the CDC, contact with unvaccinated people without wearing masks or social distancing is permitted if uninoculated individuals are at "low risk for severe disease."

Since these guidelines apply to one-on-one or small group interactions, fully vaccinated individuals must continue to take COVID-19 precautions in the general public or when around unvaccinated people at high risk of severe illness from the virus. The CDC still recommends that fully vaccinated individuals wear "well-fitted masks," practice social distancing, get tested for COVID-19 if they experience symptoms, and avoid "medium- and large-sized in-person gatherings."

FDA grants authorization of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine administration in children ages 12 to 15

Huda Naeem

Recently, Pfizer and BioNTech asked that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorize the COVID-19 vaccine administration for children aged 12 to 15. On May 10, federal government officials granted this authorization. The vaccine is now permitted for emergency use for people 12 and older in the U.S.

Prior to the authorization, the FDA reviewed trial information submitted by Pfizer and BioNTech to support the authorization. According to Pfizer, a clinical trial involving 2,260 12-to-15-year-olds showed the vaccine's efficacy as 100% in March. It was well tolerated in the test group, as well. The side effects seen in the group were similar to those seen among 16 to 25-year-olds. Common side effects of the vaccine include pain at the injection site, fever, and tiredness.

On May 5, Health Canada, Canada's national health policy department, authorized the Pfizer vaccine for 12 to 15-year olds. Canada is the first country to approve vaccinations for the age group.

Pfizer also announced that it expects to submit for FDA emergency authorization for its COVID-19 vaccine for children between the ages of 2 and 11 in September. The safety and efficacy trial for this age group is ongoing.

Moderna and Johnson & Johnson are currently testing their vaccines on individuals aged 12 to 18, and Moderna is expected to announce the results of its trials soon.

Dr. Buddy Creech, director of Vanderbilt University's Vaccine Research Program and an investigator in Moderna's pediatric trials, estimates that a vaccine could be available for high-risk kids 12 and older by late summer but likely won't be available for children 11 and younger until November or December.

Both vaccine manufacturers are also conducting trials with children between the ages of six months and 11 years. In the United Kingdom, AstraZeneca is testing its vaccine on children ages six to 17 to determine if it establishes an adequate immune response.

Experts in the U.S. anticipate that COVID-19 vaccines won't be available for children 11 and younger in time for the upcoming school year. According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, younger children may have to wait until the first quarter of 2022 to be eligible for the vaccine.

Opinion: Modi prioritizes public image over public health during coronavirus crisis

Simar Narula

As the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps through India, the country is deprived of medical oxygen for terminally ill patients and protection equipment for frontline workers. Hospitals are packed, and doctors are turning patients away due to the shortage of ICU beds and ventilators. Meanwhile, India is also facing a vaccine shortage even though it's "home to the world's largest vaccine manufacturer."

Last month, 8.3 million new cases erupted in the country, and every day the case count continues to surge. On Friday, May 7, India's daily death toll reached 4,194 deaths. What's worse is Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi fails the country by doing absolutely nothing to improve the situation.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic first emerged, Modi quickly issued a national lockdown and mandated mask-wearing and social distancing. For the first nine months, it seemed as if the country—with a population of 1.3 billion people—would be able to control the pandemic. But as the year came to a close, Modi turned his efforts toward the local and state elections.

As Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) worked to win the elections, he allowed the pandemic to worsen. Despite the apparent surge in cases, Modi chose not to consult India's national COVID-19 task force and went against the country's leading scientists' warnings of canceling massive political rallies and campaigns for the elections. As polling began in mid-March, states began to see their highest-ever single-day spike with close to 6,000 new cases.

The Indian government also chose to export millions of doses to other nations as part of the "vaccine diplomacy" program however failed to provide vaccines to its population. "government negligence, corporate profiteering, opaque contracting, and the inequities of the global pharma market combined to bring India to this moment of vaccine crisis."

Moreover, the prime minister allowed for Kumbh Mela—a Hindu festival in Haridwar where millions gathered to pray over three months—to take place. The super spreader event attracted large crowds in April and defied all social distancing guidelines. While devotees bathed in the Ganges River, "a number of people, including top saints," tested positive.

As Modi continues to boost his achievements, he quickly shuts down criticism against him or his party. The BJP has threatened the domestic press and newspapers, taken down social media posts that criticize the prime minister or request oxygen for dying patients, and Modi himself has slammed Australian newspapers for criticizing his handling of the pandemic.

However, Modi's attempt to censor the news and cover up the death toll does nothing to hide the disastrous state that India is in. Rather than investing in much-needed medical equipment, vaccines, and protective gear, he chooses to ignore expert opinions and focus on boosting his and his party's public image. In doing so, he plans to rebuild part of New Delhi; the makeover is estimated to cost billions; this is money he should be using to support India's economic fallout.

In a public address when India was on the brink of crisis, Modi claimed that India had beaten the virus and praised the huge crowds at a rally. The image of thousands of people unable to receive medical help and the hundreds and thousands of people dying on the streets contradicts Modi's words.

Oregon experiences influx of incoming cases

Anuj Khemka

Amidst the rapidly expanding vaccine rollout and diminishing COVID-19 cases, large swathes of the United States are in the final stages before returning to normalcy.

However, as COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Oregon at an alarming rate, reopenings no longer appear to be in sight. From early March to late April, cases of COVID-19 rose by greater than 20% each week, with the trend showing no signs of slowing down. As cases rise, so have the number of hospital beds populated due to COVID. From April 27 to May 4, hospitalization rates rose by 15%, with the total of hospitalized COVID-19 patients standing at 328 people. Among those, 90 patients find themselves fighting for their lives in intensive care units.

The uptick in Oregon is partially a result of recent delays in the state's vaccine rollout. On April 11, the state injected nearly 45,000 doses of the vaccine. Yet, since then, daily doses have starkly decreased, and on May 5, the state saw the lowest number of daily doses given since late March.

Now, restrictions have started to fall back in place. In response to the re-emergence of COVID-19 as a statewide threat, on April 27, Democratic Governor Kate Brown and her administration moved to designate 15 of the state's 36 counties as "extreme risk" areas, banning indoor dining and reducing capacity in gyms and entertainment areas. Though Brown loosened the restrictions a week later, she urged the people of Oregon to remain cautious.

"Let me be clear: across the state, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are still high, and Oregon is not out of the woods yet," Brown said. "As your governor, I chose to save lives."

Opinion: Student recounts pandemic learning experience

Reyhan Haider

The black computer screen stares at me as I slowly creep out of my bedsheets. I look to my left and see the rising sun greeting me like a long-lost friend. I glance at my clock; it's 8:37 AM.

With a burst of energy, I jump out of bed and rush to the bathroom, where I struggle to squeeze out the last bits of toothpaste. The clock reads 8:39 AM. Feeling rejuvenated with water dripping down my face, I speed walk to my desk just a few feet away and open the lid of my computer, wincing as the bright lights shine in my eyes.

Swiftly, my fingers go to work and type in that eight-letter combination of keys that has become engraved in my brain. My fingers continue to make steady strides across the smooth, sleek, silver surface of the mouse pad. I begin to worry as the screen freezes at 8:40 AM. Ms. Waltman must be taking attendance now; I make a prayer and hope that the page loads. My reflection stares at me in the preview just before the meeting window opens.

At last, the page loads; I turn off my camera and microphone and join the meeting.

"Reyhan?" The teacher calls out my name for attendance as soon as I join. I quickly unmute.

"Here," I say. With a sigh of relief, I started to zone out as the teacher calls out other students. My mind drifts back to just a year ago, thinking of the "good times." Being in school subdued all my worries. My mornings were filled with activity; I remember all the mornings when I ran to catch the bus, played basketball during open gym, and talked to my friends throughout the day.

"That's all for today, head over to your first block," the teacher bids us adieu. I head to my next class.



Photo used with permission from Google Commons

Classrooms remain empty as students attend classes virtually.

The rest of the day quickly passes.

As I reflect on the past seven months, I find myself startled at how much has changed; I'm unable to remember life before coronavirus. I was known as a student who asked many questions, actively participating in discussions. Now, I'm quieter; I've seen this change in myself and other students. Our levels of engagement during class have dropped.

Sometimes, I wonder what's the teachers' perspective; what do they have to say about this change? In many counties, including my own, schools have reopened, I decided to hold out for the rest of the year and remain distant. I hope that I can go to school and experience my freshman year in high school in the fall.

Now that both of my parents are vaccinated, I can spend some time outdoors, though I still have to wear a mask. Every time I meet someone that I haven't seen in a while, memories flood my mind. However, through all of what I have just said, I am incredibly grateful that I still have access to education and countless resources during a pandemic in which so many have suffered

COVID-19 Causes Colleges to Extend Test-Optional Policy

Claire Bauman

The pandemic has caused a drastic change to the college admissions system. This year, high-level colleges and universities offered students an option to apply test-optional and will be extending this policy for next year's high school seniors as well. Likely, this policy will not be changing anytime soon.

Applying test-optional allows applicants to submit applications without including standardized test scores if they cannot take the test due to the pandemic or fear that the score they earned isn't good enough for acceptance. This process encourages colleges to focus on other aspects of the student's profile, such as extracurricular activities, community service, and course rigor.

Schools that institute the test-optional policy include the Ivy League universities and various public and private universities. This past fall, the University of California system went test-blind. It will continue to omit SAT and ACT score evaluation as part of admissions for high school students for the following cycle.

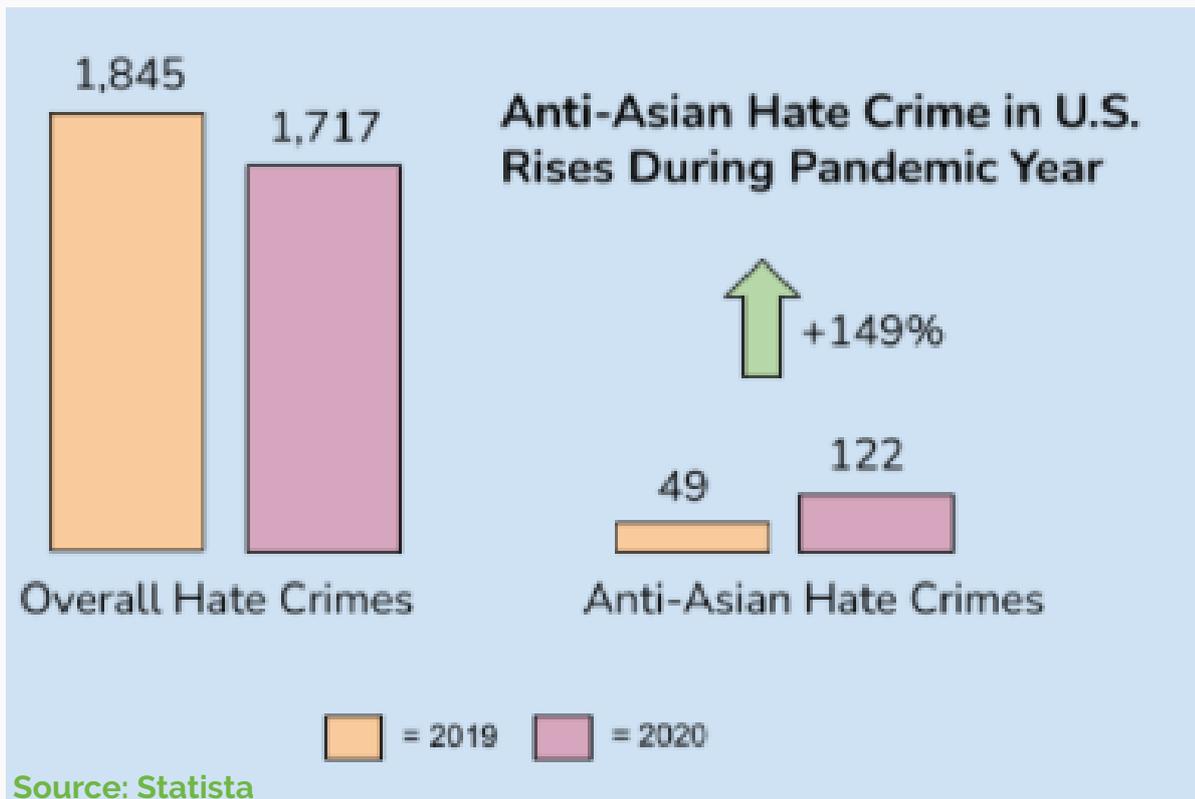
Even though admit rates plummeted this past year, there was an increase in applicants at selective colleges. Additionally, standardized testing often favours white men from affluent families. The test-optional policy caused a surge in women and students of color applying and being admitted into prestigious institutions. This added layer of college admissions will forever alter each college's approach to weeding through applications and choosing the next class of leaders.

Deep Cuts

Key topics of the month

Opinion: Political figures contributed to increase in hate crimes against Asian Americans during pandemic

Nirja Divekar



Infographic by Nirja Divekar

While America continues its battle against COVID-19, it is also battling a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans. The Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University released findings in early March that showed hate crimes against Asian Americans spiked 149% between 2019 and 2020.

While one race is being targeted, America supports the Asian American community through protests and social media awareness. Many protesters believe that American politicians have contributed to the rise in Asian American hate crimes. According to speeches, Twitter posts, and interviews, former President Donald Trump has specifically been accused of saying racist remarks about Asian Americans as the pandemic began.

What began as casual racism directed toward Asian American accents has now escalated to become direct hate crimes. The Senate will vote Wednesday on a bill aiming to combat a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told CNBC.

Although there has been an increase in AAPI hate crimes this past year, racism has been an ongoing problem for years. One of the largest mass lynchings in U.S. history took place in Los Angeles (L.A.) in 1871, when 18 Chinese residents, 10% of the Chinese population in L.A. at the time, were killed by a white mob. In 1875, the Page Act was passed to “end the danger of cheap Chinese labor and immoral Chinese women,” becoming the first federal exclusionary law in the U.S. By stereotyping Chinese women as prostitutes, this early law institutionalized the sexualization and objectification of Asian American women. Many Asian Americans have been continually facing racism and being targeted for something they simply cannot change about themselves: their skin color.

As the hate crime rate rises once again, we should promote inclusivity and community. As the public becomes more aware of the situation, legislation has a better chance of passing.

Legal officials are not required to charge an incident as a hate crime if there isn't identifiable evidence that race motivated the attacker. But for the community that is being targeted, the hate crime charge may be more critical.

We can all take a moment to stand by our Asian American friends and spread awareness of the dire situation at hand. Small actions make a difference. The faster we are educated, the quicker we can put these hate crimes to an end. Lastly, remember not to generalize a worldwide disease toward a particular group of people. Imagine how you'd feel if you were the group targeted.

Previous incidents were prosecuted as hate crimes, such as a woman in the Bronx who was hit on the head with an umbrella as her attackers used anti-Asian American remarks. Other incidents may not have resulted in official charges, such as yelling racist slurs.

In response to the escalation of hate crimes during the pandemic, community groups and the Asian American Studies Department of San Francisco State formed Stop AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) Hate. The group invites Asian Americans who have experienced hate to report the incidents. Stop AAPI Hate cataloged nearly 3,800 hateful incidents, not limited to crimes, during the first year of the pandemic.

U.S. Representative Grace Meng, D-N.Y., and Senator Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, introduced a bill in March to designate a Justice Department employee to expedite the review of COVID-19 hate crimes.

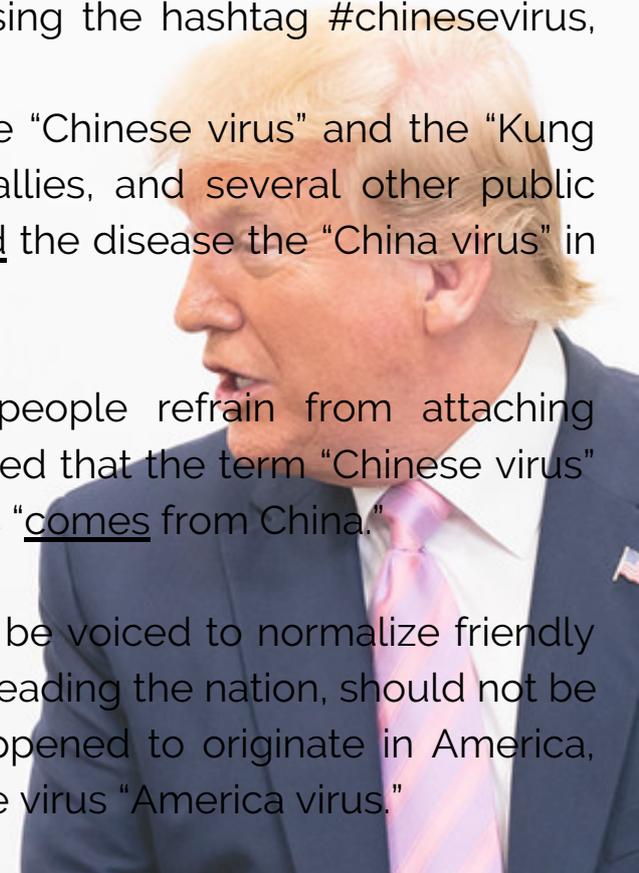
As mentioned earlier, many citizens believe that the increased racism in the United States stemmed from former Trump, as he routinely used racist slurs to refer to COVID-19. He also frequently blames China, where the virus originated, to deflect his response to the pandemic.

The World Health Organization urged people to avoid terms like the “Wuhan virus” or the “Chinese virus,” fearing that it would cause a backlash against Asian Americans. On March 16, 2020, he first tweeted the phrase “Chinese virus.” That tweet led to the exact backlash that the WHO had feared. It was followed by an avalanche of tweets from Trump supporters using the hashtag #chinesevirus, among other anti-Asian American phrases.

Trump repeatedly referred to the disease as the “Chinese virus” and the “Kung flu” during White House briefings, campaign rallies, and several other public appearances. A month ago, he once again called the disease the “China virus” in an interview with Fox News’s Maria Bartiromo.

Despite public health experts’ request that people refrain from attaching locations or ethnicity to the disease, Trump argued that the term “Chinese virus” was not discriminatory or racist because the virus comes from China.”

While some argue that political opinions should be voiced to normalize friendly debate, a familiar political figure, especially one leading the nation, should not be targeting a race while doing so. If the virus happened to originate in America, Trump would be deflecting comments calling the virus “America virus.”



Opinion: Extensive change is needed to solve U.S. border crisis

Siddharth Kondam

In the initial stages of the Biden presidency, the president was hoping to roll back on former President Trump's immigration policies, citing them to be a source of the "humanitarian crisis at our border." On Inauguration Day, Biden issued five immigration executive orders and promised an efficient system that prioritized the safety of immigrants. Months later, Biden faces a more daunting situation at the U.S - Mexico Border than his predecessor.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened conditions for impoverished communities, especially those in Central American countries, where most unauthorized immigrants hail from.

Last year alone, the virus was the main reason 45.4 million individuals in Central America were forced into poverty. Today, many Central Americans experience violence in their home countries coupled with the deteriorating economic climate. Although they have declined in recent years, homicide rates in many Central American countries are also among the highest in the world. Due to the many risks they face in their respective countries, many view the U.S. as their last hope.

This March, the Mexican-American border experienced the most significant surge in migrants in the last two decades, with 172,000 people apprehended by border officials. The majority of those attempting to cross the border come from Mexico and Central American countries, such as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. The influx has caused a significant strain on the U.S border system. Due to this, Biden's actions have been criticized across the aisle. Although Biden has created executive orders that have combated Trump's "zero-tolerance" policies and made the immigration process more humane, his administration has allowed unaccompanied minors into the country, one of the primary reasons for the surge in immigrants.

To solve the situation at the border, we must acknowledge that accepting all illegal immigrants will not be beneficial for the United States. Primarily, it dissuades those from applying legally to become citizens of the country. Letting illegal immigration go unchecked has and will continue to cause problems in the U.S.

Most importantly, the loss of tax revenue hampers governmental programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Without the tax dollars that come in from many of the jobs occupied by illegal immigrants, the revenue that is supposed to fund programs vital for many Americans will be drastically cut.

However, passing immigration reform and holding border officials accountable are the two primary steps needed to revitalize our immigration process in the post-Trump era. Creating a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants would ensure that they are registered by the government and attain governmental benefits.

Our current immigration system has been far too restrictive. The U.S.'s net immigration rate ranks in the bottom third of the 50 countries with the highest per-capita GDP in the world. Opening up legal immigration to a greater extent will also deter people from illegally entering the nation.

Along with immigration reform, holding those in charge of our border systems is essential. In recent years, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has routinely violated the rights of immigrant detainees. While abolishing ICE doesn't seem to be a viable solution, overhauling the agency and creating changes from top to bottom is needed to protect immigrants. Increasing oversight from Congress to oversee investigations and reallocating funds to migrant facilities and adequate training is necessary to end the border crisis for the long term.

Although Biden has faced criticism from all sides, taking action by working in the best interest of our country and the migrants at our border can be a stepping stone to sustained prosperity at the border.



Photo used with permission from Google Commons

People around world observe cultural, religious festivals

Jahnavee Chakravarty

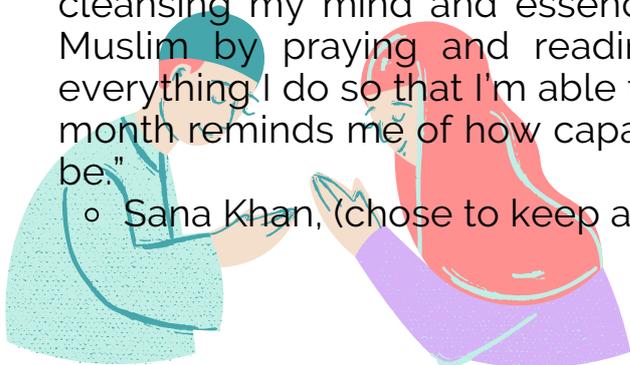
In the past few months, people around the globe celebrated cultural festivals and observed religious practices:

- Purim is a Jewish festival that celebrates the defeat of Haman's plan to murder the Jewish people in Persia. The festival took place on February 26. During the day, the Jewish community offered charity and spent time together. In some parts of the world, children listen to the story of Esther, Mordecai, and Haman via the Megillah during Purim. Observers also follow an old custom of wearing costumes and masks.
- On March 1, the Welsh people wore "one or both of the national emblems of Wales, a daffodil or a leek," to celebrate the feast day of St. David. He was the patron saint of the country who helped spread Christianity among Celtic tribes in western Britain. Traditionally, the National St. David's Parade, which features numerous artistic performances, takes place in Cardiff, the country's capital. Various local towns and villages also host their own additional parades and concerts.
- Clean Monday marked the beginning of the holy season of Great Lent on March 15 in the Eastern Orthodox Christian community. The word "clean" comes from the thought that the religious celebration should be initiated with clean hearts and good intentions throughout the fast. This is a period of 40 days between the beginning and end of Lent that signifies the number of days Jesus fasted in the desert. However, believers of Western Christianity don't count Sundays (the day Jesus had been resurrected). On the first day of Great Lent, many Christians observe a strict fast with no food from midnight to noon and no meat overall.
- St. Patrick's Day is an Irish holiday that recognizes Ireland patron saint St. Patrick who introduced Christianity to the country's inhabitants in the fifth century. On March 17, people attended religious services and prepared large feasts consisting of corned beef and cabbage to honor St. Patrick. The color green is an essential theme during this festival as it relates to the traditional folklore of leprechauns pinching anyone they can see (i.e., non-green things).
- Nowruz, the first day of the Iranian new year, encourages peace and contributes to better relations and friendships between different cultural communities. Held on March 21, Nowruz marks the beginning of spring and demonstrates respect towards nature as an overall entity.

- Holi is the annual spring religious festival celebrated on March 28. This festival is celebrated in countries like India, which have large Hindu and Sikh populations. People light bonfires the day before Holi to commemorate the destruction of evil. The day of the festival consists of people putting powdered paint, or “gulal,” and water on each other to commemorate Prahlada, an important figure in Hindu mythology, whose story “marks the win of good over evil.” Holi is one of the oldest Indian festivals celebrated and is mentioned in various ancient religious scripts that date back to the seventh century.
- This year, Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, began on April 12. Throughout this month, Muslims abstain from eating or drinking (yes, even water) from the break of dawn till sunset to come closer to God and to spiritually rejuvenate themselves. Although fasting is mandatory for Muslims during Ramadan, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, children, sick people, and the elderly are exempted from fasting.

Through Teen Lenses: How do you observe cultural, religious holidays in your households?

- “Every year, family friends get together, and we all play with colored powder and throw it on each other. We always have tons of food, and other activities are carried out too, like throwing eggs at one another.”
 - Arna Banerjee, 15, Sophomore at Walter Johnson High School, North Bethesda, MD
- “On days we don’t have school during Ramadan, we try to spend nights at the Mosque, praying and making friendships with people that we otherwise wouldn’t have the opportunity to. For Iftar, I help my mom whip up some Bengali dishes like Chola, Piaju, and Pakora!”
 - Sameeha Malek, 17, Senior at Thomas S. Wootton High School, Rockville, MD
- “We dress up in costumes of people in the Purim story and exchange gifts, so it’s a little like Halloween. We also put on plays called “schpiels” that tell the story of Purim. Any time you hear the word “Haman,” which is the name of the bad guy of the story, you’re supposed to yell “boo” and shake a noise-making instrument called grogger. We also make hamantaschen: little triangle-shaped cookies with filling in the middle. The shape comes from Haman’s hat.”
 - Madeleine Press, 15, Sophomore at Thomas S. Wootton High School, Rockville, MD
- “Ramadan is the month where my soul feels closest to God and where I work on cleansing my mind and essence. I spent Ramadan trying to become a better Muslim by praying and reading the Quran more. I try to find meaning in everything I do so that I’m able to create a deeper connection with my faith. This month reminds me of how capable I am and how much better of a person I can be.”
 - Sana Khan, (chose to keep age, school, grade, location anonymous)





Penny Points

Economy Updates

Biden, Democrats propose infrastructure spending

Ahan Patani

This month, President Biden announced the Democrats' new 2.2 trillion-dollar infrastructure plan, which has stirred recent controversies in the political world. Firstly, the Democrats stretch the limit of the definition of the word "infrastructure," proposing for the bill to include funding for broadband internet, Medicare, and environmental regulations.

Furthermore, the bill would be the second significant spending initiative this year, following the almost as expensive as 1.9 trillion-dollar American Rescue Plan. Republicans have responded to their liberal counterparts' proposal with discouragement, citing the risks relating to the federal spending deficit, which is already high. There are also concerns regarding the bill's potential impact on businesses, considering that the Democrats' primary means of paying for the package would include hiking the corporate tax rate to 28% from the current amount of 21%.

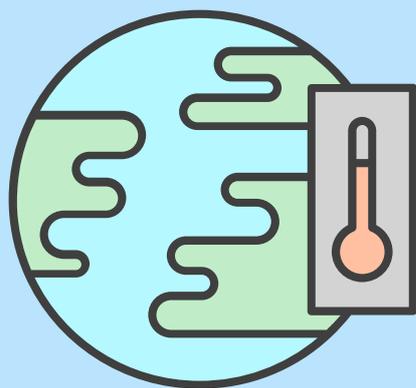
Opposition to hiking the corporate tax rates comes predominantly from groups that believe that corporate tax rates hinder business growth and employment, which are already in dire situations considering the economic impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

At this time, it appears that the bill is unlikely to pass in the split Senate due to moderate Democrats' similar concerns to those of Republicans regarding the amount of money that the federal government is spending and the impacts of raising taxes by amounts such as those proposed in the bill. Below is a list of the pros and cons of the package.

Biden's Infrastructure Plan

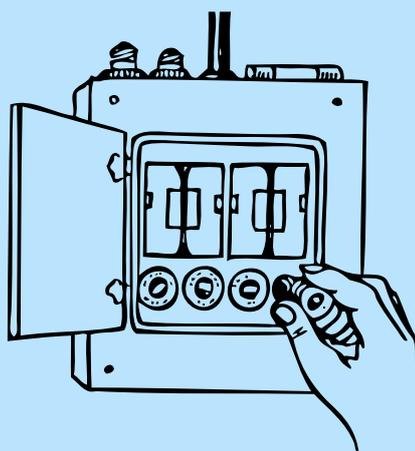
Pros

Funds significant improvements in broadband internet access and medicare.



Provides funds to address climate change.

Improves pressing problems such as broken roads, bridges, and tunnels, as well as issues with water and electrical systems.



Cons

Costs \$2.2 trillion



May drive existing jobs out of the U.S.



Would require increases in the corporate tax rate, which can hurt businesses.



Infographic by Ahan Patani, Sarah Firdaus

Listen to Lenses' podcast series "Washington Through Teen Lenses" to hear opinions from teens about Biden's infrastructure plan. Available now on Google Podcasts, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Overcast, Breaker, and Castbox!



The Latest Staff

Newsletter Director, Editor: Sarah Firdaus

Staff Writers: Ahan Patani, Ben Ringel, Claire Bauman, Jahnavee Chakravarty, Nirja Divekar, Reyhan Haider, Sheoli Lele, Siddharth Kondam

Guest Contributors: Huda Naeem, Simar Narula, Anuj Khemka, Samir Chowdhury