



Will Trump Rig the 2020 Election?

By Alex Roberts



If you cannot reason beyond petty sentiments, then you are a liability to mankind.
- Dr. Chuba Okadigbo

Wisconsin, the critical swing state that I'm from and currently live in, made resounding headlines worldwide on April 7th when the Republican legislature, in a Machiavellian manoeuvre, insisted that the primary election be held in person without postponement, while also shifting the goal posts for absentee, mail-in voting and cutting the number of polling stations in the largely black, strongly democratic city of Milwaukee from 176 down to 5.

All this was to ensure that the down ballot vote for Jill Karofsky, a liberal upstart circuit judge, was soundly defeated by Republican incumbent Dan Kelly. Kelly, a staunch right-wing activist judge, was personally touted by Trump, who repeatedly pushed for him on social media.

The citizens of Wisconsin essentially acted in civic revolt, and smashed Dan Kelly out of office, despite the goal posts practically being burned down.

In Kenosha, Wisconsin, on April 6th, 2020, the typically conservative-leaning city on the banks of Lake Michigan flipped markedly Democratic in the controversy-laden special election for a Wisconsin Supreme Court seat. Months later - in August of 2020 - Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back during a questionable altercation with the police, which permanently paralysed him. The video of the shooting touched off days of protests, unrest and violence. All of this weirdness and

political sniping begs the question: Why would Trump bother with anything like this at all? Who cares? Well, if Kenosha, a small Middle America city, is an example, all this craziness looks like it might just encourage people to get out and vote. It certainly looked like that back in April, and things haven't exactly improved in America since that time.

When the masses vote in the US, they tend to lean liberal. So the answer from the conservative side is simple: do everything in your political power to ensure it is much more difficult to vote.

The Wisconsin election for the Supreme Court seat in April of 2020 tipped the Republican hand; the 2020 presidential election will be an attempt to "legally" and illegally rig the vote to skew towards the incumbent, allowing Donald Trump and his ilk to cling to power. The key word here is cling. One must cling if one is the ruling minority that holds a disproportionate amount of power within a country.

Looking into the news, one would almost think that the United States is a fundamentally conservative and Republican country. But this isn't true; it simply has some built-in systemic flaws tailored for exploitation. Most people know about the electoral college affording more importance to some states than others during elections, but there are other methods, including gerrymandering of districts to stack the government, packing the courts with interchangeable ultra-conservatives from an institute called the Federalist Society, and all states having two senators (despite some states having considerably larger populations than others) help the conservative cause further.

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The Republicans are simply better at politics; they refuse to compromise, even when in the minority. The party plays the game with a win-at-all-costs mindset. A case in point is when the liberal Supreme Court Justice Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg died of cancer on September 18th. The Republican leadership was quick to announce they'd rush to replace her ahead of the upcoming election, despite a pandemic and an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions. This would not be so bad if Senate leader Mitch McConnell had not blocked President Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland, because it was the election year of 2016 and "the people should decide".

A party that cares so little about what people say about it has an inherent advantage built in over the liberal wing, who have famously offered to continually compromise for "the good of the nation" Such offers of olive branches rarely benefit the people in any real way.

In this election year, however, this clear-cut Machiavellian tendency to bend or even break the rules can further muddy the waters. Take the crucial swing state of Wisconsin as an example. That same controversial judicial election in April of 2020 was made controversial by a state legislature that openly tried to rig the deck in every way they could think of doing so. They made the standards to vote by mail far more stringent, while simultaneously shrinking the time window in which voters could complete their ballots.

In the April judicial election, they played a hand in ensuring that the Democratic stronghold of Milwaukee County (the state's biggest and most diverse city) was cut down to a measly five polling stations. All of this during a pandemic of historic proportions. Just because the Democratic candidate won in a landslide doesn't mean that the attempt to suppress the vote wasn't there. These efforts are

sure to rear their ugly head ahead of the upcoming general election on November 3rd, and in some respects already are.

The state legislature of Wisconsin has become so blatant that Harvard's Electoral Integrity Project, which analyses the health of election bodies around the world, rated the state's electoral boundaries as a [three](#) on a scale of one to 100, akin to an authoritarian regime. They have within the last several years introduced some of the most stringent voting ID laws in the US, changed the parameters for absentee ballots, made it necessary to have an adult witness for someone fulfilling an absentee ballot, targeted black and Latino districts for suppression efforts, and systemically purged the voting rolls. (The last time they did this with particular gusto was in 2020.)

Now election officials in the state are weary of weariness. Voters who think that they have jumped through all of these hurdles may find themselves turning up at the polls only to not have jumped through a hoop that was only recently introduced and not publicly announced.

Strange regulations and laws

There are dozens of strange regulations and laws, perhaps hundreds, across the US, often in Republican-held states (such as Florida, whose former governor-turned-senator proposed on September 24th that all votes not counted within a 24-hour period should be thrown into the trash), which only serve to frustrate an already frustrated population.

This becomes a problem if Trump declares national emergencies in several cities in key swing states, limiting the number of hours voters will be able to vote in person. Or if, on election day, on orders from the White House, unofficial "poll watchers" show up in several districts at multiple polling places. Officials on the ground could report widespread voter intimidation, especially within black and Latino neighbourhoods.

Or there could be delays in absentee ballot counting. Despite an untold number of votes going uncounted, Trump could declare a narrow victory and the Biden camp could dispute this claim. The state legislature could intervene as "electors" due to the disputed nature of the election and ongoing public health emergency due to COVID-19. The Democratic governor of Wisconsin, Tony Evers, could declare the election for Biden. Both results could be brought before Congressional committees in Washington, which could leave it up to the courts to decide. The proceedings could rapidly go up the court chain of command, all the way to the US Supreme Court, which just had another member controversially confirmed by the Republican-held Senate. The Supreme Court could mandate recounts must stop and that absentee ballots beyond a cut-off date be voided.

Trump could win.

This sounds far-fetched, but it isn't, and is the exact circumstance in other key swing states such as Michigan. Recent history would suggest that the US Supreme Court is a partisan entity within the current political landscape, as it was in the 2000 presidential election, when it proved more than capable of overriding election processes to declare a victor. In that same ill-fated April election in Wisconsin, the US Supreme Court had the final say in forcing the in-person vote to go forward without a pandemic-induced delay.

This, unfortunately, is not the only controversial path for the Republicans to steal a victory in the convoluted and vastly outdated US election system, but it is a plausible one. Already in Wisconsin alone the blueprint was laid out in April, and in this unpredictable year of 2020, the Wisconsin GOP has been tightening the restrictions since then.

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All of this becomes easier to achieve when compounded with the biggest handicap to American voters - that the election takes place on a Tuesday in the cold late autumn month of November, and that Tuesday is not a national holiday. This ensures that anyone with a bad vacation day/ sick leave policy and an inflexible boss will find it difficult to vote. Even Kenya, which to put it mildly, has had its fair share of election day mischief, declares a public holiday when it comes time for citizens to go to the polls. To that end, it almost seems as though the White House is finally listening to East African countries - albeit not by gleaning democratically constructive lessons but by maintaining a pseudo-legitimate grip on power.

Playing a rigged game

There are already rumblings of “norms” from Democratic Party officials (falling back on the very court processes that will fall to the Conservative-packed Supreme Court) and of trust in “institutions”, despite the said institutions being currently run by interim Trump appointees. It is these same institutions that lock-stop liberal Washington insiders continually decry as being mismanaged and corrupted and not adhering to the very norms that they now claim will be able to salvage an unprecedented election. It is unclear what these Democratic politicians believe to have changed or will change in the coming weeks and months ahead. When you know that there’s rigging within the game and you keep playing it, then you are a sucker. This rings two-fold as you make continual unforced errors, as the Democratic Party seems hell-bent on making across the last half year period.

For example, there is somewhat of a “unicorn” within the US voting bloc - that of the possibly conversion-prone moderate Republican. Under the Trump administration, such figures have skyrocketed in value, even getting nods of approval from the most venerated of liberal circles if they espouse anti-Trump sentiments. The problem is that they’re unicorns, and unicorns, if they exist at all, are rare. The Biden campaign seems insistent on appealing to these voters, while simultaneously not leaning into the firebrand of righteous anger - the pandemic and the economic and racial inequality that is currently stewing within the massive swathe of 18-35 year-old voters.

One stark incident from recent weeks of Democrats falling into this trap comes with the Biden campaign’s eager acceptance of the endorsement of Rick Snyder, a former Republican governor of the State of Michigan. It was the Snyder administration that oversaw (and then attempted to cover up) the Flint water crisis, in which unneeded switching of water sources for profit directly led to the poisoning of tens of thousands of children within the city of Flint. Flint is a largely black city, and after the Obama administration didn’t sufficiently address or stop the crisis, 8,000 black voters who went twice to the polls for Obama didn’t show up in 2016 for Hillary Clinton. The entirety of Michigan was won by Donald Trump by approximately 10,000 votes. Snyder has multiple lawsuits against him, and among working class liberals across the hotly contested state of Michigan, he is a figure hated with more vigour than even Trump himself. So why accept his endorsement? Why walk the ball into your own post to shoot an own goal?

In an electoral system that could feasibly see Biden win by 10 million votes nationally, but lose if a few key states are won by Trump by even a singular vote a piece, there shouldn’t be such a margin for error.

A horror show

To be sure, the Trump administration has been an abject horror show. It is inept, mean-spirited, openly corrupt, blindingly dumb, and blissfully ignorant and hateful – and that’s a generous assessment. Now, with more than 200,000 dead from the coronavirus in the US, there is open revolt in many cities against a system designed to oppress in an economically devastating period that will be felt for at least a decade.

The Trumpians are doing everything in their power to make sure there isn’t a need for a change in power. Trump said as much on September 24th during a White House press briefing. “Well, we’re going to have to see what happens,” Trump said. “You know that I’ve been complaining very strongly about the ballots, and the ballots are a disaster. We’ll want to have — get rid of the ballots and you’ll have a very — we’ll have a very peaceful — there won’t be a transfer, frankly. There’ll be a continuation.” He followed up by saying that the vote will probably be decided by the Supreme Court, a court he seems poised to skew hopelessly in favour of conservatives.

In September, after the death of Justice Ginsberg, members of the Democratic National Committee were already crying foul at Republican efforts to rush through the next interchangeable arch-conservative judge to the Supreme Court, lamenting the inherent unfairness of the system. While the point is well taken, the Democratic Party establishment at times reminds me of the election efforts of Raila Odinga, in that when you know for certain that your opponent will cheat you at every possible turn, what will you do to rise above it? Are you also willing to get your hands dirty to win? It may be difficult when the assorted second-in-commands surrounding you and propelling the campaign forward find new stumbling blocks to trip over. Raila, like the Democrats, always ends up compromising. The pattern is such that it almost makes one wonder if it was the plan outlined all along.

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For the Democratic camp, there’s certainly reason to be nervous about all the seeking of compromise because Biden himself is an agent of such compromise. He’s inherently a self-described moderate, and has long been known as one of the most conservative Democrats in the US Senate. The country and circumstances have drifted markedly to the left since March of this year, and there is concern in the youthful left wing that Biden, “the establishment candidate”, will drift over to the right.

The continued appeal to the fabled “Reasonable Republicans” to convert is inherently a flawed one – why trade horses when the other man only holds a goat? There is concern among the activist wing that the Democratic National Committee may be giving up far too much, that they might not be that much better, that they are a part of the problem and not helping these ever-deepening emergencies.

On top of the ignoring and dismissive hand waves to the young, the active left wing currently taking to the streets in the latest wave of protests to march against the lack of criminal charges brought against the police officers who killed Breonna Taylor (a Louisville medical worker who was shot and killed in her house after police showed up at the wrong address to fulfill a no-knock drug warrant), there also seems to be a real gap in bringing in more Latino votes into the fold. There have been troubling reports that the Latino population is less in the Democratic camp than they were in 2016, and that Trump is siphoning off votes in key states like Florida and Georgia.

When the Democratic National Convention took place in August, hardly any Latino voice was heard. In this year of brutal underrepresentation coming punching through to the surface, it may be a fatal error to ignore the second largest ethnic group in the country.

The Republican Party sure isn't ignoring them, or blacks, for that matter. They're hard at work ensuring that the voters are both too depressed to show up, and hassled drastically if they do so. Justin Clark, a deputy campaign manager for the Trump re-election effort, said as much (thinking he was not being recorded) at a sequestered meeting made up of top [Wisconsin Republican litigators in late 2019](#): "Wisconsin's the state that is going to tip this one way or the other...So it makes Election Day operations really, really, really important. Traditionally it's always been Republicans suppressing votes, Democratic voters are all in one part of the state, so let's start playing offense a little bit. And that's what you're going to see in 2020. That's what's going to be markedly different. It's going to be a much bigger program, a much more aggressive program, a much better-funded program, and we're going to need all the help we can get."

Clark later claimed that his comments were taken out of context, but such is almost an after thought. There's a certain blatancy to the voter suppression efforts this year, and increasingly it seems that there's little attempt to even hide them any more.

Curveballs

Republicans know a basic fact - that their party is no longer wanted in America; people know that when Republicans hold power, their civil rights are reduced, progressive ideals stagnate, their wages fall, economic recessions strike and wars start. Luckily for them, the system is on the Republicans' side - and they are exploiting it fully.

On top of all of these factors, there still remains the foreign interference factor, which has already begun a misinformation campaign in earnest.

Such efforts at suppression, coupled with the Democratic Party's repeated fumbling and falling back on "norms" to save the process, are troublesome. There is nervousness in America now, but it seems that most people can't quite comprehend what could happen. It is a certain naiveté that comes along with being taught concepts like "American Exceptionalism" and "Manifest Destiny" from a very young age (while not being taught the basics of civic government). Talking to Americans, it is almost colonialist thinking - they deny something exists because it simply hasn't been discovered by them yet. I used to hear such sentiments frequently from Americans who had lived and worked in Kenya for years. "I absolutely cannot believe what the Trump administration is doing!" they'd say, to which I'd reply, "What do you mean you *'can't believe it'*...you live in Kenya."

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Despite all of these nervous trepidations there seem to be only two possible outcomes. First, that all of what was just outlined above, combined with several curveballs yet to be revealed, allow Trump to eke out an electoral college victory while losing the popular vote (with more than vague overtones of foreign interference, mail-in voting miseries, voter suppression and Republican assistance). Or, the second option, and a vastly more optimistic one: that Wisconsin's election in April of 2020 was a preview, a groundswell of anger of a population that had been messed with on a few too many fronts in too short a period of time.

Now, with Trump having been infected with the coronavirus (probably the result of his own reckless advice to Americans to not wear masks or observe social distancing), what comes after November 3rd is an uncertainty of a scale that most Americans simply cannot wrap their minds around.

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