

# Why I Cannot Vote For Trump, as a Christian and a Conservative

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## Introduction and Summary

As the election approaches, it has been increasingly common for Christians to charge that anyone voting for the opposing candidate could not possibly be a Christian. Let's begin by saying this is utterly false. There are truly believing Christians who will vote for Biden, and truly believing Christians who will vote for Trump. No one party can claim to represent the Kingdom of God.

Such denouncements are frequently heard among conservative, evangelical Christians. Just in the last few days, we had John MacArthur claim that [any real believer would vote for Trump](#). We had Eric Metaxas [affirm](#) John Zmirak's [contention](#) that it would be "better to cut off your hand than use it to vote for Biden." And of course we have Franklin Graham, Jerry Falwell Jr (yikes!), Robert Jeffress, and many other evangelical leaders who have said things like this throughout Trump's tenure.

However, I believe there are at least some conservative Christians who are conflicted—opposed to many elements of the Democratic platform, but also appalled by Trump's lack of morality, crass and degrading actions, disregard for truth, and other obvious failings. Such Christians may want to vote for Biden, but feel they cannot do so and be a good Christian.

This piece is for those Christians, and for any other conservatives who question the wisdom of another four years of Trump. I will try to argue below that **not only is voting for Biden an acceptable choice, but it is in fact the preferred choice for any conservative Christian**. I am not trying to convince the diehard Trump fan – I know I cannot succeed there. But I hope I will give the Christian or other conservative who is troubled by Trump some sound reasons to feel confident opposing him and voting for Biden.

And I would emphasize again that I am not saying my way is God's way. God's way is God's way, and I hope this argument aligns with it, but I know that not all Christians will agree with me. I assure you, those Christians who disagree are still Christians. I should also note that I am a lay leader in my church, and I am not speaking for the church here. These words are mine only. My argument will proceed as follows:

## Part I – The Argument Against Trump

- The distinction between moral order, civil order, and "law and order," and the primacy of civil order for society
- The *founding principles* (natural rights, rule of law, due process, and checks and balances) and *founding assumptions* (objective truth, human dignity, and sin) that provide the underpinnings of American civil order.
- How Donald Trump has consistently attacked and undermined all of the founding principles and founding assumptions
- Why it matters – re-electing Donald Trump threatens to irreparably harm American civil order, and possibly put us on the road to tyranny (although Trump himself is very unlikely to become a tyrant)

## Part II – Responding to Objections and Conclusion

- Three common objections to my argument:
  - o Liberals ignore other equally important assumptions that I have not highlighted (in which I address abortion, and other topics of morality)
  - o Liberals are destroying civil order by causing or enabling riots across America
  - o Liberals are in fact guilty of the same thing I accuse Trump of (in which I compare the *degree* and *extent* of Trump’s sins with Obama and Biden)
- Conclusion: Trump is a threat to American civil order, and should be opposed by conservative Christians.

## Part I – The Argument Against Trump

### **The Primacy of Civil Order**

Russell Kirk, in the first chapter of *The Roots of American Order*, discusses the two primary types of order, moral and civil, or the “inner order” of the soul and the “outer order” of society:

Order is the first need of the soul. It is not possible to love what one ought to love, unless we recognize some principles of order by which to govern ourselves. Order is the first need of the commonwealth. It is not possible for us to live in peace with one another, unless we recognize some principle of order by which to do justice. The good society is marked by a high degree of order, justice, and freedom. Among these, order has primacy: for justice cannot be enforced until a tolerable civil social order is attained, nor can freedom be anything better than violence until order gives us laws. (p6)

He then goes on to describe how a Russian scholar came to learn this lesson through the Russian Revolution. Encountering Odessa in true anarchy, Kirk’s friend described how:

At any moment, one’s apartment might be invaded by a casual criminal or fanatic, murdering for the sake of a loaf of bread. In this anarchy, justice and freedom were only words. ‘Then I learned that before we can know justice and freedom, we must have order...Much though I hated the Communists, I saw then that even the grim order of Communism is better than no order at all. Many might survive under Communism; no one could survive under general disorder.’ (p7)

I agree with this assessment that order necessarily comes before freedom and justice. As Kirk’s friend pointed out, justice, which includes a great many assumptions about moral order, has no meaning if the rule of law is overrun. Raw power, rather than morality, defines justice in conditions of anarchy.

A further distinction will be helpful. What we typically describe as “law and order,” or the basic prevention of crime and anarchy, is the first step toward civil order, but civil order is a much broader idea. As Kirk suggests, civil order is a whole system within which justice is administered, both at the level of violent crime and at a much higher level with respect to the

preservation of more abstract rights (such as 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment freedoms, racially neutral application of the law, etc.). A tyrant may well achieve “law and order” by stifling dissent, curtailing rights, and brutally punishing lawbreakers, but such situations are often characterized by a lack of enduring civil order.

So we begin with “law and order,” but we quickly move on to address larger questions of justice and freedom. The civil order we then build is the overarching framework within which justice and freedom can flourish (or decay) and comes to be greater than the sum of its parts. It comprises the core principles and institutions of government and, once well established, can endure even if “law and order” is compromised in individual locations. We will return to this point later.

The Christian’s first allegiance must always be to the Kingdom of God, a kingdom which transcends nationality and politics, often requiring Christians to admonish or oppose the kingdoms or political movements of this world. But it is true that America has, on the whole, been a good place to be a follower of Christ because of our high degree of civil order. Unlike in places such as North Korea, Iran, or China, we in America are not persecuted for our faith, and we are free to worship as we please.

We still face many challenges with our civil order, especially recently highlighted problems of the equal application of the law to all races. But [as Winston Churchill said](#), “Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” So while our civil order is far from perfect, it is appropriate for American Christians to work to preserve the system which has established a well-functioning civil order within which to seek justice and freedom.

### **American Civil Order: Founding Principles and Assumptions**

The enduring American civil order rests in particular upon certain *founding principles* which guide our system of government: natural rights, the rule of law, due process, and checks and balances. These principles are the framework within which our Constitution was written and within which new laws and policies are enacted. They ensure that individuals retain core rights of life, liberty, and property (natural rights); that we all play by the same rules and justice is not meted out arbitrarily (rule of law and due process); and that power is not overly concentrated in the hands of only a few people (checks and balances).

Beneath these founding principles are even more fundamental *founding assumptions*. Underpinning the principles of the rule of law and due process is the assumption that truth can be known objectively. For example, if we are to have a trial, we must be able to agree on the facts of the case if we ever hope to render effective justice. Similarly, we must agree the moon exists before we make a plan to visit it. While not all truth is objective (for example, the statement “ice cream is delicious” is true for me, but not for my wife), basic order requires the possibility of *objective truth* in many areas of life.

Similarly, the concept of natural rights stands upon a certain anthropology, a certain view of what it means to be human, namely, that we are made in the image of God and thus have inherent *dignity*. The fact that God made us in his image means that every one of us has intrinsic worth and potential, irrespective of the actions or decisions of others. This dignity

informs our equality before God and the law, and creates the corresponding duty to treat others with respect, just because they are human.

Finally, the separation of powers and other checks and balances assume that while humans are intrinsically valuable, they are also intrinsically flawed. That is, we all *sin*. Because sin is real, no individual can be trusted to wield unchecked power. The power of one person or group must be checked by the power of others. Hopefully we can still learn to act in the common interest, but it is assumed that no one can be completely trusted to do so in all situations. So we arrive at three *founding assumptions* about objective truth, human dignity, and sin which form the bedrock beneath the *founding principles* of natural rights, the rule of law, due process, and checks and balances.

Although I don't think it is right to call America a "Christian nation," Christians will notice that the founding assumptions about objective truth, human dignity, and sin are also core ideas of the Christian faith: humans were created good by God and given a special role in the creation (human dignity), we fell into sin and rebellion against God through our own pride (sin), and our redemption is realized only through the historical reality of the death and resurrection of God himself in the person of Jesus, which, if untrue, [undermines all Christian faith](#) (objective truth). There are many other aspects of the Christian faith that are not captured by these assumptions, but any orthodox Christian will see how important these assumptions are for our faith, so it is good that we should seek to uphold these assumptions in all aspects of life.

### **The Status Quo Ante-Trump and the Crisis of 2020**

Most Americans and both main political parties have basically committed themselves to the founding principles, and thus implicitly, the founding assumptions. We no longer argue about *if* laws should be applied equally to all Americans; we argue about *how* best to do that, and what new laws might be needed. We don't argue about *if* all Americans, by nature of being human, have certain fundamental rights; we argue about where the limits of those rights should be drawn and if the unborn should be considered as individual persons. Instead of debating the content of the founding principles and assumptions, political battles in the last century have focused largely on what policies to implement within the settled framework. And most people choose who to vote for based on these policy differences.

Like any other group of constituents, Christians have considered each candidate and assessed whose policies are most in line with a Christian worldview. In the last 40 years, evangelical Christians have largely sided with Republicans, specifically because of certain stances on abortion, the family, work, education, and other key issues. We can certainly debate if the Republican Party was the correct choice for evangelicals, but the key point is that the choice was based on policy, not on the founding principles and assumptions of American civil order, to which both parties adhered.

But unlike any election in recent memory, **the 2020 presidential election features one candidate who *does not* affirm the American civil order**, and has in fact sought to undermine its most basic principles and assumptions throughout his first term in office. **That candidate is Donald Trump.**

Donald Trump's disregard of our founding principles is well documented, but let me offer a few examples to get us started. Donald Trump has:

- Sought to [undermine the credibility of judges](#) and the justice system
- [Pardoned his cronies](#) or supporters convicted of serious crimes
- [Used the Justice Department](#) to protect himself rather than administer justice with equality
- [Encouraged extra-judicial violence](#) as legitimate justice
- [Used federal forces](#) to make illegal seizures in violation of the 4<sup>th</sup> amendment
- [Tear-gassed peaceful protestors](#) for a photo-op
- [Sought to undermine](#) a *future* election because his prospects look bleak
- [Advocated against](#) the due process of law

Christians should be deeply concerned about any president who undermines the American founding principles. The above are just a sampling, and you can continue reading about such problems [here](#) or [here](#), among many others. But we should be even more concerned about attacks on the *founding assumptions*, which are essential to both the American civil order *and* to the Christian faith itself, as I described above. Let us now turn to consider these in more depth.

### **Founding Assumptions: Objective Truth**

There are two possible political outcomes if we cease to accept the reality of shared truth. Either nothing gets done, because no one agrees on the premises for a policy debate, or one group or person comes to define truth for all others, and governance proceeds according to that arbitrary definition. Neither of these is a good option, for the first leads to national decay and dissolution, and the second to tyranny. So the Christian should uphold truth because of its central contribution to our faith, and because of its vital role in ensuring order and freedom.

Donald Trump, unfortunately, is perhaps the greatest enemy of truth our nation has ever known. He has made more than 20,000 false or misleading claims as President. (Here is a [comprehensive database](#) of all of them, documented. Go take a look!) Among the most harmful of these, he:

- Emphatically denied that Russia interfered with our elections, which has been [well documented by the Republican controlled Senate](#) (as well as [requesting China's help getting reelected](#)).
- Repeatedly lied to [stoke fears of immigrants](#), particularly concerning crime
- Consistently [lied about the pandemic](#), hampering an effective response
- Encouraged conspiracy theories such as [QAnon](#) and the [Obama birther conspiracy](#) (also [now targeting Kamala Harris](#))
- Lied about the [election results in 2016](#), claiming to win the popular vote "if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."
- Sought to [undermine legitimate reporting](#) on all sorts of topics, and attacked those reporters or outlets he does not like (even recently including Fox News)

Trump is easily the most compulsive liar ever to win high office in America. If we cannot agree on basic facts in this country, even about quotidian things like the size of a crowd, how can we ever hope to agree on the facts to deal with a pandemic, develop our economy, deal

with racism, address hostile foreign powers, or anything else? Donald Trump's approach to truth is the approach of a tyrant, who cares nothing for the shared reality we all live in, and instead seeks to shape reality in his own image. This is antithetical to the shared Christian and American assumption that truth can in fact be known objectively, and represents a significant threat to our civil order.

### **Founding Assumptions: Human Dignity**

God himself is the source of human dignity, and we have seen the importance of recognizing the humanity of our political opponents in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When our opponents are dehumanized, we begin to believe they no longer deserve to be treated with respect. The results can be catastrophic, such as in the cases of the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the Cultural Revolution, Cambodia, Bosnia, Armenia, and countless other genocides before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But Donald Trump has consistently used his words and actions to degrade and dehumanize those who oppose him, or just those whom he does not like. Below is a list of examples showing how Trump fails to respect the inherent dignity of human beings. He has:

- [Repeatedly dehumanized women](#) with language, calling them “dogs,” “crazed, lying lowlife,” “nasty,” “slob,” and so on.
- [Reduced the essence of women to their appearance](#), for example, comments on Carly Fiorina (“Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that?”) or Rosie O’Donnell (“...that fat, ugly face of hers”), or even on the other side, his own daughter: “She does have a very nice figure. I've said if Ivanka weren't my daughter perhaps I'd be dating her.”
- Consistently [demeaned black Americans](#), saying that “laziness is a trait in blacks,” denying the innocence of the so-called “Central Park Five” 15 years after they had been exonerated by DNA evidence, [consistently referring](#) to the “low IQ” or lack of intelligence of black people, and tacitly and sometimes [openly supporting white supremacists](#).
- Dehumanized immigrants, referring to their [“shithole countries,”](#) characterizing Mexican immigrants as “rapists” and criminals, saying immigrants from Haiti “all have AIDS,” and [referring to immigrants as “animals” that would “infest” our country.](#)
- [Detained children at the border](#), separated them from their parents, and denied them soap, toothbrushes, and other basic necessities.

Donald Trump has no respect for human dignity. He only respects those humans who agree with him, which is merely self-interest. By showing his disregard for human dignity, he undermines the idea of natural rights and shows himself opposed to the Christian faith. Christians believe all humans are endowed by God with dignity because each person is a unique creation of God, made in his image. Donald Trump clearly disagrees.

### **Founding Assumptions: Sin**

Finally, the last founding assumption is that all people are flawed, all people sin, and so we should never trust one person to have absolute power. But Donald Trump does not appear to believe that his own power needs checking. This is because he does not believe in his own sin; he does not believe that “the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being,” as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn [famously wrote](#). His intense narcissism is well documented, as he claims to have [“the best words,”](#) the biggest hands, the smartest mind, the

greatest health, etc. But Trump's disregard for his own sin goes well beyond merely thinking highly of himself:

- In [this surreal clip](#), asked if he had ever asked God for forgiveness, Trump admits, "I don't think I have...I don't think so," but that he rather aims for self-improvement.
- [In 2015 he suggested](#) that he did not think he had ever been wrong up until that point in his life: "I think apologizing's a great thing, but you have to be wrong. I will absolutely apologize, sometime in the hopefully distant future, if I'm ever wrong."
- [He repeatedly lied about his affair](#) and the hush money arrangement with porn star Stormy Daniels, but once he could no longer deny the reality, he failed to publicly acknowledge that his adultery was wrong. He appears to have made [a private apology to his wife](#) but only about *the uncomfortable media coverage and scrutiny*, as opposed to the sin of adultery itself.
  - o This is no surprise because Trump has been known to [actually boast about sin](#), and specifically about his sexual exploits with married women in *The Art of the Deal*.
- The [one time he has publicly apologized](#) for his sin was with respect to his lewd remarks on the infamous Access Hollywood tape, about forcing himself on women. In this case, the apology only came after tremendous outcry and only "if anyone was offended" by his "locker room banter," also trying to make himself look better by comparison with Bill Clinton. Thus, his only significant "apology" was itself an attempt to minimize the sin.

A man who thinks he has no sin is especially prone to use power to ill effect, unconstrained by conscience or faith.

### **Re-electing Donald Trump Threatens to Put Us on the Road to Tyranny**

The reason Trump's attacks on our civil order matter so much is because of the precedent they set for the future. Tyranny in formerly democratic countries usually requires:

- (1) A weakened civil order (and thus the principles and assumptions I have described above), so that the system itself cannot effectively check the ambitions of a tyrant
- (2) Sufficient popular and/or military support so that the tyrant seeking to grab power is not immediately unseated by protest and rebellion
- (3) A crisis which the tyrant can use to justify the abolition of weakened rights and checks on power (such as a war, pandemic, economic collapse, etc.), sometimes of the tyrant's own making

This situation is how Hitler came to power. The Weimar Republic was already a weak democracy after the devastation of World War I, and when severe economic crisis struck Germany, Hitler came to power democratically with great (and sudden) popular support and used the economic crisis to consolidate power for himself. Of course we all know what followed. This same template has been used by strongmen around the world in our own time to rule as authoritarians.

American civil order is strong, founded on principles that have withstood great trials in the past. But that is largely because both the majority of Americans and most powerful elites

have bought into the founding principles and assumptions (especially within the last century).

I do not believe Donald Trump is likely to become a tyrant himself. Even if he is re-elected and continues his attacks on democracy, I don't think he has sufficient support from the population at large to effectively rule as an authoritarian. Instead, **Donald Trump is such a problem because he has already done so much to weaken our civil order *and* because if he is re-elected, America would be validating this attack on our civil order.**

With such a precedent, further weakening of our democracy is likely to occur both under a second Trump term and in future presidencies. If our civil order then becomes weak enough, and if a popular would-be tyrant comes to power (either liberal or conservative), then all that is needed is a crisis for America to succumb to tyranny. As we have seen in 2020, crises are not all that hard to come by.

**Even if we never go fully down the road to tyranny, a weakened civil order that cannot effectively check the power of a president would still be a big problem.** Conservatives must remember that **if we set a precedent for letting the president get away with whatever he wants, future *liberal* presidents will feel no guilt in doing exactly the same thing**, to the great consternation of conservatives, no doubt.

Our institutions of civil order are precious, as any conservative knows, and we must preserve them for the sake of ourselves and our children. They are the first and best defense against tyranny or the overconcentration of power in the hands of one person, but Donald Trump is doing everything he can to tear them down.

**For this reason, the 2020 election is not primarily about whose policies are best, but rather about preserving the American system itself. We must not simply accept the undermining of our democracy, which is the first crucial step to tyranny. Instead, we must vote Trump out in November.**

## **Part II – Responding to Objections and Conclusions**

The argument I have been making against Donald Trump is that his reelection poses an existential threat to American civil order. Skeptics are likely to have (at least) three main objections to my argument:

- (1) Liberals show contempt for other key assumptions that I did not highlight, which are of equal importance.
- (2) Liberals are actively destroying civil order by causing or enabling riots across America.
- (3) Liberals have done the same types of things I accuse Trump of doing.

I will try to address each of these objections in turn.

### **(1) Liberals ignore other founding assumptions that I did not highlight.**

Civil order in America is founded on the principles I have explicated above. These principles of civil order do, by necessity, assume certain elements of moral order – namely, objective

truth, sin, and human dignity. However, *not all* moral assumptions held by conservatives (or other groups) are essential to civil order, and I believe in this election we must prioritize the assumptions that are truly essential to civil order.

For example, conservatives believe that abortion is wrong, and I agree (with possible rare exceptions). This belief comes from the combination of two assumptions: the assumption that (1) all humans have dignity (as discussed above), and the assumption that (2) unborn children are full humans. While I agree with both of these assumptions wholeheartedly, and I believe the scientific evidence is strong in support, I recognize that the second assumption is not as obvious as the first and it also is not a primary underpinning of civil order.

For example, often it is the case that embryos do not survive the early stages of development, and in such cases the mother may not even be aware that she was ever pregnant. So it is reasonable to debate if, how, and when to confer political rights on such an embryo, and it is reasonable to debate if these rights should be the same as those of humans who have already been born (or could survive and develop outside the womb with medical assistance). Additionally, it is not obvious how to preserve the rights of women who suffer the pain and grief of natural miscarriage if strict abortion laws were to be enacted (ie, how to ensure they are not charged with committing murder).

The assumption that all born humans have dignity is simple and easy to define (though hard for some people to accept); the assumption that unborn children are full humans is not as simple or easy to define. I believe there are reasonable solutions to the questions, but the point is, the issue is complex and has significant gray area. Our civil order is constructed in such a way that we can (and should) continue to debate this moral assumption, but opposing abortion certainly is not necessary to the civil order itself.

Perhaps more importantly for my argument, during the last 50 years, in which abortion has been legal, civil order has never been seriously threatened by the legality of abortion (nor was it imperiled in the past when abortion was illegal). One might argue that abortion has implications in the long-term for civil order, but it is clear that in the short term, it does not.

I believe abortion to be a great injustice, and Christians are right to oppose it. But without civil order, there is *no justice*, for either the born or the unborn. Differing assumptions about unborn children do not threaten the civil order, and we can continue to debate such things within the American framework as long as that framework remains intact. Therefore, we must deal with Trump first, and abortion second.

As an important side note, Christians should also be more skeptical that voting Republican (especially at the presidential level) actually leads to reduced abortions in the first place. There are several reasons to question this. First, David French [recently argued](#) quite convincingly that the presidency has little influence on the long-term trend of abortion (and of course, he discusses the judges). Second, I would argue that a hyper focus on legal remedies to abortion, specifically the overturning of Roe, has led many Republicans to ignore the important work of actually convincing the culture, which is more likely in the long run to determine national abortion policy than whether or not a specific court case is overturned. But this topic is too big to fully address here.

Another key issue for many conservatives is around sexuality and the family. I have absolutely no intention of debating sexual ethics themselves here, but as with abortion, it is obvious again from our own experience that civil order is not immediately threatened by differing sexual ethics. We all know people who follow sexual ethics that are different from our own and yet we are capable of living in peace with them in an ordered society.

We also have evidence from American history of this fact. Polygamy was practiced by some Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and generated a fierce moral debate. By the 1880's it was outlawed at the federal level and remains illegal to this day in all 50 states. Though it was hotly debated, polygamy did not cause the breakdown of civil order in the areas where it was practiced, and the nation was eventually able to regulate its practice within the American framework of government. We have also regulated other sexual practices that nearly everyone agrees to be immoral, such as pedophilia.

As I have stated, I am a Christian, and so of course I care about the morality of our nation. I seek to follow the principles of Christian ethics, but I recognize that differing moral assumptions about some topics (such as abortion and sexuality) are unlikely to be immediate threats to the civil order of our nation. They do matter, but they will never fully be agreed upon, and our civil order is capable of allowing for ongoing discussion and new policies on such topics as long as we preserve that foundational civil order.

Thus, it is true that in my critique of Trump I have omitted discussion of some important moral assumptions. That is because **the moral assumptions I have highlighted are essential to civil order, while other moral assumptions are not.** Civil order is always the first business of the state, and so when it is threatened, we must put aside our other concerns temporarily to shore it up. **Without civil order first, no policy debate about abortion, sexuality, or any other moral issue has any real meaning for our country.** Trump poses a direct threat to civil order, so we must deal with that first, and then we can have our debates as necessity dictates.

## **(2) Liberals are undermining civil order by causing or enabling riots.**

Some may also now raise the question about riots in Portland, Seattle, Atlanta, and other places recently. Isn't the current, liberal leadership in such places already failing to secure civil order?

First, as discussed earlier, the civil order I have been describing is not the same as "law and order." "Law and order" primarily describes the extent of crime in a particular area at a particular time, while civil order is a complete system for preserving rights and administering justice, contributing to the stability of a nation over time. The extent of crime is certainly one component of civil order, but unless crime is pervasive and lasting, it is not a serious threat to a well-founded civil order for the nation.

We can see this insofar as most tyrannical governments may be very strong on "law and order," due to severe curtailment of rights and brutal punishments for crime, but have nothing close to the enduring civil order of America. Furthermore, we can observe in the US how even when riots hit one city or locality, the rest of the country does not suddenly collapse – the civil order carries on.

In America (as in other democracies) we attempt to balance “law and order” with freedom, particularly in terms of First Amendment rights, which lend themselves to protests that, until the moment of rioting, are perfectly lawful. So a localized riot, in itself, certainly can be a problem of “law and order,” but unless spreading to large areas and lasting for long periods, is not a serious threat to *civil order*.

Second, riots are often (though not always) sparked by legitimate grievances. In recent times, riots have often been a sign that some component of civil order (natural rights, rule of law, etc.) is deficient. Current protests are ultimately based on legitimate grievances of black Americans that contend they are not treated equally under the law, which is a true and serious problem.

I could point to many examples of this problem, but the one that stands out for me in Georgia is the case of Ahmaud Arbery, killed while jogging in Brunswick, GA by obviously racially motivated white men. All murders are terrible, and while white men are certainly not the only people who commit crimes, what stands out in this case is that it took *seventy four days* for any arrests to be made, despite clear evidence in the hands of police. It took a viral video sparking national outrage months after the killing for the murderers to even be charged. That is, justice was not being meted out with equality *because of race*.

I have great compassion for the struggle of black Americans for equal treatment, and I empathize with Dr. King’s point that “a riot is the language of the unheard.” Racism is still a huge problem in America, and it needs to be taken seriously. If more Christians (and everyone) took the problem seriously, I don’t believe we would be having the protests today which sometimes lead to rioting.

But because rioting is often the result of deficiencies in our civil order, it is, to some extent, in the blood of Americans, black, white, and other, who are all seeking to benefit from that same civil order. America started with riots, and I don’t think we will ever be rid of rioting. Consider [this list of civil unrest](#) in American history and tell me you really think this is a matter of if the president is Republican or Democrat. It isn’t that simple.

So while I emphatically oppose violence towards the innocent or the unjust destruction of property (one injustice does not justify another), localized rioting has seldom posed a serious threat to the national civil order, but instead may reveal the areas in our civil order that need improvement. Thus, we need to ensure that those who are rioting are given a voice for their legitimate grievances and that their grievances are addressed. Simultaneously, we must protect the innocent from violence and the destruction of property.

In summary, rioting does need to be addressed, both in terms of its root causes and in terms of protecting the innocent, but it does not undermine the American system of government like the actions of President Trump.

Furthermore, with respect to the presidential election, Trump has undoubtedly worsened the racial animus that has contributed to riots, so removing him will likely be helpful. I believe the same would be true for any other politicians who seek to inflame racial tensions. But I

would encourage each voter to consider the local dynamics in his/her region and see which candidates are best suited to address the root causes of rioting while also protecting the innocent.

### (3) Liberals have done the same thing?

I am not arguing in this piece for the wholesale rejection of Republican candidates in favor of Democratic ones. I am arguing that Trump himself is a particularly dangerous candidate. By connection, other politicians who have embraced Trump's approach are also problematic for me, but that does not include all Republicans (though it does include many leading Republicans in Congress). Also, because the president wields so much power, both political and cultural, I am much more concerned by the presidential contest in particular than I am with other contests. So I think it is appropriate to consider the individual candidates in each race and vote accordingly.

Because of the unique threat of Trump himself, I don't think it is right to argue against Trump merely by saying "liberals" do the same thing. Yes, some liberals have done similar things, especially among the more radical liberals. But we are concerned here with one race, and two particular candidates: Trump and Biden.

So the question is not, "Have liberals done the same thing?" but rather, "Has Biden done the same thing?" or "Have other liberal presidents or presidential candidates done the same thing as Trump?" (since Biden might be expected to act in ways similar to Obama if elected). These are more reasonable comparisons when we weigh this particular race.

All people in similar professions struggle with similar types of temptations. Athletes struggle with the temptation to cheat through performance enhancing drugs or other means. Business people struggle with the temptation to misrepresent their results to enhance their own salaries or standing. House cleaners, mechanics, builders, and all sorts of service workers and manufacturers are tempted to cut corners in order to perform their work more quickly or at lower expense. In *all* jobs, the nature of the work lends the worker to face certain types of temptations.

So it should be no surprise that elected politicians, and especially American presidents—the most powerful of all politicians—should be prone to temptation with respect to power. Thus, it is not sufficient to exonerate Trump's actions merely by saying that liberal presidents have abused their power too. *Every* president in recent memory has abused his power to some extent.

**The appropriate questions instead are: *how often* and *to what extent* did presidents abuse their power, and how did presidents respond when the various checks and balances of the American system pushed back? On both of these counts, Trump truly stands out for the *frequency* and *degree* of his errors, and his unending attempts to delegitimize the checks on his power.** Since we all have different standards for what merits special attention, ultimately these decisions are up to individual judgment, but below are a few comparisons to consider.

- Obama (and Hillary) insulted people, but they never *dehumanized* people in the way Trump does. The worst thing either of them has said in public (that I could find) was

Hillary's "basket of deplorables" comment, which was indeed mean-spirited, but not *dehumanizing*. She didn't call anyone "animals" or "dogs" or say they would "infest" America (like bugs). And that comment was significantly worse than anything I recall Obama saying. Most importantly, it was not a habit. We should never insult people, but everyone says things they shouldn't. Insulting others *from time to time* does not undermine the assumption of human dignity, but *dehumanizing others constantly* does.

- One area where some liberals have gone too far, in my opinion, is constantly referring to people they disagree with as "bigots," especially on topics of disputed morality (I do think the word is appropriate sometimes with respect to racial attitudes, but I personally do not like using it given how loaded it is). However, I would note that Biden hardly ever uses that word as far as I can tell. So it might be reasonable to oppose a candidate who constantly calls Christians bigots due to any disagreement of morality, but that is *not* a reason to cast a vote specifically for Trump over Biden.
- Obama certainly lied or misled the public as all politicians do, *but never to the pathological extent of Trump*, whose lies are so constant that they are nearly impossible to count, and range from the most ridiculous of topics (crowd size) to the most important (the pandemic, foreign intervention in elections, etc.). Everyone expects lies and misleading from politicians, but [the number of Trump's lies](#) and their range to encompass so vast a scale of topics is unprecedented.
- Obama had disputes with conservative news outlets, particularly Fox News, but he never went to the lengths of Trump in trying to silence his opponents. Trump has consistently attacked the press as a whole, labeling them "enemies of the people," and especially when he has not liked its conclusions (even Fox News, recently), repeatedly banning parts of the press from attending his events or press conferences, harassing individuals on Twitter to the point of needing bodyguards, and so on. I come to the [same conclusion as Chris Wallace of Fox News](#): "I believe that President Trump is engaged in the most direct sustained assault on freedom of the press in our history."
- Obama had one or two controversial pardons (Manning, Lopez Rivera), but neither of them was closely associated with Obama himself. Trump has repeatedly pardoned those convicted of serious crimes *because of their close association to himself*, or their celebrity status.
- Obama used his justice department in what appeared to many Christians as targeted, partisan attacks on pro-life groups and businesses (such as Hobby Lobby). However, Obama did not try to undermine the legitimacy of the judicial process that ruled on his actions towards Hobby Lobby. The process followed its course, and Hobby Lobby won at the Supreme Court. At that point, Obama did not launch into a Twitter tirade trying to undermine the decision and calling for harassment of the judges. While of course Obama was not happy about the decision, he respected its legitimacy and made the necessary policy changes required by the decision. But when Trump does not get his way, he personally attacks and harasses the individuals involved, and tries to undermine their legitimacy. That is, he attacks the system itself.

My discussion above has nothing to do with if Obama was a good or bad president. But on all of the issues above—lying, dehumanizing others, abusing power for partisan ends—the failings of Obama were not even close in their *degree or frequency* to those of Trump.

Obama sometimes used his power for partisan ends, but he did not seek to delegitimize the press or the courts that checked his power. Obama sometimes lied, but not to the extent of undermining the very existence of objective truth. Obama sometimes insulted conservatives, but he never dehumanized his opponents. Trump has failed to uphold the founding principles and assumptions *incessantly*, seeking to delegitimize all checks on his power, undermining the very idea of truth with his pathological lying, and dehumanizing his opponents.

Furthermore, the current candidate is Joe Biden, not Obama, and the presidential contest is not between all “liberals” and Trump. I am not aware of any deeply serious impeachments of Biden’s character with respect to pathological habits of lying, dehumanizing others, delegitimizing the rule of law/checks on executive power, or denying his own sin. Quite the contrary on all these points. He has been in politics long enough to reveal such faults, and I think it is reasonable to conclude from his character that he does not suffer from the egregious maladies that plague Trump. He would surely make mistakes as president, but probably not beyond the bounds of what we would have considered typical before the Trump era.

Thus, while Obama and other liberals have surely made many mistakes, I conclude that the relevant liberals have *not*, in fact, undermined the basic principles of American democracy with anywhere near the frequency or degree that Trump has. Most of the reasons conservatives did not like Obama were simply issues of policy within the existing civil order.

### **Conclusion – we must oppose Trump**

I do not deny the vastly different policies of the Republican and Democratic parties, and I understand why many conservative Christians are troubled by elements of the Democratic platform. But Joe Biden and Kamala Harris do not threaten the basic underpinnings of American democracy. They have shown commitment throughout their political careers to work *within the existing framework of American civil order*.

**Donald Trump, by contrast, has repeatedly and brazenly attacked the framework of American civil order. If he is re-elected, *after so openly and consistently attacking our civil order*, we would be validating the intentional undermining of our democracy.** Future would-be tyrants (or unscrupulous presidents), conservative or liberal, could reasonably expect to further weaken our democracy with impunity, ignoring truth, precedent, and basic morality, and—given sufficient popular support and an appropriate crisis—govern tyrannically.

Re-electing Trump would thus weaken American democracy for generations to come, greatly raising the risk of tyranny for our children and grandchildren. For this reason, I strongly encourage the Christian voter to put aside policy preferences this fall, instead prioritizing the merits of the American civil order itself. **Freedom and justice are meaningless unless we maintain the civil order in which they can survive. Thus, we must reject everything Donald Trump has done to undermine that system by resoundingly voting him out of office in November.**