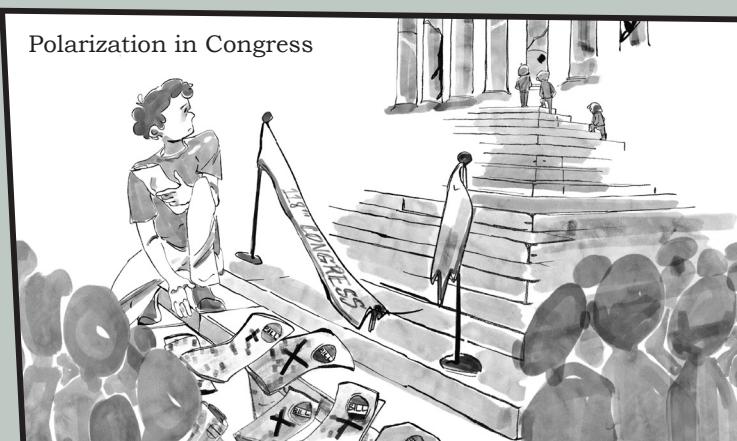
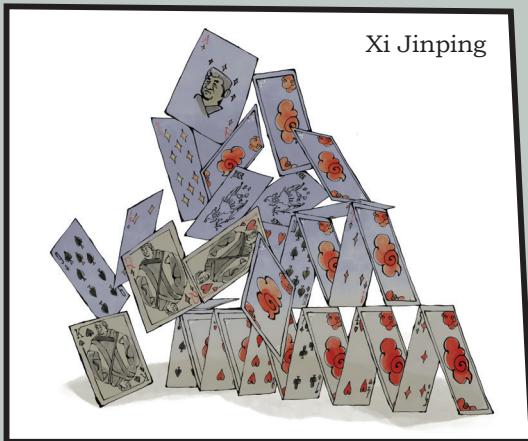
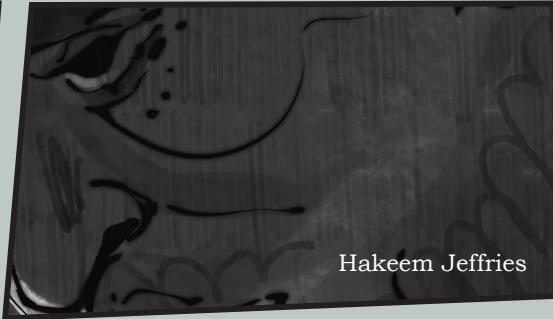
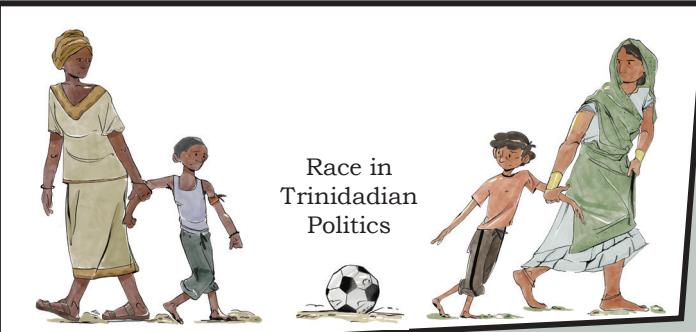


Happy Medium Magazine



Winter 2023
Vol. 1, iss. 3



2023
Winter Edition

Vol. 1 | issue 3

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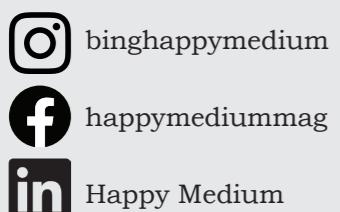


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Want to join our writing team? Scan this QR code to submit an application.



happy medium — a satisfying compromise; an impossible standard.

Happy Medium's mission is to create a space for all Binghamton University students to respectfully and productively discuss the politics of our nation and world.

Compromise is a requisite of progress. We weigh what we are willing to lose against the potential gain. This process can give us clarity about what is most important to us.

A special thanks to the Student Association Finance Committee for making this edition of Happy Medium Magazine possible.



Dear Reader,

I'm proud to present the third edition of Happy Medium Magazine! It has now been over a year since we started Happy Medium, and we've come a long way due to the continuous support of the Binghamton University Student Association and the students, faculty, and staff.

This edition is special due to the six custom pieces of art created by our Resident Artist, Rhea Da Costa. Featured on the cover and throughout the issue, Rhea's art ties in the narrative elements of each article to create beautiful visuals. See her work on pages 9, 13, 16, 17, 22, 25, and 28.

The editing team is very excited to share the content of this edition. The articles featured here showcase our team's diverse skillset in political writing, including an interview with a student candidate, a profile on House Minority Leader and Binghamton alum Hakeem Jeffries, a Supreme Court case review, an analysis on the reelection of Chinese President Xi Jinping, an inquiry into the cause of polarization in America, and a first-hand investigation into racial tension in Trinidadian politics.

Sincerely,

Trevor Fornara
Editor in Chief, 2022-23

Senior Administrative Team



Trevor Fornara, Editor in Chief, is a senior from Mystic, Connecticut, majoring in philosophy, politics, and law. Trevor is a founding member of the Happy Medium Executive Editing Team, serving as its first Editor in Chief. He works as the Communications and Outreach Coordinator at the Binghamton University Undergraduate Research Center and is a member of the design team at Harpur Edge. During his first year at Binghamton University, Trevor participated in

the Source Project, where he investigated the effects of the university on the city's housing market and was published in *Alpenglow: Binghamton University Undergraduate Journal of Research and Creative Activity* in October 2022. Last summer, Trevor was a participant in the Summer Scholars and Artists Program, receiving funding to create the first print edition of Happy Medium Magazine.



Bryan Goodman, Political Director, consults with writers and the editing team about specific pieces that could potentially be hot-button issues. Bryan also serves as Happy Medium's Head Writer for Elections. He is a recent graduate of Binghamton University's Masters of Public Administration program.

Bryan is from Valhalla, NY where he attended Westchester Community College for two years before transferring to BU to complete his undergraduate studies in political science. Bryan is passionate about judicial politics and a variety of social/economic issues. Bryan hopes to one day be fortunate enough to positively impact as many lives as possible.



Briana Lopez-Patino, Managing Editor, is a senior philosophy major born in Lima, Peru and raised in Rochester, NY. Briana is a founding member of the Happy Medium Executive Editing Team, serving as its first managing editor. She also serves as vice president of the Interdisciplinary Research Club, a Program Assistant for the Emerging Leaders Program, a Research Assistant for the Human Sexualities Lab, a Trainee at the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics, and the Co-Chair of Bioethics Education for the National Student Bioethics Association. She plans to earn a PhD in philosophy and aspires to be a professor, bioethicist, and clinical ethics consultant.



Arwen O'Brien, Marketing Editor, is a philosophy, politics, and law major. She works for the Student Association at Binghamton and is the Membership Communications Chair for Binghamton's Ski and Snowboard Club. Arwen is a founding member of the Happy Medium Executive Editing Team, serving as its first marketing editor. Arwen grew up in Argentina and England but now lives in Westchester, NY. She is minoring in and is fluent in Spanish.



Amanda Escotto, Lead Editor, is a copy-editor for Happy Medium Magazine as well as the lead editor for Happy Medium's High School Magazine Development Program (HSMDP). She is an undergraduate studying political science at Binghamton University and a candidate for a Master of Public Administration through the university's 4+1 program. She is from Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, and loves to listen to music and paint in her free time. Over the last year, Amanda worked on two congressional campaigns and gained experience in driving political mobilization and strategic campaign operations. Amanda is especially passionate about congressional politics, elections, and public policy, as well as issues relating to reproductive rights, immigration, and representation. She plans to dedicate her career to the public sector.

Writers and Designers



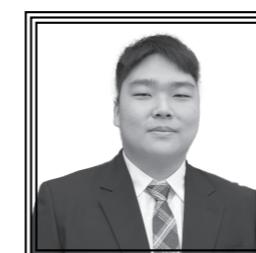
Rachael Ali, Head Writer for Foreign Affairs, is a third-year undergraduate student from the Bronx majoring in political science with a double-minor in Spanish and French. Rachael's goal is to attend law school and become an international lawyer. This past summer, Rachael was an intern political journalist at Happy Medium. Topics that Rachael is passionate about include immigration, reproductive rights, indigenous communities, gun laws, and environmental justice.



Joseph Brugellis is a freshman from New Hyde Park, NY, on Long Island who intends to double-major in history and philosophy, politics, and law. After graduation, Joseph plans to go onto law school and hopes to one day be appointed as a federal judge. Joseph is passionate about the American judicial branch and is deeply interested in how different interpretative philosophies held by judges shape constitutional law. During summer 2022, Joseph worked as an intern in the office of state Senator Anna M. Kaplan. In his free time, Joseph enjoys reading, listening to music, and exploring nature.



Benji Hoff is a sophomore from Stamford, Connecticut. He is majoring in philosophy, politics, and law and plans to attend law school after graduating. Benji was a part of the Source Project at BU, a year-long research program for first-year students. In the Source Project's History and Capitalism stream, he studied many contemporary political theorists and philosophers, culminating in a research paper on Jewish and capitalist ideology. In his free time, Benji loves to play and watch sports; he is a diehard Mets fan! He also plays guitar and is an avid listener of classic rock and roll music.



Geonha Lim is a sophomore from South Korea, majoring in political science and business administration with a minor in genocide and mass atrocity prevention. Interested in global humanitarian issues, he wishes to extend his high school model UN experience and be a real UN diplomat one day. In addition to writing for Happy Medium, Geonha is a participant in Binghamton University's PwC Scholars Program and the American Parliamentary Debate Association. Geonha is interested in foreign affairs and likes to read and talk with his friends in his free time.



Ellie Michaud, Layout Editor, is a third-year undergraduate student pursuing a major in graphic design and a double-minor in computer science and digital & data studies. Her goal, after changing majors four times, is to cultivate a unique combination of skills in computer science, data analytics, marketing, and design. She was born in GuangXi, China, but grew up in the Bronx, New York. She works for the Binghamton University Student Association and is a member of the Gymnastics Club and the Swimming and Diving club.



Rhea Da Costa, Resident Artist, is a third-year undergraduate student pursuing art and design with a major in drawing and minor in cinema. She intends to continue with illustration work in publications post graduation while always attempting to break into the animation industry for character design and storyboards. She was born in Goa, India, but grew up in New York, now in the Bronx. She works as a graphic designer for Binghamton University's Harpur Edge. Rhea's art is featured on pages 9, 13, 16, 17, 22, 25, and 28 of this edition.

Student Candidate Chance Fiorisi Stakes His Claim for Binghamton City Council

BU undergraduate aims to knock on every door in the district with the goal of building a grassroots campaign.

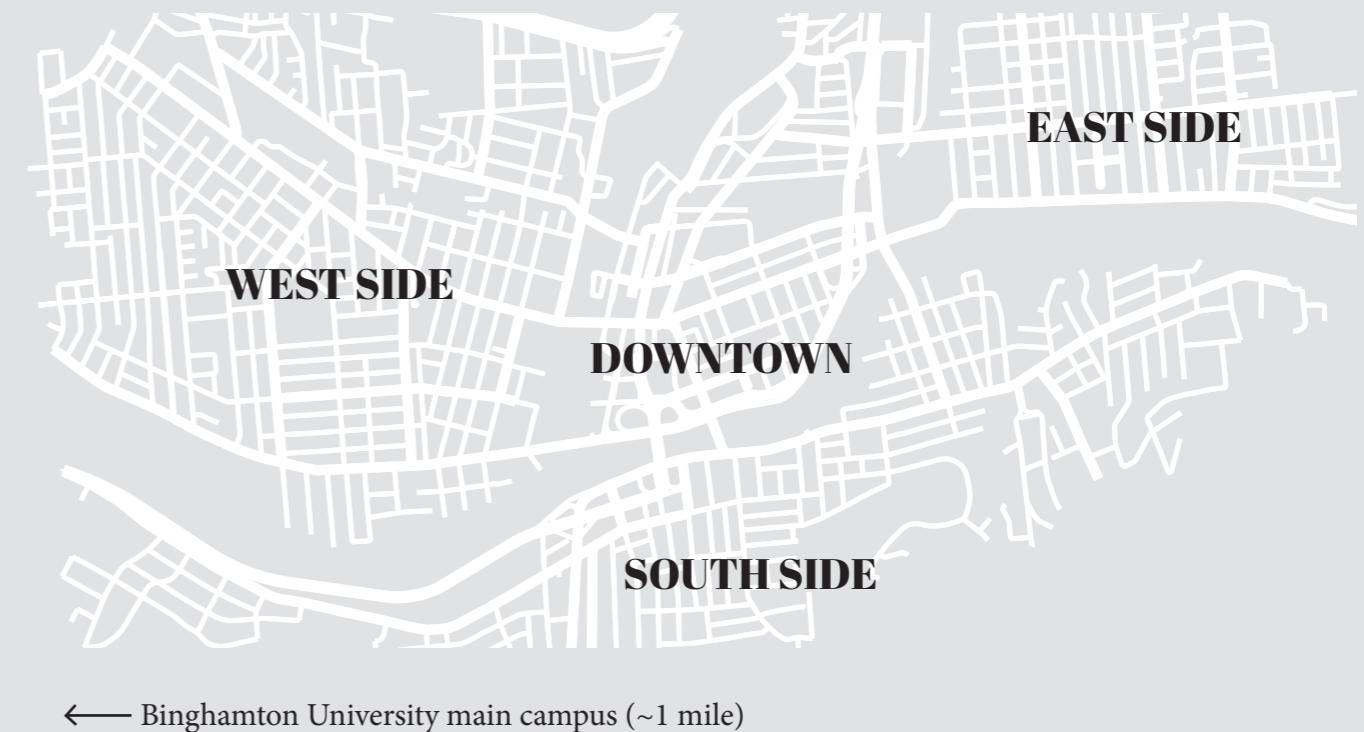
By Bryan Goodman, Political Director

It is not often that college students run for elected office in the towns where they go to school. However, in the city of Binghamton, this has happened before and is happening again. Binghamton University undergraduate Chance Fiorisi is running for the Binghamton City Council during the 2023 election cycle. He is running in the third district which is located on Binghamton's West Side. Fiorisi is also the president of Binghamton University's College Democrats chapter. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to speak with the candidate about his background, motivation to run, qualifications, and the policy issues he is campaigning on.

Fiorisi, a sophomore at Binghamton University studying political science, aspires to stay at the university to receive his Master of Public Administration. He is originally from Dutchess County, New York. His father is a painter, and his mother is a dietary aide who he has worked with when home on

breaks. Fiorisi indicated that it is difficult for people like him to run for office for multiple reasons, but namely because he is young, which means he does not have a lot of money to spend on the campaign. He also does not have a set career at the moment because he is a student and does not come from wealth. He placed emphasis on the fact that he is a student and could be focusing all of his energy on academics or partying every weekend. Running a campaign is a demanding task, and it will require great discipline from Fiorisi and his team.

Fiorisi also acknowledged that, since he is a student running for office, his candidacy may not be the most appealing to voters within the city. In response to that, he said, "... I know I'm running for city council simply because I believe that we need to bring vigor and a new breath of fresh air to city council." A pro-choice advocate, Fiorisi initially got the idea to run for city council last May



← Binghamton University main campus (~1 mile)

when the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* Supreme Court decision was leaked.

Two key issues Fiorisi discussed during our time together had to do with the recent rezoning laws on the West Side of Binghamton, and the city council's redistricting, which Fiorisi called "an example of extreme political gerrymandering." The student-dominant West Side housing has been an issue that has attracted predatory landlords while also pricing out permanent residents in the area, leading to constant tenant turnover in this area of the city.

He plans to run in the newly drawn third district. This district is currently represented by Angela Riley (D), but she will not be running for re-election in 2023, creating a vacancy on the city council. Due to this vacancy, an incumbency advantage will not be in play. This city council seat will be an open contest, leaving room for political outsiders to come

in, captivate the electorate, and unexpectedly win an election. This poses a risk to Fiorisi's candidacy, as he could not be received well by the local electorate, allowing what is expected to be a safe seat for Democrats to fall into the hands of the Republicans on the city council. Many young adults and college-aged students live within this district, allowing Fiorisi to build stronger connections with the residents he would be representing. However, there may be some difficulties regarding the electorate within the district due to students that are registered to vote at an outdated address from the previous academic year, not registered to vote in Binghamton, or not registered to vote at all.

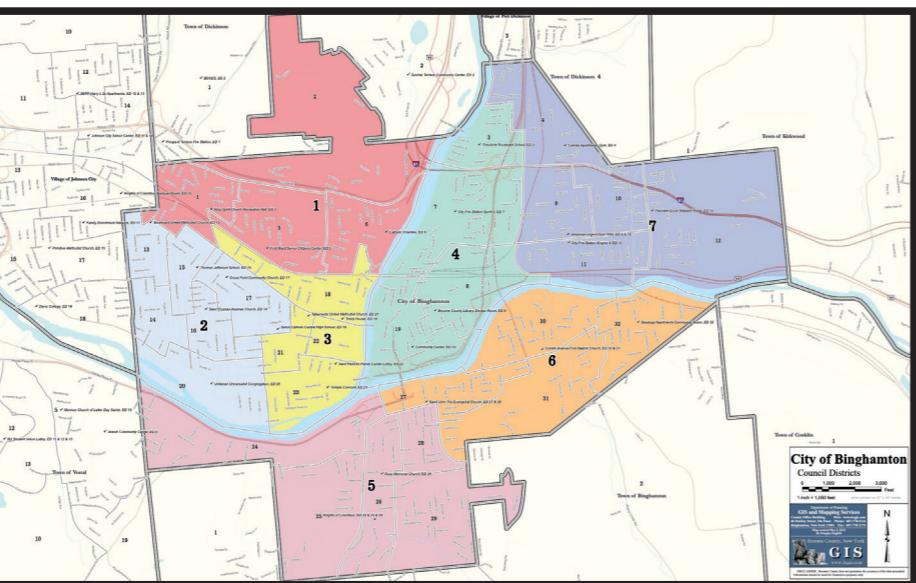
Fiorisi is running as a Democrat, and his involvement through Binghamton College Democrats has helped him build connections and position himself well for a run for city council. I asked him if he had been in contact with the Broome County Democrats and

the Binghamton Democrats regarding his candidacy. As the president of Binghamton College Democrats, Fiorisi has a seat on the Broome County Democratic Committee. He also sat down with members of the Binghamton Democratic Committee and discussed necessary changes in candidate recruitment. For local elections, the committees typically engage in an outreach process to field individuals interested in running for office. He said that his intent to run for office was generally well received and accepted, and he is very thankful to the city committee for being so cordial to him.

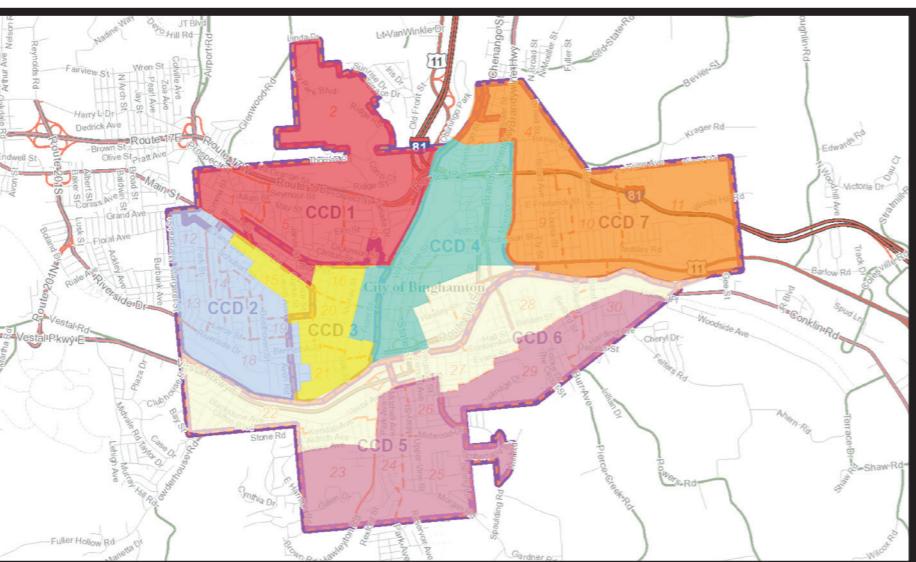
When asked about his coalition-building and electoral strategy, as well as its reliance on students, Fiorisi responded that he is not just running a city council campaign for students—he is running to represent every inhabitant of district three. He acknowledges that, while the district has a student-heavy population, permanent residents and families are living within this district as well. His canvassing strategy includes knocking on every door within the district throughout the summertime if he faces a Democratic primary opponent and picking right back up again in the fall as the general election approaches. Fiorisi displayed confidence that he could win the Democratic nomination for the seat.

When asked about the biggest issues facing the city, the housing crisis was at the top of his list. He points out that the city's population has been in a steady decline and

Current City Council District Map



New City Council District Map



that the city government is not doing enough for people who want to move to Binghamton and build their lives and families here. The lack of affordable housing prices out potential residents and drives away families looking for somewhere to settle down and start a life.

Fiorisi's main platform consists of ensuring roads are built, focusing on crime, and making sure local businesses are growing and have the potential to thrive.



He recognizes that there needs to be proper incentive structures for the businesses in the area to succeed. When I asked about his position on police funding, Fiorisi said, “I just want to make it clear that I, specifically, do not full-on support, just the notion of defunding the police. I don’t like the whole idea that goes behind that.” Continuing on the topic of police reform, Fiorisi stated: “The main issue I have with talking about police is that we need police reform, we need to make sure that police officers are well connected within the community, and we need to make sure that the community isn’t afraid of police officers.” He acknowledged that this concept goes much deeper than the city council’s politics and governance and that it requires time and commitment to achieve such goals. As our discussion on crime continued, it started to shift towards some root causes of crime, including the lack of affordable housing as well as unstable sources of income. Fiorisi believes that one-step solutions—such as adding more police officers or providing other singular mechanisms of relief—are unlikely to result in consistently lower crime rates in the city.

In terms of general campaign strategy, Fiorisi has emphasized the importance of being on the ground in the district rather than building a community of support solely online. This is important because, while some portions of his potential constituency may be online—younger, college-aged students—the permanent residents in the district may not be as present on social media platforms where Fiorisi is advertising himself. He hopes to knock on every door at least twice, possibly three times.

Continuing on the topic of social media, when asked about how a politician’s presence online may impact their decision-making, Fiorisi emphasized that he wants to be as accessible to his constituents as possible. The importance of making decisions for your constituents and what is in their best interest after weighing all of the potential positives

and negatives of certain actions is a value he hopes to employ if elected.

I asked Fiorisi what his priorities would be during his first year on the council if elected. He mentioned the redevelopment/repurposing of an abandoned plaza off of Main Street to attract new businesses and to “revive the community.” He is also focused on fixing and removing potholes that are notorious across the West Side of Binghamton. When asked about particular business incentives and the extraction of money out of the local economy by large national companies, he expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of big corporations coming into Binghamton and buying up the spaces that local businesses may otherwise be able to utilize. He mentioned the potential for tax incentives, partnerships with municipal agencies, and whatever else is necessary to attract economic growth.

I wrapped up the interview by asking Fiorisi what he hopes his lasting legacy would be if elected to serve on the city council. He said he hopes to be remembered for doing everything possible to get his constituents’ needs heard and their voices brought to the table. He wants them to feel heard, loved, and appreciated by the city council.

Fiorisi also has an incredible opportunity for wordplay off his first name—Chance—for a brilliant campaign slogan, and his communications team has produced several. The current leading contender is “A Chance for Binghamton.”

Leading the way for a new era of political leaders from Generation Z has been a hot topic since the 2022 midterms saw the election of the first Gen Z congressman, Maxwell Frost (D-FL). Chance Fiorisi has an opportunity to build off of Frost’s momentum and propel Generation Z further into the most important discussions in communities across the country.

Binghamton University Alum Hakeem Jeffries Becomes New House Minority Leader in Democratic Leadership Shakeup

By Amanda Escotto, Lead Editor

The introduction of the 118th Congress has come with a new minority leader: Hakeem Jeffries of New York. Nominated as the first Black congressman to lead a political party in Congress, Jeffries has already pushed boundaries previously unexplored in congressional politics. Hakeem Jeffries has a special place in the heart of the Binghamton University community, completing his bachelor’s degree at the university in 1992 (Ellis 2022). With Jeffries becoming more prominent in American politics now than ever before, Happy Medium offers a profile of the congressman as a politician and as a Binghamton alum.

Jeffries is a Brooklynite, born and raised. He grew up in Crown Heights with his parents Marland Jeffries, a substance abuse counselor, and Laneda Gomes Jeffries, a social worker. He is a product of the New York City public school system, graduating from Midwood High School in 1988. After graduating from Binghamton University in 1992, Jeffries went on to earn a Master of Public Policy from Georgetown University in 1994. He did not stop there; by 1997, he graduated with a Juris Doctorate from the New York University School of Law (“Hakeem Jeffries Fast Facts” 2023).

While working towards his undergraduate degree at Binghamton University, Jeffries immersed himself in the Binghamton community, both inside and outside of the

classroom. He recalled being named head of his pledge line and how it impacted his ability to see himself as a leader, sharing that it was “one of the first moments as a teenager when someone else seemed to think there was some measure of leadership in [him]” (“Jeffries is in the House” 2013). He later served as president of that fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, during his junior and senior year at Binghamton (“Jeffries is in the House” 2013), and he was also an engaged member of the Black Student Union here on campus (Ellis 2022). Being the minority leader requires an extraordinarily developed set of leadership skills, and Jeffries has credited Binghamton University and the experiences it brought him for the development of his personal confidence and ability to lead assuredly. He has since continued to discuss his time at Binghamton University, which he fondly refers to as “bingo”, as a place that provided him with the environment and opportunity to receive a foundation of knowledge about public service and government (Ellis 2022).

After graduating from NYU Law School and before his career in the New York State Assembly, Jeffries briefly dabbled in a career as a lawyer (“Factbox” 2022). From there, Jeffries served in the State Assembly for six years, from 2007 to 2012 (Congressman Hakeem Jeffries 2022). It was in the Assembly that he began his growth as a political figure. Jeffries championed a variety of notable issues

such as affordable housing and policing, namely opposition to the controversial “Stop and Frisk” practice in New York City subways (“Factbox” 2022).

Throughout Jeffries’ nine years in Congress representing New York’s 8th district he served on several committees, including the House Judiciary Committee and the House Budget Committee (“Committees” 2022). By 2019, Jeffries had become the 5th highest-ranking Democrat after being appointed as chair of the House Democratic Caucus. As Democratic caucus chair, Jeffries was tasked with forming the “Caucus Issues Task Forces—through which legislative and party policy is developed and communicated” (“Who We Are” 2022). He also appointed members to lead each task force.

For the last several years of Jeffries’ time in office serving New York’s 8th district, his campaigns have outlined priorities such as more affordable housing, healthcare, and education (“Issues” 2022). Jeffries’ election as House minority leader makes him the first Black congressman to lead a political party in Congress. Although this milestone is notable, it is not his first time making congressional history. Jeffries began to substantially rise in popularity in January 2020 when former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi appointed him as one of seven impeachment managers that acted as prosecutors in the Senate’s first impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump, becoming the first Black man to assume this role (*Congressman Hakeem Jeffries* 2022). The national recognition he received as an impeachment manager and his continuous legislative efforts boosted him closer to the speakership.

Following Hakeem Jeffries’ election as minority leader on November 30, 2022, a number of prominent New York political figures expressed their approval, satisfied with having a New Yorker and Brooklyn local leading the Democratic Party in Congress.

“There is no better advocate for our Democratic values than Brooklyn’s own Representative Hakeem Jeffries.”

Statement by Governor Kathy Hochul

“New York City will have a champion in our nation’s capital while we continue to fight for our fair share of federal funding and a multitude of other priorities that will support New Yorkers.”

Statement by NYC Mayor Eric Adams

Jeffries also received positive feedback regarding his new position from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, a leading organization promoting racial justice in the law.

“His election marks another important moment for our nation as our legislative halls at the federal and state levels continue to become more representative of our multi-racial, multi-ethnic democracy.”

Statement by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund



During the House Speaker elections, which began on January 3, the American public watched as Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R) struggled to attain a majority of votes cast as his caucus stood divided. Meanwhile, Democrats remained unanimous in their support for Jeffries' nomination. McCarthy was elected Speaker on the 15th round of voting, and there was a unanimous and peaceful transfer of power as Jeffries passed McCarthy the gavel in the early morning of January 6, 2023 (Sprunt and Davis 2022).

Jeffries' first official speech as minority leader laid out his priorities for Democrats for the next two years. He mentioned Democrats would continue to promote economic opportunities and reproductive freedom. With Republicans' slim majority, many have been concerned about increasing polarization and the lack of bipartisanship in Congress and throughout the country's political environment. Jeffries addressed these concerns in his speech, and to his Republican colleagues, he affirmed, "We do extend our hand of partnership to you. We want to make clear that we extend and intend to try to find common ground, wherever and whenever possible on behalf of the American people. Not as Democrats, not as Republicans, not as Independents, but as Americans" ("New York Democrat" 2023).

While we live with a divided government, Americans will witness the attempts by the major parties and their members to negotiate new policies, this comes with the necessity for the new majority and minority officials to work together in order to arrange effective ways to govern. Hakeem Jeffries' new position as minority leader stands as a proud moment for his supporters and the Binghamton University community. For many students, Jeffries' legacy will serve as inspiration for their future career paths and the possibilities that lay ahead.

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Trinidad & Tobago's Politics are Marked by a Racial and Cultural Divide—Here's Why

Two large political parties in Trinidad and Tobago are largely separated by race—an outcome of centuries of European colonization.

By Rachael Ali
Head Writer for Foreign Affairs

Trinidad and Tobago is a dual-island Caribbean nation located just seven miles off the coast of Venezuela. The mainland of Trinidad is just 1,850 square miles—roughly the size of Delaware—and the two islands have a combined population of 1,368,000 people who come from a variety of backgrounds. The two main ethnic groups are from African and Indian descent. Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, as the groups are called, make up 34% and 35% of the population respectively—the latter being my heritage. But how did these two ethnic groups end up in Trinidad & Tobago? What created such a deep divide between them? And how has that influenced Trinidadian politics today?

Christopher Columbus arrived on the shores of Trinidad on his third voyage to the Western hemisphere, and the Spaniards controlled the island from 1498 to 1797, at which point the British took over. Like many other Caribbean islands, Trinidad's primary agricultural crop is sugarcane. Throughout Spanish and British colonial rule, African slavery was used to cultivate sugarcane until 1838, when England abolished the practice in all of its colonies (Julien 2006). This ruling ended 300 years of cruel and inhumane treatment of enslaved people: familial separation, degradation, torture, and extreme exhaustion from working sixteen to eighteen hours a day (Moore 1995). However, there was still a high global demand for sugar, so the British turned their attention towards India. Thus, the system of Indian indentured servitude began.

This influx in immigration from India made Trinidad & Tobago's racial demographics distinct from other Caribbean islands today.

Indians first arrived in Trinidad & Tobago in 1845 (Khan 2007), and the practice of indentured servitude continued until 1917 (Moore 1995). During this 72-year period, roughly 400,000 Indians voyaged to and set up permanent residence in Caribbean nations (Roopnarine 2011). About a third of these Indians were sent to Trinidad (Khan 2007). However, many Indians claimed that they had agreed to voyage to the islands "under false pretense" (Khan 2007), unaware of the harsh conditions that they would endure while working on plantations.

African slaves and Indian indentured servants faced similar challenges. For example, strict laws enacted by the white planter class dictated that indentured laborers were unable to travel over two miles past the plantation where they lived and worked (Roopnarine 2011). In fact,



the population of Indian indentured laborers had a higher death rate compared to all other ethnic groups in the country (Roopnarine 2011).

To reiterate, Africans and Indians arrived in Trinidad & Tobago under colonial rule at the beck and call of the white planter class. Why, then, is there so much racial division in Trinidadian politics today? The answer to this question has religious, societal, and colonial implications.

Firstly, Africans and Indians differed in their religious and spiritual beliefs. The majority of Indians brought their Hindu and Muslim faiths to Trinidad, while many Africans maintained the spiritual traditions stemming from their motherland, such as voodoo and obeah (Wright Muir 2020). When Indians arrived to Trinidad, the majority of Afro-Trinidadians had converted to Christianity, while a minority continues to practice voodoo and obeah to this day. However, Indians largely resisted Christianity until the arrival of Reverend John Morton and his Presbyterian missionaries in 1868; and, even then, they remained apprehensive of Westernization (Moore 1995). This is one of the reasons why Indians were faced with xenophobia upon their arrival, as they were foreign and considered to be "exotic" in this pre-formed, Afro-European society (Khan 2007).

Indian societal and cultural norms were another factor that created a rift between Afro and Indo-Trinidadians. Indians came to Trinidad with the caste system mentality, which forbade them from mingling outside of their class and race. Additionally, as Indians were reluctant to conform, they tended to stay in the rural areas and keep to themselves (Roopnarine 2011). Many Indo-Trinidadians opposed race-mixing because it was viewed

as "a drain from the size of the Indian community" (Stoddard and Cornwell 1999), rather than a contribution to a larger culture.

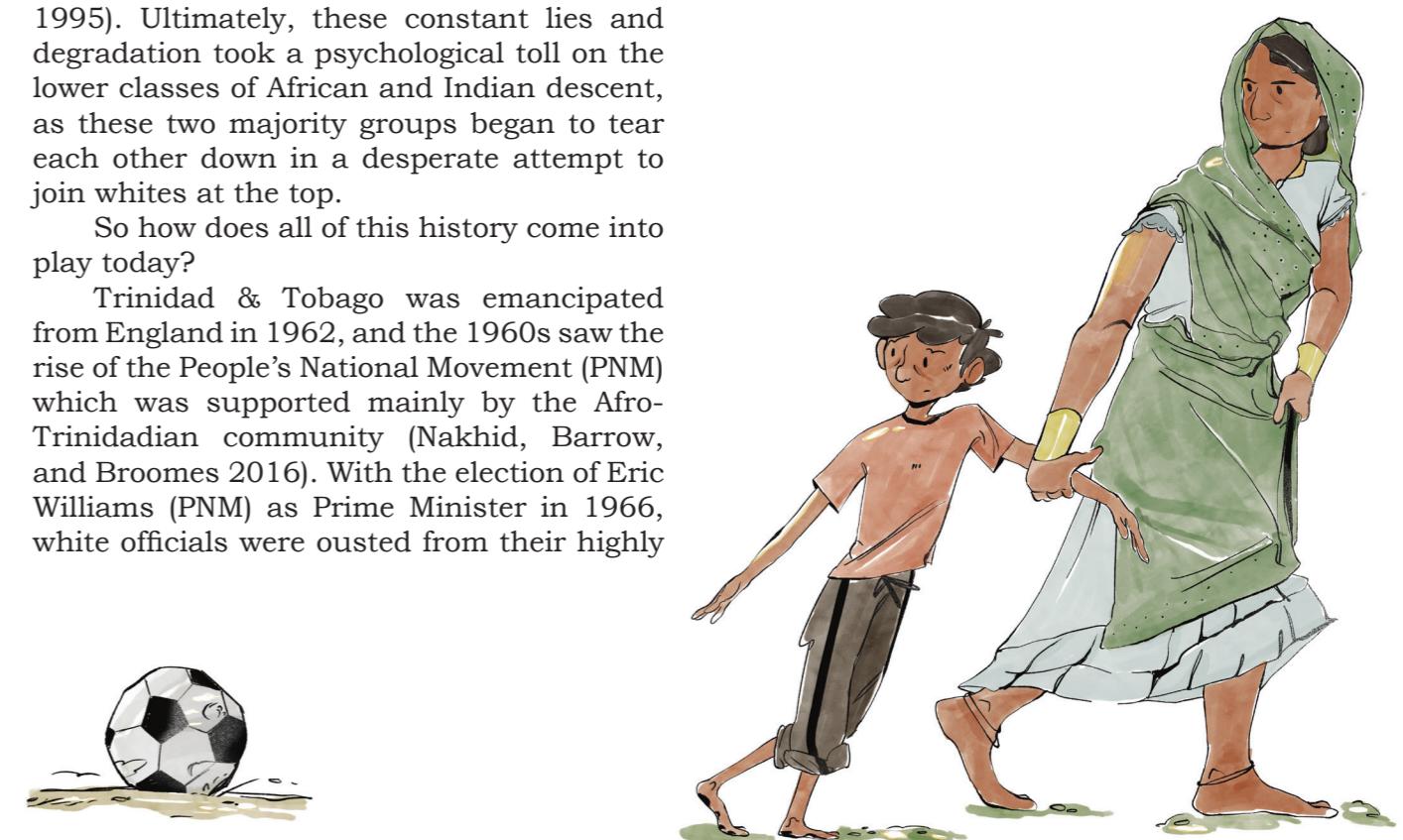
One last source of racial tension was the colonial government which inhibited racial intermingling, thus preventing cultural integration. For example, from 1845 to 1917, government officials hired many indigenous peoples and Afro-Trinidadians in order to recapture Indian indentured servants who had fled their plantations. White people in positions of power also divided people of color through the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. One infamous perpetrator of these stereotypes was the previously mentioned Reverend John Morton, the leader of Presbyterian missionaries dedicated to converting Indo-Trinidadians. Morton made it common knowledge in Trinidadian society that Indians were lazy drunkards (Khan 2007), brainwashed by "dark idolatry" and a "Mohammedan delusion" (Moore 1995). Similarly, Morton stated that Afro-Trinidadians were poor, ignorant heathens who beg and steal to survive (Moore 1995). Ultimately, these constant lies and degradation took a psychological toll on the lower classes of African and Indian descent, as these two majority groups began to tear each other down in a desperate attempt to join whites at the top.

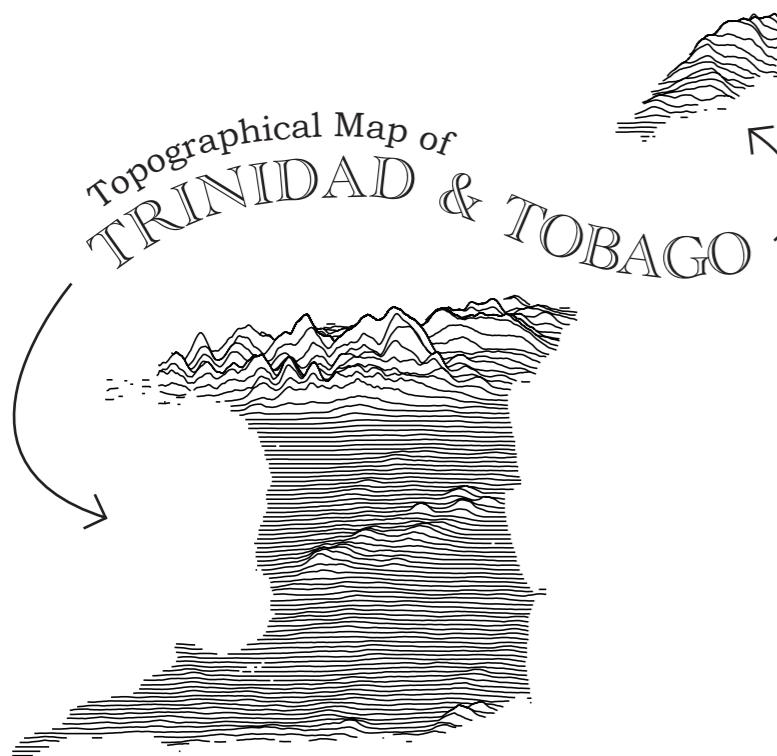
So how does all of this history come into play today?

Trinidad & Tobago was emancipated from England in 1962, and the 1960s saw the rise of the People's National Movement (PNM) which was supported mainly by the Afro-Trinidadian community (Nakhid, Barrow, and Broomes 2016). With the election of Eric Williams (PNM) as Prime Minister in 1966, white officials were ousted from their highly

powerful positions in the legislature and the school system. However, a worthy adversary arose to oppose the PNM; the Democratic Labour Party, supported primarily by Indo-Trinidadians, known today as the United National Congress (UNC).

Trinidad & Tobago has been under PNM leadership since 2015 with the election of Dr. Keith Rowley as Prime Minister. Prior to his election, the UNC was in power with Prime Minister Kamla Persaud-Bissessar serving from 2010 to 2015. Bissessar was the first woman to hold this position, and made global history as the first person of Indian origin to be elected prime minister of a country outside of India and South Asia. She was also named Time Magazine's 13th most influential female leader in 2019. One highlight from her administration is the completion of Couva Hospital in 2015, which is currently being used to treat Covid-19 patients as well as conduct research regarding post-Covid treatments by students at the University of West Indies in Trinidad.





Despite this success, many Trinidadians are upset with the state of Couva Hospital, which was originally intended to be a children's hospital with facilities for adults. It was supposed to be a fully functioning hospital with a burns care unit and a pharmacy, but it is not being used to its full potential or capacity. This is largely due to the subsequent Rowley administration, which has stated that the government was unable to provide sufficient funding and staff for the institution. However, many Trinidadian citizens and politicians are in disbelief, as "there have been calls to have the hospital functioning and to forget the politics" (Wayow 2016). This hospital could serve Trinidadians of all races and political affiliations and has strong grassroots support, but the Rowley administration's course of action has caused even further division and animosity.

Despite negative public response over the hospital, Rowley's administration has coped well with the Covid-19 pandemic, with 51.3% of the total Trinidadian population

fully vaccinated.

Despite this success, a large reason behind the delayed opening of the Couva Hospital and why Trinidad's political parties are racially divided is because the country is ethnically segregated. In other words, there are "black" areas and "Indian" areas, much like how regions in the US are predominantly white and others are mostly populated by people of color or immigrants due to historical practices like redlining. Indo-Trinidadians are typically found in the South of Trinidad while Afro-Trinidadians reside in the North of the island. This has led to certain issues in particular areas being ignored by whichever administration is elected. In December 2022, I stayed with my family in the South of Trinidad for over two weeks, and

it was not hard to notice that their roads are littered with dangerous potholes and far too narrow to qualify as two-way streets (but are functioning as such). Indo-Trinidadians, like the cousins who I stayed with, have been imploring the government to fix this faulty infrastructure, but because this issue is in the South, these inquiries have gone ignored by the PNM for eight years.

All in all, present racial tensions in the Trinidadian government can be traced to British colonialism, as the white upper class took advantage of differences between Africans and Indians and used these differences to turn these two groups against each other. These harmful, colonial-era stereotypes have unfortunately persisted to this day and made their way to the top of the Trinidadian government, resulting in the suffering of the entire Trinidadian population, regardless of race.

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SCOTUS Hears Arguments in

Moore v. Harper

By Joseph Brugellis

When Americans go to the polls to elect their next congressperson, they are often unaware of the critical role that state legislatures play in administering federal elections. The Elections Clause of the United States Constitution gives state legislatures the power to govern how federal elections are conducted (US Const. art. I, §4). It has long been understood that this lawmaking authority is not unlimited; state courts reserve the right to ensure that the federal election laws and procedures approved by the legislature “comply with [the] state constitution” (Herenstein and Wolf 2022). As an example, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in recent years has held that partisan gerrymandering by the state legislature in the congressional redistricting process violates the state constitution (Chung 2018).

This widely held legal precedent is now under threat. In November 2021, the Republican-led North Carolina General Assembly passed a new congressional redistricting map. Several voting rights activists filed a lawsuit contending that this new map was a partisan gerrymander that violated several provisions of the state constitution. Three judges on the North Carolina Superior Court (a trial court) initially ruled against the activists and declined to block the redistricting map. The state Supreme Court, however, agreed with the voting rights activists, and, on February 4, 2022, directed the Assembly to craft a remedial map to be submitted to the

Independent State Legislature Doctrine May Have Implications for Federal Election Processes

trial court. Simultaneously, the trial court appointed three special masters on February 16 to draw their own proposed redistricting map. One week later, the trial court rejected the congressional map proposed by the Assembly, instead adopting the map drafted by the special masters. The Assembly appealed this decision to the US Supreme Court (“Brief for Petitioners” 2022).

On June 30, 2022, the US Supreme Court agreed to hear arguments in *Moore v. Harper* (“Order List” 2022), a case which could restrict the ability of state constitutions and courts to place limits on the power of legislatures to alter the federal elections process. The heart of this case concerns whether the Supreme Court should adopt a version of the so-called “independent state legislature” (ISL) doctrine, which asserts that state legislatures retain “broad power to regulate federal elections” (Howe 2022) without being subject to limits imposed by the state constitution and courts.

At stake? Democracy itself—a broad adoption of the ISL doctrine could result in rogue legislatures stripping previously-guaranteed voting rights protections from the state constitution with no ability for state courts to protect these rights (“Transcript” 2022).

The ISL doctrine is of relatively recent vintage, first appearing more than 20 years ago in Chief Justice William Rehnquist’s concurrence in *Bush v. Gore* (2000) (Herenstein and Wolf 2022). After Al Gore formally contested the certification of Florida’s

election results in the 2000 presidential election, the Florida Supreme Court created a novel system for a statewide voter recount. George Bush appealed to the US Supreme Court, which ruled 7-2 that the Florida Supreme Court’s recount scheme violated the 14th Amendment (“Bush v. Gore”). Chief Justice Rehnquist wrote a concurring opinion where he also expressed the view that the Florida Supreme Court’s scheme violated the Presidential Elector Clause because only the “state legislature” can make the rules governing how presidential electors are to be chosen (V. Amar and A. Amar 2022). While advocating for the general supremacy of the legislature to govern how the electoral process operates, Chief Justice Rehnquist crucially “acknowledge[d] that state courts” play a key role in ensuring that state legislative action comports with the state constitution (“Transcript” 2022).

Proponents of the ISL doctrine claim that their position is supported by the Constitution (Brief for Petitioners 2022). The text of the Elections Clause states that “The Times, Places and Manner of holding

At stake? Democracy itself—a broad adoption of the ISL doctrine could result in rogue legislatures stripping previously-guaranteed voting rights protections from the state constitution with no ability for state courts to protect these rights (“Transcript” 2022).

Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof...” (US Const. art. I, §4). The Constitution also contains the Presidential Elector Clause, which provides that the state legislature be given the power to appoint electors during a presidential election (US Const. art. II, §1). The ISL doctrine asserts that the Constitution’s usage of the term ‘legislature’—the state organ tasked

with making and amending laws—rather than “the State as a whole” implies that other state entities (e.g. state courts) cannot interfere substantively in the legislature’s election law endeavors (“Brief for Petitioners” 2022). Unlike the version of the ISL doctrine embraced in the Rehnquist concurrence, the petitioners in *Moore v. Harper* go further and argue that state courts have no power to place substantive limits upon what the legislature may do (“Transcript” 2022).

Those opposed to the adoption of the ISL doctrine note how centuries of historical practice demonstrate that state legislatures could not ignore the state constitution when passing laws governing federal elections. Immediately after the Constitution was ratified in 1787, many states amended their respective constitutions to enact rules regarding federal election procedures. Delaware’s 1792 constitution, for example, contained a provision requiring that federal elections be conducted “by ballot” rather than voice vote” (“Brief of Amici Curiae” 2022). By 1802, states like Vermont, Tennessee, and Ohio all had constitutional provisions mandating that federal elections be free and open to all (“Brief of Amici Curiae” 2022). As the 19th century progressed, state constitutions began to be more explicit in regulating the administration of federal elections. The constitutions of Indiana, Missouri, Mississippi, and Michigan, for example, set out a specific time for federal elections to be conducted (“Brief of Amici Curiae” 2022). According to those opposed to the adoption of the ISL doctrine, if such a theory was one grounded in historical practice, then all of these state constitutional provisions would have been ruled as violations of the Elections Clause. They were not.

Prior Supreme Court precedent also casts doubt on the notion that state legislatures retain unqualified control over the federal elections process. In *Davis v. Hildebrant* (1916), decided more than a



century ago, the Supreme Court ruled that the Elections Clause did not prevent voters from rejecting a congressional redistricting map in a referendum “authorized by the state constitution” (“Brief by State Respondents” 2022). Sixteen years later, in *Smiley v. Holm* (1932), the Supreme Court ruled that the Elections Clause did not prevent a state governor from vetoing a legislature’s preferred course of action concerning federal elections (“Brief for Respondents” 2022). And in 2019, the majority opinion in *Rucho v. Common Cause* explicitly stated that “[p]rovisions in... state constitutions can provide standards” that limit how a legislature can act in the redistricting process (“Rucho v. Common Cause”). All three precedents call into question the validity of the claim that state legislatures retain absolute control over the administration of the federal elections process.

This simmering dispute came to a head when advocates forcefully argued their positions for nearly three hours in front of the Supreme Court on December 7, 2022. Attorney David H. Thompson represented North Carolina’s Republican state legislators (Howe 2022). Thompson argued that states lack the ability to place substantive limitations on their legislature’s ability to regulate the time, place, and manner of federal elections and therefore the North Carolina Supreme Court should not have struck down the newly crafted congressional map as being a partisan gerrymander violative of the state constitution (Liptak 2022).

Several justices from across the ideological spectrum appeared deeply skeptical of adopting this far-reaching argument. Chief Justice John Roberts questioned whether Thompson’s argument can be squared with prior precedents like *Smiley v. Holm* (1932) (“Transcript” 2022). Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson pointed out that while the US Constitution identifies the legislature as the appropriate body to regulate federal elections, it is the state constitution that confers lawmaking authority to the legislature

and thus makes it subject to constitutional restrictions and state judicial review:

“What I don’t understand [Mr. Thompson] is how you can cut the state constitution out of the equation when it is giving the state legislature the authority to exercise legislative power... why suddenly in this context [of the Elections Clause] do you say all those other constitutional provisions that bind or constrict legislative authority... evaporate in this world?” (“Transcript” 2022).

Justice Amy Coney Barrett remained skeptical of Thompson’s distinction between impermissible restrictions that limit the ability of the state legislature to actually enact its desired election laws and permissible limits that merely set out a process for the legislature to obtain its desired election regulations. According to Mr. Thompson’s proposed legal test, a hypothetical provision in a state constitution that empowers the governor to veto an election law passed by the legislature would be permissible because such a provision merely sets up a proverbial “hoop that [the state legislature] has to... jump[] through” in order to enact the desired election law (“Transcript” 2022). Suppose that the state constitution, however, contained a provision that patently barred the state legislature from engaging in partisan gerrymandering. This would not be permissible because the provision imposes constraints on the actual elections-related substance that the state legislature wishes to enact into law. Drawing on her prior experience “[a]s a former civil procedure teacher,” Justice Barrett told Mr. Thompson that “it [would be] a hard line to draw” between what restrictions are permissible or impermissible under his theory (“Transcript” 2022).

While remaining skeptical of Thompson’s more far-reaching arguments, Justice Brett Kavanaugh floated a compromise position that would give great deference to interpretation by state courts while allowing federal courts to intervene only when state courts egregiously misinterpret the law (Howe 2022).

Neal Katyal and Donald Verrilli, former solicitor generals under the Obama administration, joined the current Solicitor General of the United States, Elizabeth Prelogar, in representing the private respondents, North Carolina state officials, and the United States federal government in front of the Supreme Court. They forcefully asserted that adopting Thompson's argument would buck more than two centuries of history and that "the blast radius" created from the adoption of the ISL doctrine would "sow elections chaos" (Liptak 2022). Solicitor General Prelogar noted that Thompson's theory would give the legislature "free rein" to pass any election law desired without any check on this power by the state constitution or courts ("Transcript" 2022). Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, and Neil Gorsuch seemed more receptive to adoption of the ISL doctrine. After Mr. Katyal warned about the potential damage to democracy that could occur if the Court were to adopt a broad version of the ISL doctrine, Justice Alito responded by rhetorically asking whether democracy would be furthered by "transfer[ing]" the power of federal redistricting to "elected [state] supreme court" judges where these judges can publicly "campaign on the issue of districting" (Liptak 2022).

We will likely not know the Supreme Court's ruling in *Moore v. Harper* until June 2023. Based on oral argument, it seems likely that the Court will decline to adopt the broad formulation of the ISL doctrine advocated by the Republican state legislators from North Carolina. As Justice Elena Kagan noted, a ruling that embraces much of the ISL doctrine would unleash dramatic consequences ("Transcript" 2022). State courts would be powerless to stop legislatures from engaging in aggressive partisan gerrymandering while voting rights protections in state constitutions would be vulnerable to evisceration ("Transcript" 2022). A narrow ruling that reaffirms the vital role that state courts and state constitutions play in safeguarding our federal election processes would be

consistent with both historical practice and prior precedent. Such a ruling would reaffirm the role that checks and balances plays in ensuring that no branch of elected government wields more power than the rest.

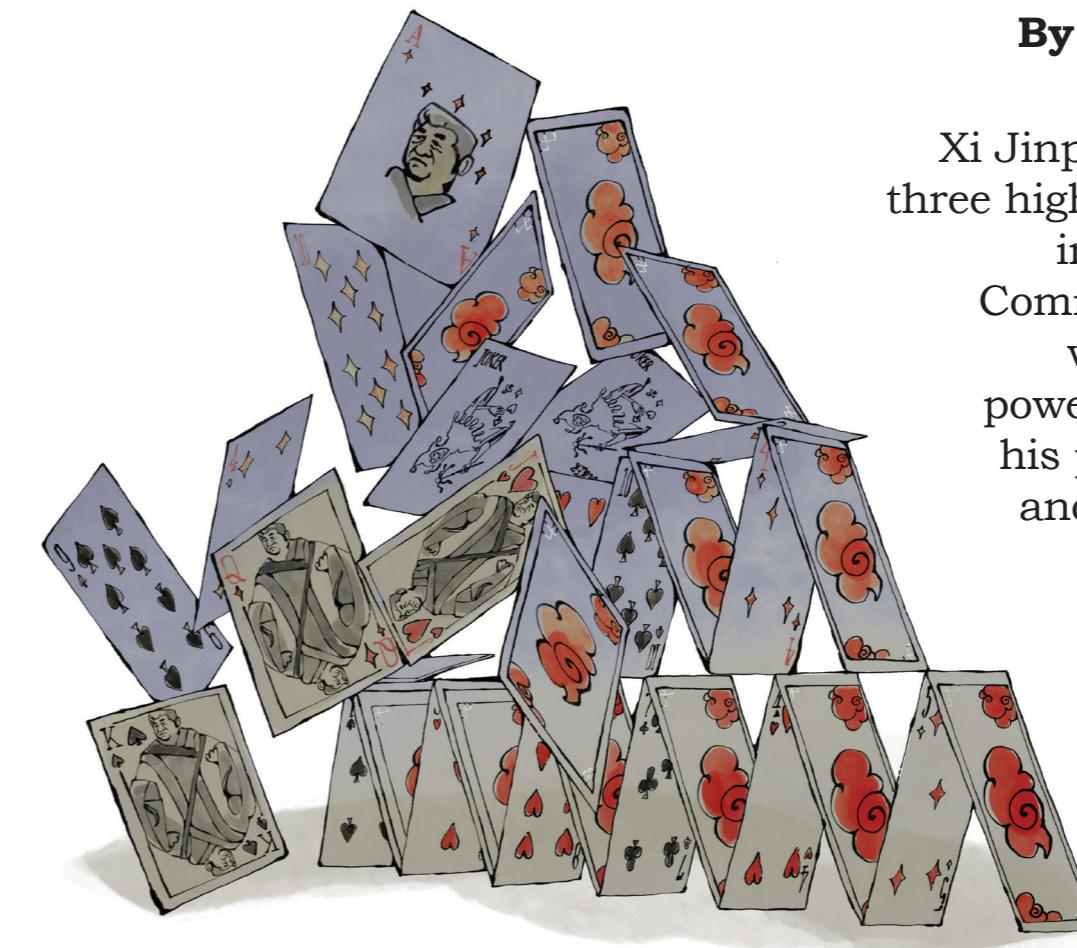
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How Chinese President Xi's Reelection May Impact Taiwan and the US

By Geonha Lim

Xi Jinping holds the three highest positions in the Chinese Communist Party, wielding more power than any of his predecessors, and he might be here to say.



Chinese President Xi Jinping's reelection last October, which gave him another five years to his already ten-year long presidency and ultimate control over the government, is raising concerns for the ongoing China-Taiwan and China-US relations. Though certain experts worry that China will adopt more transgressive diplomatic policies, others argue that Xi's reelection is not as concerning as people think.

China has a unique political power structure with which some American readers may be unfamiliar. It traditionally does not operate on one-leader totalitarianism (as many people assume) but rather operates as a one-party autocracy. The Chinese

Communist Party (CCP) is the supreme authority of the People's Republic of China and controls almost all branches of government. The party and the state are ultimately tied together, and differentiation is nearly impossible. The top branches of the Chinese government consist of the National People's Congress (the legislative branch), State Council (the executive branch), Supreme People's Court (the judicial branch), National Supervisory Commission (law enforcement, anti-corruption agency), and the Supreme People's Procuratorate (the prosecution). Within the Chinese Communist Party are the General Secretary, Politburo Standing Committee, Politburo, Central Committee, and the National Party Congress (Maizland 2022).

Conventionally, the supreme authority of the Chinese government has been shared by three positions: the General Secretary of the Communist Party, the President, and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Even during the era of Mao Zedong, China's national hero and first president, the three top positions were not held by one leader at the same time. From 1982 until Xi changed the constitution in 2018, presidency in China was limited to two five-year terms. However, through his reelection, Xi Jinping has consolidated his power by taking all three leadership roles, removing the two-term presidential limit, filling members of almost all government and party roles with his supporters, and ending traditionally sectarian characteristics of the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, he has gained practically absolute decision-making powers.

China and Xi have continuously tried to expand their influence in the Asia-Pacific region through One-China Policy and the Belt and Road Initiative, which has caused inevitable clashes with Taiwan and the US. Xi's goal is to progress China into a fully developed country by 2049 with the great power status it used to have, which includes reunification with Taiwan. Xi's ambitions have challenged both American and Chinese

authorities, as well as military analysts, who are concerned that with Putin's transgression in Ukraine, China might accelerate its plan to take Taiwan by force. Since October 2021, the Chinese military has operated occasional incursions by sending warplanes to fly near Taiwan and concentrating land forces near the Taiwan Strait. Experts warn that the clock is ticking for Chinese reunification with Taiwan, and military invasion is inevitable and imminent (Lo 2022).

A primary concern of American and Western political and military analysts before Xi's reelection was that after the election, Xi would no longer have domestic concerns about power consolidation and use his entire force on foreign policy. It is true that in China today, Xi has no political opponent to inhibit his ambitions. However, Xi and the CCP face severe internal and external struggles. In 2020, Avery Goldstein, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, analyzed that China has gained worldwide hostility in its rapid and self-interested approach and has created hurdles to continuing its deep economic engagement with the world's biggest economies. In response to Chinese transgressions, Western countries now hesitate to depend on or deepen their economic ties with China, which has isolated China. Thus, unless China adjusts to the challenge with reforms, it will struggle to achieve further growth and may face an economic decline (Goldstein 2020). In 2022, Goldstein's analysis has somewhat come true. Recently, China has faced unprecedented protests against the zero-Covid policy. Also, the Chinese economy has faced severe struggles in exports and investment. The interest rate lift-off of the US Federal Reserve has further hindered the power of the Chinese Yuan and the real estate market (Wong 2022). Regardless of Xi's ambition to reunite with Taiwan, China may have to deal with its struggles before seeking outward expansion. Conversely, Xi and the CCP may accelerate their invasion

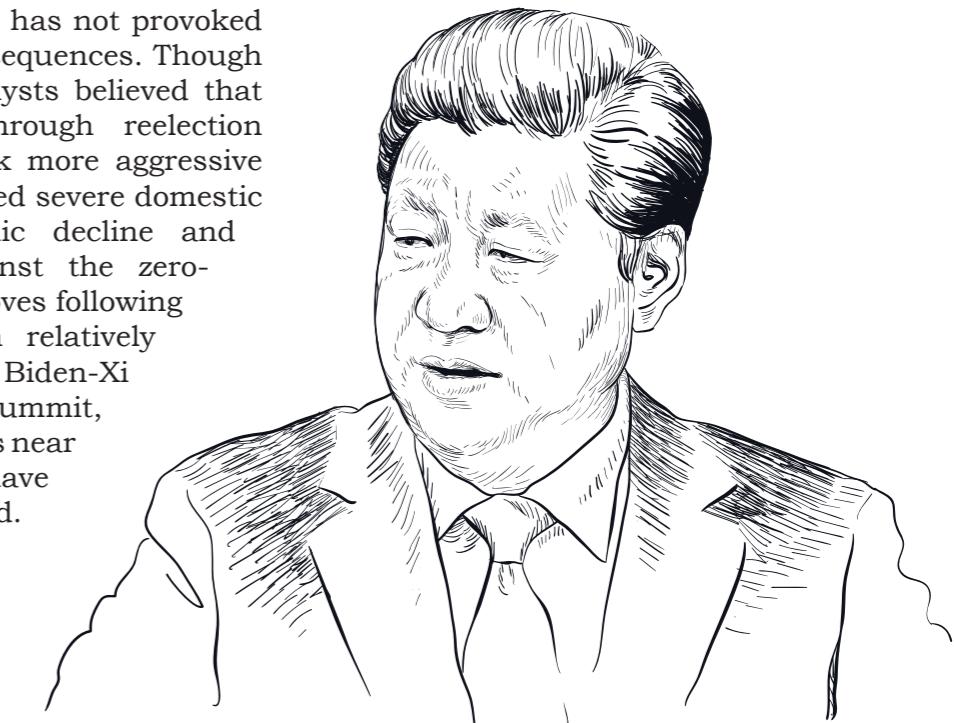
plan to divert internal struggles to external war and legitimate state security.

After his reelection, Xi met President Biden last November at the G20 gathering in Bali, Indonesia. Though the meeting did not drive any mutual agreements or consensus, it provided room for conversation and symbolized that leaders of two rival states were not entirely closed to negotiation. During the meeting, the leaders discussed three significant issues: Taiwan, Ukraine, and North Korea. In the matter of Taiwan, the US readout noted that the US was against any aggressive actions toward Taiwan, while the Chinese readout emphasized that Taiwan was China's core interest and the first red line that should not be crossed (Sacks 2022). In regard to Ukraine, China said that it was concerned about the war and did not want any nuclear conflict to occur, while the US declared it wanted peace in Ukraine. Turning to North Korea, the US hoped China would put leverage and stop North Korea's nuclear transgressions, but China did not reply on that issue. Though the meeting did not engender fruitful outcomes, it implied that both states left room for future negotiations (Sacks 2022).

Xi Jinping's reelection has not provoked immediate worrisome consequences. Though political and military analysts believed that domestic stabilization through reelection would motivate Xi to seek more aggressive foreign policies, Xi has faced severe domestic issues such as economic decline and nationwide protests against the zero-Covid policy. While Xi's moves following his reelection have been relatively peaceful, such as the Biden-Xi meeting at the G20 Summit, Chinese military operations near the China-Taiwan border have continuously intensified. War clouds hanging over the Taiwan Strait, Xi's next moves are the center of attention.

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A House Divided: Is Congress Fueling or Reflecting Polarization in the US?

By Benji Hoff



If you ask any politically aware person about the state of American politics today, they will likely characterize it with one word: polarization. A person's views on today's most prominent political issues—such as abortion, gun control, tax brackets, immigration policy, and more—can often be predicted based on their views on any single one of these issues. According to a study by Pew Research in

2016, 66% of Republicans agree with their party's positions on abortion, and 80% on gun policy ("Partisanship and Political Animosity" 2016). On the other side of the aisle, 81% of Democrats agree with their party's economic policies and 77% back the party platform on immigration ("Partisanship and Political Animosity" 2016). These numbers demonstrate the general lack of deviation from the party

platform. Political scientists are split on the origin of this trend. Does polarization come from the bottom up as people become more ideologically distant from one another and surround themselves with like-minded individuals? Or does the partisan nature of our legislature trickle down to ordinary citizens and push them farther apart?

The trends demonstrated in Congress certainly suggest the latter. Another Pew Research report has tracked polarization in Congress since the 92nd Congress in 1971 (Desilver 2022). The report uses a method that records members' roll call votes to track the ideological divisions over time. A roll call vote is a simple "yea" or "nay" vote on a particular motion in the House or Senate. A member's votes will reflect their policy preferences, making this a viable method to compare different Congresses to each other regardless of the relative political climate in each one.

The report places lawmakers on a left-right spectrum from -1 being the most liberal to 1 being the most conservative. Since the 92nd Congress, both parties have strayed further from the ideological center, but Republicans have moved farther. Democrats in the House have moved from an ideological score of -.31 to -.38, representing a moderate increase (Desilver 2022). House Republicans have moved from .25 to .51, doubling their ideological score and representing a starker move toward the extreme (Desilver 2022). Over the past 50 years, both parties have become more ideologically cohesive. There is much less voting across party lines, and like the average citizen, a member's views on one issue will likely predict their views on any other issue. In the 92nd Congress, there were more than 160 representatives that could be characterized as moderate; now, there are just over 20 (Desilver 2022). These stats do not confirm the origin of polarization. What they do show is that Congress has grown more divided over

time just as American citizens have. Furthermore, Congress exhibits the same partisan animosity found in every-day political discourse. In addition to the rarity of voting across party lines, lawmakers often refuse to collaborate with members of the opposite party. This polarization in Congress results from the structural design of our government in which congressional majorities dominate the agenda, pushing their own policies and blocking those of the opposition. The House Rules Committee is the source of power in this regard. The Rules Committee is controlled by the Speaker of the House, who is a member of the majority party. The Speaker decides who is appointed to the Rules Committee, and if members do not follow the Speaker's agenda, they will be replaced with new appointees. The Rules Committee is powerful because it unilaterally determines the agenda in Congress, with the exception of some jointly supported bills that are discharged from committee. Which bills are considered on the floor and the terms of floor debate are among two of the major legislative procedures that are controlled by the Rules Committee.

When House majorities change, there tends to be a flurry of legislation passed by the majority party and heavy use of the Rules Committee to snuff out the other party's agenda. The new majority wants to establish control and dominance over the minority party. This was the case to an extreme degree in the 104th Congress. In 1994, the Republicans swept the elections, gaining control of both the House and the Senate. This marked the end of a 40-year drought in the House, and the Republicans were eager to take control. House Speaker Newt Gingrich adopted a highly confrontational approach to the Republicans' newfound power (Fenno 1997). He and the rest of the Republican majority tried to push through as much legislation as possible, block any Democratic legislation, and overall asserted

their authority over the Democratic minority. A conflict over the Republicans' proposed budget plan resulted in two government shutdowns, and President Clinton vetoed Republican legislation on spending and tax cuts. Being out of power for so long meant a significant lack of experience in leading as well as an inability to craft bills that would also be supported by the Democratic minority. The uncompromising strategy of the Republicans led to a stronger divide in the House, and the handling of their majority power was viewed by many as ineffective.

Political incentives also drive legislators to high levels of partisanship. In 1974, David Mayhew published his seminal work *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, in which he characterized Congress members as "single-minded seekers of reelection" (Mayhew 1974). Mayhew applied the rational choice theory of economics to Congress, which states that all humans make rational choices that provide them with the greatest benefit (Ganti 2022). He argued that all electoral activity taken by Congress members is done with the hope of reelection, because without reelection no other political goals can be achieved. While members do try to pass legislation that benefits their constituents and answers their needs, this is often selfishly motivated. If voters see representatives as adequately fulfilling their policy goals and needs, they will vote for them again. Reelection serves to further polarize Congress because breaking from the party line on Capitol Hill will upset the constituency on the ground. Additionally, straying too far from the party platform runs the risk of a challenge within one's own party. Falling in line with the partisan platform is ultimately best for a Congress member's hopes for reelection.

The importance of roll call voting is relevant again, as it is an easy instrument for members to signal their ideologies to both their constituents as well as their political

opponents. An easy way to gain support from your voting base is to differentiate yourself from the opposite party. Roll call votes provide a clear and understandable record of a Congress member's ideological platform. This combination of procedural and political factors keeps Congress—and by extension, the country—divided.

Of course, Congress is not the only cause of polarization. Geographical sorting also has some effect, but it is usually overstated in the discourse surrounding polarization. Sorting refers to the phenomenon of people intentionally moving into communities that are comprised of politically like-minded individuals. Political scientist Bill Bishop articulated this theory in his 2008 book *The Big Sort*, positing that people actively prefer to be surrounded by voices similar to their own (Bishop 2008). More recent research has revealed two major holes in this theory. First is that most people are financially restricted from living wherever they want. No matter how liberal a person identifies, most can not afford to live in the most liberal parts of the country, which are large, dense cities with exorbitant rent. Secondly, Americans tend to move frequently, so data is not always accurate as population distributions shuffle around (Martin and Webster 2018). It is also counterproductive to blame citizens' living preferences for polarization when oftentimes economic and social policy affects where someone chooses to live.

Many may point to gerrymandering as a cause of polarization. Safe districts—districts that are reliably either Democratic or Republican—certainly disincentivize working across the aisle, but the reason for this goes back to reelection goals. Why would a representative from a safe district risk their reelection prospects by collaborating with a despised political rival? The main problem with the gerrymandering explanation is that the US Senate can not be gerrymandered because each state

elects two Senators at large, regardless of population. The Senate demonstrates the same patterns of ideological division that the House does, so gerrymandering can not be the primary cause.

Media is also often blamed for polarization, but news outlets are best viewed as amplifiers of extreme politics, not creators. Most politically engaged people recognize the political leanings of different news sources and try to balance their media intake accordingly. Those who exclusively watch CNN or FOX likely already have solidified views and are seeking confirmation. Media companies are businesses, so they may value ratings over truth or sincerity. It makes sense for them to appeal strongly to one demographic as opposed to appealing to both sides of the political spectrum. Hence, the polarization of the media is an effect—not the source—of nationwide polarization as networks attempt to please specific political groups.

Overall, Congress's effect on polarization is largely understated and often excluded from the discourse on the subject. Perhaps this is because the processes and procedures of Congress are an elusive, complex subject that many people do not have the time or interest to delve into. It is much easier to consume mass media, browse news headlines, and then share partially-formed views on social media. However, easier does not mean better. This surface-level engagement with politics is certainly a factor in the intensely polarized political climate of today. Maybe a more nuanced understanding and broader discussion of our governmental structure could contribute to a decline in polarization. Voters would be more informed, putting more pressure on lawmakers to work together towards productive goals rather than seeking to widen the political aisle. An informed, educated public can help uproot polarization on the ground, but it is also crucial to understand our government and how it works to divide us from the top down.

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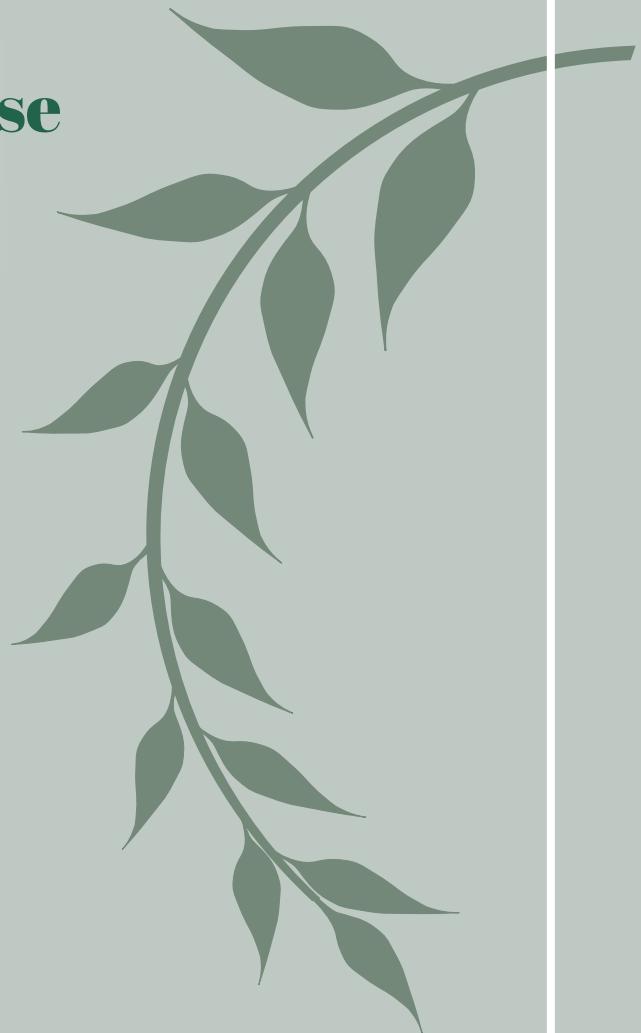
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