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**RAFAŁ KOWALSKI**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1062-1762>  
Faculty of Theology in Wrocław i University of Wrocław  
[rafal.kowalski@pwt.wroc.pl](mailto:rafal.kowalski@pwt.wroc.pl)

**RENATA DUDA**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0476-9111>  
University of Wrocław  
[renata.duda@uw.edu.pl](mailto:renata.duda@uw.edu.pl)

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## Pope Francis and Donald Trump on Global Challenges. An Analysis of *Fratelli tutti* and the 2020 Presidential Campaign

### *Abstract*

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** This article presents an analysis of Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli tutti* in the context of Donald Trump's 2020 re-election campaign.

**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** The aim is to assess the extent to which key issues identified by the Pope as threats to democracy – such as immigration, environmental neglect and populist tendencies – are reflected in the US President's rhetoric.

**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** The research problem concerns the discrepancy between Donald Trump's political agenda and the moral message contained in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, in which the Pope offers a critique of populism, exclusionary policies and environmental neglect.

**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The results of the study demonstrate a clear contrast between the nationalistic and exclusive rhetoric of the then US president, which overlooked or marginalised environmental issues, and the inclusive and justice-oriented message of *Fratelli tutti*.

**CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:** The article's innovative approach consists of comparing the text of the papal encyclical *Fratelli tutti* with an analysis of Donald Trump's 2020 election campaign

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rhetoric. Confronting the Pope's reflections on migration, environmental protection, and the rise of populist tendencies with Donald Trump's speeches revealed areas of tension between Catholic ethics and political practice. Consequently, the article proposes interpreting the papal document as a form of a moral intervention. This approach does not support any particular political agenda; rather, it aims to highlight the universal ethical principles that underlie social life.

Having a pope from the United States opens new perspectives for analyzing the Church's social teaching in the context of American politics. In the future, it will be interesting to examine whether and how the new pope's encyclicals address socio-political issues relevant to the U.S.

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**KEYWORDS:**

Fratelli tutti, Pope Francis, Donald Trump, threat to democracy

PREFACE

Catholics are one of the largest religious groups in the United States, outnumbering every single Protestant denomination. It is therefore not surprising that in the 2020 presidential election, when Joe Biden, a Catholic who has publicly emphasised on more than one occasion his commitment to faith and Christian values, ran for office against Donald Trump – a former member of two communities of both the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches, who now describes himself as a 'non-denominational Christian', the voice of Catholic voters gained significance. In this context, the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, issued during the election campaign, takes on particular significance not only as an encouragement to integrate moral issues such as fraternity, respect for other cultures or helping the marginalised and excluded people into the public debate, but also as an explicit criticism of Donald Trump's policies (although he is not directly mentioned in the document), especially with regard to his expressed desire to stop the flow of migrants by erecting a wall on the US-Mexican border. Populism and nationalism, which resonate strongly in Donald Trump's electoral rhetoric (Gaufman & Ganesh, 2024; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, 2024; Greven, 2016), are also seen by the Pope as harmful. Pope Francis warns against ideologies which, under the guise of defending national interests, lead to exclusion and the creation of new forms of social egoism. However, reading this document may also pose a challenge for Joe Biden and those supporters of the Democratic

Party who take a compromise-oriented stance on the pro-life issue. Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has consistently emphasised his commitment to defending life and has expressed his firm opposition to abortion, which may be controversial among that part of the Catholic Democratic electorate who support the right to legal abortion (Pepinster, 2020).

The main purpose of the article is to analyse Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli tutti* in the context of Donald Trump's 2020 re-election campaign. The article seeks to explore the key issues raised by the Pope which are perceived as threats to democracy and social justice, and which, as the authors suggest, are reflected in Trump's actions and rhetoric. Particular emphasis is placed on the analysis of two fundamental issues: the approach to migrants, and environmental protection. In order to outline the broader context for the issue discussed, the first part of the article presents the situation of Catholics as an important component of the social and political structure of the United States, along with their voting preferences. This is followed by a general presentation of the legal regulations of the Catholic Church regarding the possibility of interference in the current politics of individual countries, and then an analysis of the official statements of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and individual bishops concerning the 2020 election campaign. In this way, the background has been outlined for a consideration of sections of the *Fratelli tutti* encyclical that may directly pertain to the policies of Donald Trump and his opponent in the presidential election, Joe Biden.

The second part of the article analyses Donald Trump's election rally speeches delivered between 28 August and 30 September 2020<sup>1</sup>, as well as public opinion polls. In particular, the study focuses on the two key issues that Francis identifies as threats to contemporary American society and democracy: the approach to migrants and climate change. In order to better understand the above issues, each will outline the relevant social and political context prevailing during the

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<sup>1</sup> The adoption of a specific timeframe enabled the authors to identify 17 speeches delivered by D. Trump, primarily in swing states where electoral preferences are variable and support for either party cannot be clearly predicted (including Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Nevada). The initial speech was delivered by Trump during a rally in New Hampshire on 28 August, while the final speech was delivered in Duluth, Minnesota, on 30 September.

2020 presidential campaign. The timeframe for the analysis is defined by two important events that are crucial for achieving the goals of this study. On 28 August 2020, Donald Trump, as the Republican Party's candidate and the incumbent president, delivered his nomination acceptance speech which officially launched his election campaign. Meanwhile, on 3 October 2020, the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* was published, in which Pope Francis critically addressed certain aspects of contemporary politics that can be associated with the rhetoric and actions of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States.

## CATHOLICS IN THE USA

According to the latest data from the Pew Research Center, the Catholic population in the United States remains relatively stable, with 20% of American adults identifying as Catholic (Nortey et al., 2024). This relatively stable trend has persisted since 2014 and, despite a decrease from 24% in 2007, shows the strong presence of Catholicism as an important component of the religious and political structure of the American society. At the same time, in recent decades, there have been significant changes in the ethnic composition of American Catholics and in their political affiliations, making their vote, once a key support for the Democratic Party, more dispersed and ideologically diverse. The dynamics of demographic change in the USA associated with the growth of the Latino American population has significantly altered the ethnic structure of American Catholics. Although white Catholics still constitute the majority, comprising 57% of this group, their share has decreased by 8 percentage points since 2007. Meanwhile, the proportion of Latino Catholics has increased to 33% of the total number of Catholics.

Alongside these changes in the ethnic structure, there has been a significant dynamic in the process of change in party affiliation over the past few decades. Historically, Catholics were one of the key voting groups supporting the Democratic Party. In the 1960s, 70% of Catholics identified with the Democrats, while only 22% aligned with the Republican Party. In the following years, there has been a clear trend of Catholics gradually moving away from the Democratic Party and towards the Republican Party. Over the years, despite some fluctuations,

by 2020, the distribution of votes stabilised at relatively equal proportions, with 46% of Catholics supporting the Democratic Party, while 40% expressed a preference for the Republican Party (Smidt, 2021, p. 286). When analysing party identification by ethnic group, there is a clear division and differentiation between white Catholics and Latino Catholics. According to Pew Research Center data (Doherty et al., 2024, p. 36), an analysis of fluctuations in party identification over 15 years (1994–2023) reveals a noticeable increase in support for the Republican Party among white Catholics, with 61% of voters in this group identifying with this party, making a significant change from 15 years ago when preferences were almost evenly split between Democrats and Republicans (48% and 49% respectively). In the case of Latino Catholics, 60% of registered voters in this group still identify with the Democratic Party, although their loyalty has decreased from 71% in 1994. There was also a slight increase in support for the Republican Party over the same period, from 28% to 35%. These fluctuations in party identification among registered white and non-white Catholic voters may stem from growing diversity in economic and social views within these groups, which are not always fully represented by the party's programme. In addition, increasing political polarisation and changing voter priorities may prompt representatives of these groups to seek alternative solutions among the opposing party's agenda.

The change in political preferences among Catholics and the noticeable shift away from the Democratic Party towards the Republican Party over recent decades has become a significant factor influencing the electoral process. Views on the issues addressed by political parties are largely shaped by party affiliation rather than religious beliefs. This political divide also affects positions on key social issues such as abortion, where political preferences (rather than religious beliefs) play a major role in shaping opinions. Pew Research Center data (Nortey et al., 2024) shows that Catholic views on abortion are diverse, although a majority (61%) supports its legalisation. Of these, 39% believe that abortion should be legal in most cases, while 22% think it should be legal in all cases. Meanwhile, 39% of Catholics believe that abortion should be prohibited in most (28%) or all (11%) cases. These preferences vary based on political affiliation: 78% of Catholic Democrats support the legalisation of abortion, while only 43% of Catholic Republicans express a similar stance.

An important issue in the context of this article is to analyse how Pope Francis and his pontificate are perceived among American Catholics. The data provided by the statistical centres highlight a clear polarisation on this issue, which primarily aligns with party lines rather than ethnic lines (Tevington et al., 2024). Although Pope Francis still enjoyed a positive opinion of 75% of American Catholics in 2024, a gradual decline in his popularity is evident compared to previous years. In 2021, 83% of Catholics had a favourable view of the Pope, and in 2015, at the peak of his popularity, this percentage stood at 90%. While these positive opinions are far better than those of his immediate predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, they do not reach the almost universal approval enjoyed by Pope John Paul II, who consistently maintained support above 90% throughout his pontificate. At the same time, a discernible trend of growing polarisation among American Catholics has emerged, following party lines. Catholics who identify with or lean towards the Democratic Party report very high support for Pope Francis, around 90%. Notably, however, this level of support has remained stable over the last few decades, and the reasons for the overall downward trend in support for the Pope among Catholics should be sought in the shift among Catholics who identify with or lean towards the Republican Party. In 2024, only 63% of Republican Catholics expressed support for Pope Francis and the direction of the Church under his leadership, while 35% held a negative view – an unprecedented increase in dissatisfaction compared to previous surveys conducted since 2013.

## THE POPE AND POLITICS

Accusing the Bishop of Rome of interfering in an electoral campaign in a specific country, or even preparing an official Vatican document to favour one of the candidates over another, seems unjustified in the context of the teaching of Second Vatican Council, as expressed in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Gaudium et spes*:

The Church ... is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system ... she respects and fosters the freedom and responsibility of citizens (Sobór Watykański II, 2002, 76).

In practice, the above principle has meant that the Church leaders refrain from pointing out specific solutions in so-called temporal matters, limiting themselves to making ethical judgements and proclaiming general principles when required by faith and the moral law. At the same time, in the Church's social teaching, a distinction has been emphasised between politics, understood as "the prudent concern for the common good" (Jan Paweł II, 1996, p. 20), and political involvement, defined as "making concrete decisions, formulating programmes, conducting campaigns, participating in representative bodies, and exercising authority" (Nitecki, 1994, p. 12). Due to the universal nature of its mission, the Church has rejected the possibility of clergy actively participating in the latter form of political activity, which is also implicitly outlined in the Code of Canon Law (Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego, 1984, can. 747).

Pope Francis' prior work as bishop in Buenos Aires suggests that social issues and the actions of specific politicians have not been indifferent to him. This does not mean that Cardinal Bergoglio can be accused of political involvement, since his statements from that period definitely did not go beyond proclaiming moral and ethical principles and reminding the Church's teaching on topics such as corruption, social inequality, poverty and the fate of the excluded, abortion, or the legalisation of same-sex unions. However, journalists and commentators who described the relations between him as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and Chairman of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, and President Nestor Kirchner, and later his successor in office – privately his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner – speak openly of coldness, conflict, tension, and hostility. In his homilies, the cardinal criticised the government's policies, and successive presidents, not staying silent in return, called him: "the spiritual leader of the political opposition" (*Las claves*, 2013).

Are there sufficient grounds to believe that by writing *Fratelli tutti*, Francis crossed a seemingly inviolable line, moving from the level of "metapolitics" to political involvement? And could this time President Donald Trump, after reading the encyclical, refer to the words spoken by Argentine President Nestor Kirchner? – This is the main question analysed in this article.

## AMERICAN BISHOPS VS POPE FRANCIS

The 2020 electoral campaign in the United States presented the American bishops with a serious dilemma. On one hand, the incumbent President, Donald Trump, who during his term took several measures to protect life, religious freedom, and family rights, i.e. issues that were at the heart of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' attention, while speaking out completely against Catholic teaching on topics such as immigration, the death penalty, racism, and foreign policy. On the other hand, Joe Biden, a nominal Catholic, began his battle for the presidency. While many of his views largely aligned with the Church's social teaching, at the same time they also conflicted with its moral teachings on issues such as abortion, religious freedom, and LGBTQ+ rights. It cannot be definitely stated that this led to a schism within the American Episcopate, as the protection of life remained at the forefront of discussions on the issues to be prioritised, and in all these debates, bishops who aligned more closely to Donald Trump's policies gained a clear advantage. Initially, most bishops were reluctant to become explicitly involved in political battle or to take any action that could even slightly suggest such involvement. However, this did not stop both Republican and Democratic campaigns from seeking the support of Catholics, especially as they made up 20% of the electorate, with significant numbers of votes in states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan (Gayte et al., 2022, pp. 103–105).

The recognition of abortion as a critical issue when deciding who to vote for in political elections – according to Marie Gayte – could not go unnoticed by the Holy See. Pope Francis, as Gayte argues, had already called on American bishops in 2016 to balance their stance, and in one interview, he stated that the Church was “obsessed” with abortion, same-sex marriage, and contraception, and that it needed to take on “a face of new balance”. At that time, voices like that of Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe emerged, condemning Trump's rhetoric and accusing him of “scapegoating and targeting people such as migrants, refugees, and the poor” (Gayte et al., p. 113).

The divisions among American bishops and the tension between the U.S. Episcopate and the Holy See became clear in 2019, during a conference and discussion about the contents of the guide on the participation of lay Catholics in the presidential election, entitled

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship. The Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, urged that the pastoral message of Pope Francis' pontificate to reach the American people. The retired Bishop of Philadelphia responded to these pressures by stating that while the bishops supported the Holy Father, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops had always prioritised the pro-life stance. This was perceived by the media as support for Trump's campaign and created good ground for the slogan that true Catholics supported the Republican candidate, not the "fake Catholic" – Joe Biden. During the same conference, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago voiced his opinion that the guide should not be based on a reductionist vision of Catholicism, and emphasised the importance of considering issues such as the fate of the abandoned, the destitute, the defenceless, the elderly, those at risk of hidden euthanasia, victims of human trafficking, and the significance of migration and climate problems. However, he remained unnoticed in practice (Gayte et al., pp. 114–115).

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York also deserves special mention. In 2016, he published a column criticising Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobic statements. Yet, eight years later, the Republican candidate called him his greatest friend, and the cardinal reportedly replied that he reciprocated those feelings, and that he spoke to Trump on the phone so often that his own mother complained that her son talked more with the president than with her. The politician reported his participation in a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Dolan at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on social media platform Twitter, while the cardinal appeared on Fox News, praising the President's aides, and emphasizing how sensitive Trump was to the feelings of the religious community. Finally, Dolan offered a prayer at the Republican convention, thanking God for a country that values religious freedom. This paved the way for one of the incumbent president's campaign slogans: "Catholics for Trump" (Gayte et al., pp. 113, 117–118).

The Republican candidate's attempts to involve the Church in his campaign politics can be seen in the fact that when his opponent began presenting himself as supporting Pope Francis' Catholic priorities, and promoting with the slogan "Are you a Pope Francis voter?", Trump appealed to the internal conflict within the Church community

by seeking the support of Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the former Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S. (formally excommunicated in 2024), who had openly criticised the Bishop of Rome, accusing him of covering up cases of paedophilia among the clergy and calling for his resignation. Trump's campaign spread the narrative that the contemporary Church strayed from true Catholicism, especially when it comes to the Pope, and that both Francis and the bishops needed a sort of correction in their thinking, and that this was the role of truly faithful Catholics (Gayte et al., p. 119–122).

In this climate, Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli tutti* was published, which, according to its author, was intended to offer a modest contribution to continued reflection; in the face of present-day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, the humanity may prove capable of responding with "a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words", because, as the Bishop of Rome emphasised, no one can face life in isolation (Franciszek, 2022, n. 6–8).

## THE ENCYCLICAL AND ITS AMERICAN CONNOTATIONS

Analysing the issues raised in the document, in the context of the hypothesis adopted, it is noteworthy that the Pope explicitly mentions the United States twice as an example illustrating the topics discussed. For the first time, in paragraph 124, Francis quotes an excerpt from the 2018 pastoral letter of the American Conference of Catholic Bishops. Considering the number of letters issued by individual episcopates around the world, and the fact that they are not obliged to inform the Holy See about their content, it can be presumed that the Bishop of Rome was aware of the current social situation in the USA while writing the document, and that it mattered to him.

Although this argument is weakened by the quotes of the teachings of other bishops (from Portugal, Australia, Congo, South Africa, Colombia, Croatia, and India), the teaching of the U.S. bishops is referenced in relation to one of the central themes of the encyclical, namely migration and the Christian approach towards refugees. In the aforementioned paragraph 124, the Pope unequivocally states:

Each country also belongs to the foreigner, inasmuch as a territory's goods must not be denied to a needy person coming from elsewhere. As the Bishops of the United States have taught, there are fundamental rights that precede any society, precede any society because they flow from the dignity granted to each person as created by God (Franciszek, 2022, n. 124).

Francis deepens this thought in subsequent paragraphs of his document, only to utter, for the second time, a statement that leaves no doubt about its interpretation, and which directly alludes to Donald Trump's policies. The Bishop of Rome, convincing that encounters between people from different cultural backgrounds are an opportunity for growth and a gift for all involved, states: "Latino culture is a ferment of values and possibilities that can greatly enrich the United States" (Franciszek, 2022, n. 135). Referring to the image of neighbourly relations, which, he says, are characterised by gratitude, solidarity and reciprocity, Francis notes: "Would that neighbouring countries (USA and Mexico – author's note) were able to encourage a similar neighbourly spirit between their peoples". He adds at the same time: "Yet the spirit of individualism also affects relations between countries [...] perhaps we were trained in this kind of fear and mistrust" (Franciszek, 2022, n. 152).

It is impossible to overlook the Bishop of Rome's criticism of using the migration crisis for political purposes. Francis condemns the stirring of emotions and the spread of xenophobic mentality.

Migrants are not seen as entitled like others to participate in the life of society, and it is forgotten that they possess the same intrinsic dignity as any person [...] No one will ever openly deny that they are human beings, yet in practice, by our decisions and the way we treat them, we can show that we consider them less worthy, less important, less human. For Christians, this way of thinking and acting is unacceptable, since it sets certain political preferences above deep convictions of our faith: the inalienable dignity of each human person regardless of origin, race or religion, and the supreme law of fraternal love (Franciszek, 2022, n. 39),

notes the Bishop of Rome and expands this thought in the statement:

The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity. Differences of colour, religion, talent, place of birth or

residence, and so many others, cannot be used to justify the privileges of some over the rights of all (Franciszek, 2022, n. 118).

A clear reference to the rhetoric of the President of the United States can also be seen in the Pope's negative assessment of the initiative to build walls to separate other cultures and nationalities. First, Francis draws an analogy to an ancient town whose inhabitants, surrounded by defensive walls, treated everything outside as barbarian and something to be defended against. He then condemns "the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people" (Franciszek, 2022, n. 27). The consequence of such actions is that the world is reduced to one's own area only, where those outside become merely "them", ceasing to be persons with inalienable dignity. In the second case, the Pope moves away from analogy or meta-language. He unequivocally condemns

a kind of 'local' narcissism unrelated to a healthy love of one's own people and culture. It is born of a certain insecurity and fear of the other that leads to rejection and the desire to erect walls for self-defence (Franciszek, 2022, n. 146).

Meanwhile, according to Francis, a good politician should take the first step and insist that different voices be heard, rather than delve into fanaticism or deepen social and cultural fragmentation (Franciszek, 2022, n. 191).

Another important topic relevant to our consideration is Francis' reference to ecological issues. In paragraph 178 of *Fratelli tutti*, the Pope states that "true statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good", recognising that "political powers do not find it easy to assume this duty in the work of nation-building, much less in forging a common project for the human family". In conclusion, the Bishop of Rome states:

Thinking of those who will come after us does not serve electoral purposes, yet it is what authentic justice demands ... the earth 'is lent to each generation, to be handed on to the generation that follows' (Franciszek, 2022, n. 178).

The final area we want to highlight when comparing the papal teaching with the statements of the then U.S. President, running for re-election in 2020, is Francis' negative assessment of populist forms of politics. The Bishop of Rome unequivocally condemns the pursuit "popularity by appealing to the basest and most selfish inclinations of certain sectors of the population". He adds that such actions are even worse "whether in cruder or more subtle forms, it leads to the usurpation of institutions and laws" (Franciszek, 2022, n. 159). The Pope recognises this type of actions, among others, in the spread of "lack of concern for the vulnerable, which is used demagogically for its own purposes" (Franciszek, 2022, n. 155). He also condemns the "craven exchange of charges and counter-charges", which in his view only seeks to destroy others, where "debate degenerates into a permanent state of disagreement and confrontation, sowing nothing but division, conflict, and a bleak cynicism" (Franciszek, 2022, n. 197).

## DONALD TRUMP'S STANCE ON MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Although the 2020 presidential election saw the votes of Catholic voters divided almost equally between the candidates, a deep political divide is evident at the level of ethnic structure (Igielnik et al., 2021). White Catholics, who made up 14% of the electorate, were more likely to support the Republican Party and its candidate Donald Trump (52%) than the Democratic candidate Joe Biden (44%). On the other hand, Latino Catholics overwhelmingly favoured the Democratic Party (67%) over the Republican Party (26%) (Gayte et al., 2022, p. 166). This division aligns with historical patterns that show a clear dichotomy in political preferences between these two groups. Over the last six presidential election cycles (2000–2020), the majority of white Catholics consistently voted for Republican candidates, reflecting their identification with conservative values. Latino Catholics, on the other hand, regularly supported Democratic candidates, reflecting their stronger commitment to the party's political line, particularly regarding issues of social and racial inequalities.

## MIGRATION

The issue of migration played an important, though varied, role in the 2020 presidential election in the USA, depending on the preferences of each candidate's voters. Donald Trump's supporters ranked this issue highly on their priority list (61% considered it very important), just behind the economy (88%) and crime (74%). For Joe Biden's supporters, migration was not significant in their voting preferences, as only 46% deemed it very important. Instead, healthcare (84%) and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (82%) were of much greater concern to this group. Democrats viewed migration more through the lens of human rights, but it did not dominate their electoral priorities (Doherty, 2020, pp. 35–36).

The rhetoric used by Donald Trump during the 2020 campaign continued from that of 2016 and was based on the need for further expansion of the wall on the US-Mexico border. The difference was that in 2020, Trump highlighted his past achievements by pointing to the construction of 300 miles of border wall despite legal and financial challenges. Similarly to 2016, Trump portrayed migrants as a threat to national security, arguing that they contribute to rising crime and drug-related problems. His migration program was based on criticising the Democrats' lenient policies towards migrants, which he believed led to lower wages and jobs losses for American citizens, especially in lower-skilled sectors. A completely different approach was presented by Joe Biden's campaign, whose narrative was more subdued and focused on the need to expand legal migration routes and reinstate the refugee admission program, which had been curtailed at the start of Donald Trump's presidency. Biden's immigration plan was based on the broader premise that immigration is a necessary element for the economic development of the USA and an important component of its cultural identity, with the restoration of legal immigration routes seen as a moral obligation for America.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

During his pontificate, Pope Francis has repeatedly highlighted the urgent need to address the issue of climate change, most notably

expressed in the encyclical *Laudato si'* (2015), which is a landmark document of the Church's teaching on ecological issues. In this encyclical, the Pope acknowledges the so-called scientific consensus by emphasising that the cause of the progressive climate warming in recent decades is human activity, linked above all to excessive greenhouse gas emissions. Likewise, in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, as mentioned above, the Pope does not shy away from reflections on environmental protection, however, he devotes significantly less space to this issue due to the different focus of this document on issues of a general nature such as solidarity, dialogue, and cooperation across borders, cultures, and religions.

Although the stance of American Catholics on climate change does not differ from that of the general public (both 57% of Catholics and the overall Americans population consider climate change a serious problem), data shows that their opinion on the matter is shaped more by party affiliation and ethnic and demographic factors than by the Pope's teachings (Diamant, 2023). Catholics who identify with or lean towards the Democratic Party overwhelmingly (82%) believe that climate change is an extremely serious problem confronting the modern world. On the other hand, only 25% of Catholics with Republican views share this belief. This party divide is reflected in ethnic differences: 71% of Latino Catholics consider climate change as a serious problem, compared to 49% of white Catholics, and in demographic differences: with younger Catholics (18–49) expressing more concern about climate change than older Catholics (50+), at 61% and 53% respectively.

A confirmation of these general trends in American society can be seen in the analysis of the importance of climate change in the context of the 2020 presidential election and the clear differences in the prioritisation of this issue between supporters of Democratic and Republican Parties. Climate change ranked high on the list of priorities among Democratic Party supporters, with 68% of respondents highlighting it, alongside topics such as healthcare (84%), the COVID-19 pandemic (82%), and racial and ethnic inequalities (76%). In contrast, among voters identifying with the Republican Party, only 11% considered climate change a priority, making it the least important of the 12 key issues raised during the election campaign. While younger supporters of Donald Trump expressed slightly more

concern about ongoing climate change, in no demographic group did the percentage of people recognising the importance of this issue exceed 20% (Tyson, 2020).

During the 2020 election campaign, Donald Trump clearly expressed his scepticism towards the widely accepted scientific consensus on climate change, which he repeatedly referred to as a “hoax”. He sought to reduce government environmental regulation, withdrawing the United States from numerous climate initiatives implemented by Barack Obama’s administration, most notably the Paris Agreement, which sought to limit the global temperature increases. Trump justified this move by arguing that the agreement was harmful to American industry and posed a threat to the national economy. Trump’s approach to climate change and his deregulatory policies were in stark contrast to Joe Biden’s program. Biden, who made the fight against climate change one of his campaign priorities, advocated for stronger environmental protection, setting a goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050 and investing in the development of renewable energy sources.

## CONCLUSIONS

However, the analysis carried out does not allow for a definite conclusion that the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* was written by Pope Francis to support the Democratic Party candidate in the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. Many of the issues addressed in the document are far more universal, and any attempts to reduce its impact to just one geographical area are not justified.

Nevertheless, our research hypothesis is reasonable to the extent that, as noted by V. Gaetan, during the 2020 election campaign, Biden frequently referred to his faith and cited the papal document with approval. The same author also notes that the U.S. government has been keeping a close eye on the Vatican for a long time, or, to be more precise, Washington carefully observes the supranational ruler of the Vatican, the Pope, and his governing apparatus. He emphasises that although the relationships between individual Popes and U.S. Presidents have varied throughout history, they worsened after Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. He adds that

Biden, as Vice President, led the U.S. delegation at the inauguration of Pope Francis' pontificate in 2013, and since then, the two men have met several times. (Gaetan, 2021, p. 1–7).

It is also significant that after Biden won the election, Francis called to congratulate him and sent him a signed copy of his book *Let Us Dream*. On the day of the Democratic President's inauguration, the Bishop of Rome sent an official telegram, assuring him of his prayers that the American people under Joe Biden's leadership would "draw upon the lofty political, ethical, and religious values that have inspired the nation since its founding". The Pope also outlining potential areas of cooperation between the American administration and the Church, which had been neglected during Donald Trump's presidency. The Pope's message was notably different from the stance of the U.S. bishops, as expressed by the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, who stated that the new president's position on abortion raised serious implications, and that he planned to form a team to examine whether Biden could receive Holy Communion (Fogarty, 2021, pp. 152–154).

In this context, it can be said that the papal document was not written against anyone. Even if Francis wrote it with the social and political situation in the United States in mind, it is far more likely that the purpose of *Fratelli tutti* encyclical was to present the richness of Catholic teaching holistically, without reducing it to just one – albeit important, area.

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