

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA I KNOW

As an immigrant from North Macedonia, I came to the United States of America to pursue my dreams. However, the current polarized condition of American society deeply saddens me, as this is not the US I know. The principle of freedom of speech, which the US prides itself on, has been compromised. The current situation in the United States will not only affect the country but also the entire world: countries where fundamental rights such as freedom of speech have been ignored for decades will now have a negative example.

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What inspires me to write this article is the current situation in the US, which I think will reshape the direction of how the country will move forward and how it will affect the entire world. Being the first immigrant out of my family and coming from a very small country, North Macedonia, I have always admired this beautiful free country where opportunities are endless, dreams come true, and immigrants are welcomed from all around the world.

I moved to New York City at the age of 24. This has been the best experience in my life by far. Living and working in Manhattan I always felt inspired and welcomed. The city has provided me with so many different challenges and adventures that I could never experience in North Macedonia. Working in the real estate world, I had the pleasure of meeting people from different cultures, religions, and walks of life on a daily basis. Everyone comes to this country to make it on their own, be free, work toward their business ideas, to be independent thinkers without being judged, and to pursue their dreams. This is the idea for all of us coming from different countries. The United States gives you the freedom to be who you are and be truly rewarded for your hard work.

I have never been politically involved; however, I always try to stay up to date by reading different newspapers and watching daily different news channels in the US and the world. Being in the US during the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump I noticed big changes after these two administrations. For example when I had moved during Obama's presidency everything seemed to be normal—at least on the surface. No one seemed to raise questions regarding the wars going on around the world, the US's foreign policy, and the many issues in the country concerning health care, taxes, immigration reforms, infrastructure, etc. After the 2016 US presidential election, everything changed and I noticed how Trump and his entire family were the only daily news often scrutinized, and judged by not just the news media but also by every Hollywood celebrity and most of the athletes in the country. Rather than everyone coming together and working for the best for the people and the issues facing the country, I saw there was widespread hate. Somehow judging and talking about Trump's personality was more important than his policies that actually resonated with many people, especially the middle working class. I never classified myself as a Republican or Democrat since I always had my own opinions on policies. This was the best thing about the US: the freedom to express how you feel and think while being willing to hear other people's opinions without any judgement.

The biggest change happened in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic and election

season. The media's hypocrisy started when everyone was told to work from home, self-isolate for months in order to not spread the virus, and not overwhelm hospital capacities, but then the Black Lives Matter protests happened. During the summer, there were thousands of people on the streets rioting, looting, destroying cities, and burning businesses and federal buildings down. All of a sudden thousands of people spreading the virus on the streets while people were still dying in hospitals and many others were losing their jobs, not being able to provide food for their families, was not a problem.

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I have noticed by talking to many friends and colleagues that these days you are almost not allowed to express your opinion publicly in the US if it contradicts the official narrative, which can even lead to losing your job. The media is one of the reasons for this polarized state of US society. Celebrities and athletes seem to be more politically involved than ever and everything on social media is almost brainwashing young people rather than encouraging them to create their own opinions and ideas. All of a sudden celebrities are interviewing politicians, which I find very strange. I truly believed that news outlets were independent, but I realized during the 2020 elections that they have been imposing their own narratives, which is one of the reasons behind the division of the country.

Macedonians tend to be a bit more conservative, but right now, most of them are scared to freely express their opinions. This is very sad because many people, including Macedonians, leave due to the socialism and dictatorships in their countries. They come to the US because they believe in freedom of speech, which is now very compromised. It makes me very confused to see that after 250 years of its founding, the US is ignoring its constitution and trying to change it nowadays. As an immigrant, I believe that the constitution is the most important document in this country, providing fundamental rights for the American people. If there are no rights and rules are not respected, the US will not be able to pride itself on its core democratic values. Such an example from a Western country, especially the US, will lead countries where human rights and freedom of speech have been ignored for decades in the wrong direction.