

# The Bulletin

## Women of Diverse Backgrounds Reflect On Life During Election Cycle

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These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

Juwayria Zahurullah is a third-year studying Psychology and Religion with an Education Studies concentration. She is part of the Muslim Students Association and an organizer with Students for a Free Palestine. In this interview, Zahurullah reflected on her Muslim identity during this election cycle.

### What has it been like to grow up as a woman of color in the Trump and Biden era of immigration policies?

I am exceedingly grateful to have grown up in a beautiful, diverse Muslim community. Being Muslim brings me a lot of pride, and I hold those values very close to my heart. I grew up with many Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian, Yemeni, and Sudanese friends whose families were cornerstones of our community. I witnessed the pain these families endured as they watched their siblings be slaughtered en masse by the United States military and its proxies. The dehumanization and mass death of Muslims is something that most Americans have become wholly desensitized to. The memory of [hundreds of thousands of] Iraqi civilians being murdered on the false pretense of weapons of mass destruction is faint or non-existent in most people's minds. Most Americans have not seen the photos from Abu Ghraib prison. Arabs and Muslims have become faceless bodies that pile up on the news, with no active voice to identify the perpetrators. I grew up understanding that all U.S. politicians are complicit in the dehumanization of Muslims and the destruction and destabilization in the Middle East. I watched Barack Obama sustain bombing campaigns on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen throughout eight years of presidency. For the last year, I have watched Joe Biden and Kamala Harris pour several billion taxpayer dollars into weapons and technology used to commit genocide against the Palestinian and Lebanese people. Entire bloodlines descending from Jesus are being erased. Bodies are disintegrating from the scale of bombing. The world is burning, and my community is weeping.

### What have you done to focus on your mental health and celebrate your identity during this election cycle?

I have found it incredibly difficult to address the question of mental health during the last year. What is work-genocide balance? What does it mean to process the killing of 44,000\* people in one year? To me, this is not something that can be processed. It is not at all normal to see what we are seeing,



Juwayria Zahurullah

Photo courtesy of Juwayria Zahurullah

and attempting to understand that would require you to repress your internal sense of humanity and justice. The pain and fire that many people have been feeling in this election is what me and so many others in my community have been feeling for the past year. I believe the best outlet for this pain, sadness, and anger is action. For every minute you spend reading harrowing stories coming out of Gaza, read a poem by a Palestinian writer. Go into your community and speak with the Palestinian families, hear their stories. Disrupt, educate, connect with others. Radically redistribute your wealth. Deprogram your mind from the individualistic thinking that allows us to believe our actions exist in a bubble.

\*According to The Lancet, indirect deaths (disease, famine) range from 3-15 times to the number of direct deaths, indicating that the actual death toll could be much higher, about 200,000.

### What changes would you like to see regarding rhetoric related to the election?

I did not support any of the third-party candidates, but I have several friends and family members who did. Genocide was our red line. Imposed starvation threatening the imminent death of 2 million people, half of them being children, was our red line. The bombing of NICU wings in barely-functioning hospitals was our red line. Those are values we were not willing to compromise.

I want people to truly understand what caused this devastating failure of the Democratic Party. It was not third-party voters, it was the rise of hatred and fascism set forth by the Republicans that Democrats reflexively matched. It was the blatant dismissal and condescension toward key populations and pandering toward moderate Republicans instead. It was massacre after massacre and lie after lie. I want people to grasp how truly detached from reality it is to blame voters who refused to abandon their values for this outcome before holding actual Trump voters or Democratic policymakers accountable.

### How can Oberlin College and the general community better support people of color during the election?

It has never been and will never be enough for the start and end of your political action to be a ballot. As Kwame Ture said, "You vote once in four years, and that's your political responsibility? That's the height of bourgeois propaganda, making the people politically irresponsible. Politics is every day." I hope people recognize that minorities are not monoliths dictated by the imperial identities enforced upon us. We are not obligated to provide unconditional support to parties or candidates simply on the basis of our minority status. I am devastated, but not significantly more than I have been for the past year. I will look for support in the communities that have offered it to me unconditionally, and I hope to see those communities grow. People will be more willing to fight now, and I will always hold hurt that this is what it took for people to care, but I am focused now on building a stronger movement to serve the greater goal of total liberation.

Ania Ocasio is a fourth-year student studying Environmental Studies and History with a pathway in agriculture and food studies. She is the president of the Oberlin Bike Co-op and a board representative for Harkness Co-op. She is also on the board of Moot Court and an Office of Energy and Sustainability intern. Ocasio discusses being a second generation Puerto Rican and Polish immigrant and how that identity has manifested itself during election cycles.

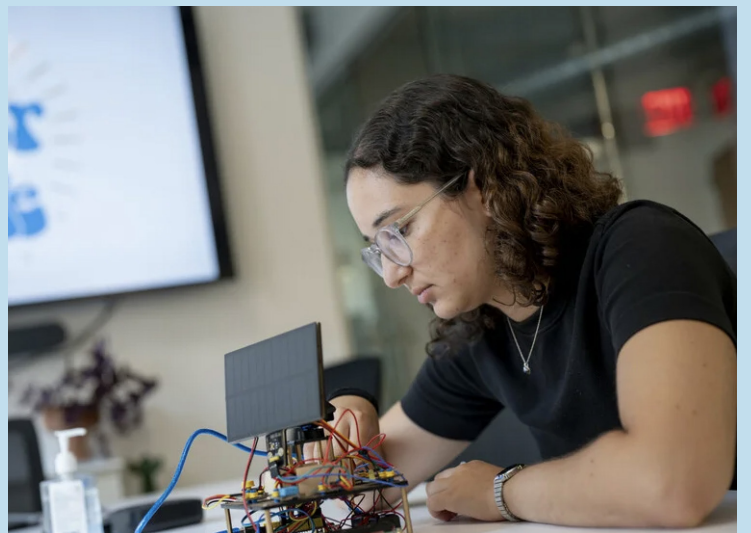
### What has it been like to grow up in the Trump and Biden era of immigration policies?

Growing up in this era of Trump and Biden immigration policies has been really interesting from my family's perspective. It's so interesting to see how xenophobia can play out and even be manifested within the communities who are immigrants themselves. I think you see it a lot in the Polish-American communities



Ania Ocasio

Photo courtesy of Ania Ocasio



Noah Hamaoui

Photo courtesy of the Office of Communications

of Chicago. Chicago has a really high population of Polish people. It's one of the second most populated places for Polish people outside of Warsaw or something like that. Something interesting that definitely plays out within those communities is just this sentiment of, "Oh! Where are you from?" They're still just kind of like, "But what kind of immigrant are you?" That's very problematic in its own way.

### Around a week ago, comedian Tony Hinchcliffe was a speaker at a Trump rally, and he made derogatory comments about Puerto Rico. As a Latina voter, what was your reaction to these comments?

The Trump rally comedian's comments were so benign to me. It's just like a call to the type of people that vote for Trump. I think it's ridiculous, obviously, and just not true, and I wasn't surprised.

However, it was cool to see the Puerto Ricans of the internet get together, and the island, the people, and the culture are awesome.

### What have you done to focus on your mental health and celebrate your identity during this past election cycle?

I think it's really hard to take people seriously when time and time again, they've shown that the things they believe in are purely reactionary or ineffective. For years and years, Trump has been on the ballot — since I was in middle school. There have always been racist things being pushed. People have always favored Trump, and the way that I protect my mental health from that I guess is just by not taking

what they're saying seriously because it is untrue. I'm lucky enough to live and be surrounded by people who are not calling my culture garbage.

Fourth-year Noah Hamaoui is graduating this semester with a degree in Environmental Studies. She is a circulation assistant at Clarence Ward Art Library and serves as an "eco rep" with the Oberlin College Office of Energy and Sustainability. Originally from São Paulo, Brazil, she spoke to the Review about being an international student during election cycles and changing administrations.

### What motivated you to study in the United States? How was the visa process influenced by politicians?

Growing up, I always wanted to do theater but decided I wanted to do something more related to social impact. I realized that I wanted to work with the environment, but Brazil doesn't have a major similar to Environmental Studies. When I found out that it existed here, I was like, "This is perfect!" That's what I've been building for almost my entire life. During the 2020 election cycle, I was definitely wondering if Trump won the election again, would that impact my ability to come or not?

### What do you wish people knew about being an international student during the election?

There's this fear of our ability to stay here based on who is President. That is really annoying.