

United States Elections: The American People Turn Trump Out of Office

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In the most important American election in decades, the American people voted on November 3 to remove the authoritarian Republican Donald Trump from the presidency, a majority voting instead for Democrat Joseph Biden. While the electorate was deeply divided and the vote close in several states, still the election represents a rejection of Trump and his policies, a demonstration of confidence in democracy, and a deep desire to overcome the country's several crises: the coronavirus pandemic, unemployment, and climate change producing violent weather..

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Speaking late on the night of November 6, Joseph Biden virtually claimed victory, pointing out that he was leading in several states yet to declare a winner and that he had so far received 74 million votes—more than any candidate in U.S. history—4 million more than Trump. “What’s becoming clear each hour is that a record number of Americans of all races, faiths religions chose change over more of the same. They’ve given us a mandate for action on COVID, the economy, climate change, systemic racism.”

On election day Trump had already falsely claimed victory based on the earliest reports on the voting. This was a delusion that he himself had caused. It resulted from the fact that despite the risk of coronavirus, Trump had encouraged his voters not to use mail-in ballots, but rather to vote in person on election day. But in most states mail-in ballot are counted after election-day votes, so it appeared on election night—when most U.S. elections have been decided—that Trump was winning the election. But as the extraordinary number of mail-in votes were counted Biden caught up and eventually passed Trump in key states like Georgia and Pennsylvania. Trump has claimed without evidence that the Democrats were adding additional ballots to steal the election.

While Trump continues to claim that the election has been stolen, Vice President Michael Pence failed to back that claim and several other important Republican politicians declined to rally to the president, though some other Republicans legislators did back repeat Trump’s false claims. To achieve a victory, Trump tried to stop vote counting in locations where he thought it would benefit him and to continue it in others for the same reason.

(As of this writing on the morning of November 7, Biden leads with 253 to 214 Electoral College votes, based on the states he is winning. The election does not become official until all of the popular votes are counted and the results certified, which may take weeks, and then not until the electors of

the Electoral College vote on December 14 and their ballot are received by the senate on December 23. At this point it does not appear that there will be a political fight over rival slates of state electors who are approved by state legislatures and generally reflect the state's certified popular vote.)

Many worried that Trump might try some sort of coup d'état, but, at least so far, he has not, and it becomes less likely and less possible with every passing day. The fear that Trump and Attorney General William Barr might use federal agents to intervene in polling places or counting locations and seize the ballots did not materialize, nor did the right wing's armed militias interrupt the voting or counting process. While Trump supporters, some armed, did cause a commotion outside of a few locations where votes were being counted, far more important were the thousands of people in several cities who marched with the slogan, "Count all the Votes."

Apparently losing the election, Trump sent an army of lawyers to four battleground states—Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Georgia—in an attempt to challenge the process, the count, and the ballots. Many of the lawsuits being filed appear to be baseless and the courts have already rejected some, but the Democratic Party will respond to those that the courts take up. Trump hopes to push the lawsuits through the courts and up to the U.S. Supreme Court to be settled by its nine justices, six of them conservative and three more liberal, the last three conservatives appointed by Trump. So far there seems no basis for such a Supreme Court case.

An Extraordinary Election

The election has taken place under the most extraordinary circumstances, amidst great suffering and social turmoil. There are officially 240,000 coronavirus deaths and perhaps in reality as many as 300,000. The virus is surging throughout much of the country, with over 100,000 cases per day and 1,000 deaths per day. Many of those affected have suffered serious and in some cases permanent damage to their lungs or kidneys or other organs.

The pandemic led to an economic depression that saw as many as 30 million unemployed, and today there are still at least 12 million unemployed and probably more because of uncounted discouraged workers. While some continue to receive state unemployment payments, the federal government's assistance programs have ceased. With a total population of 330 million, it is estimated that 54 million do not have enough to eat. As many as 35 million families face the possibility of evictions when an eviction moratorium from the Department of Health and Human Services ends on December 31.

In addition, due to climate change, several states in the West have suffered tremendously destructive forest fires, while the Gulf States and Atlantic States have experienced disastrous hurricanes. Finally, though the enormous anti-racist demonstrations and marches of the spring and summer against police racism and violence involving about 20 million people have subsided, Philadelphia and other cities continue to see protests against police killings of Black men and women, often then violently repressed by the police. All of these developments from the pandemic to unemployment and from the fires and tropical storms to the violent police attacks on the anti-racist protests created great anxiety throughout the society as election day approached.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that it was necessary to change the rules for the U.S. elections, rules that are set by each state. While absentee ballots, mail-in ballots, and early voting have existed in various states, those practices expanded enormously, with millions now voting early or by mail, or by new practices such as curbside voting. Over 100 million people voted early and it appears that 67 percent of all eligible voters voted, a record in modern U.S. history.

Trump's Heyday

Had there not been a pandemic, Trump might have easily won the election. Before the arrival of Covid-19 in the United States in February and the first measures to control it in March, the American economy was booming. The Republican Party had passed and Trump had signed a two trillion dollar tax cut that principally benefited the capitalist class. The corporate tax rate has declined from 50 percent in the 1960s to 20 percent today. The GDP grew by only 2 to 3 percent, but that was enough. Unemployment fell to 3.5 percent, the lowest rate since the 1960s, and inflation was just 2 percent. Corporate profits grew as they were taxed less. Banks, corporations, smaller businesses, and most workers were happy with the situation, even if wages did not increase.

Economic success meant Trump enjoyed political support. Many of the wealthiest continued to support him, as did those with medium and small businesses. Many white people, and certainly Trump's social base of 40 percent of the population, were also fine with Trump's racist rhetoric, regulations, and social policies. Most white business people and white working people approved or at least accepted Trump's promise to build the wall to keep out Latino immigrants, as well as his ban of Muslim immigrants, and they did not object to his forcing asylees to wait in Mexico for appointments months later with U.S immigration authorities, and while they may not have been enthusiastic about the separation of undocumented immigrant families and the caging of children, neither did they protest. Even the Evangelical Christians so key to Trump's coalition, accepted all of this, as they had accepted his financial shenanigans, philandering and cavorting with prostitutes, as long as he was "pro-life" (that is, anti-abortion) and anti-LGBT. Other whites would accept anything he did as long as there were no new gun regulations.

The Tide Turns

Then came Covid with city and state shutdowns, business failures, profit losses, and a depression that brought unemployment to as high as 30 million. The collapse of the economy also brought about a fiscal crisis that in turn led to government budget cuts and the layoff of government employees. Trump's incompetence in dealing with the pandemic and the resulting economic depression was the beginning of the end. He never organized a national response, failed at testing, tracing, isolation, and quarantine. He refused to take the advice of health experts, offered contrary advice, talked about phony cures, and became the primary source for misinformation nationally. He pushed for and Republican governors carried out the reopening of states long before the virus had been contained, leading to new outbreaks. His criminal negligence led to millions of cases and hundreds of thousands of deaths.

In addition to his poor policies, Trump very personally contributed to more sickness and death with super-spreader events held at the White House and then a score of campaign rallies of thousands, leading to thousands more cases and hundreds of deaths. He, his wife, and his young son all got Covid. Trump and his aides refuse to wear masks, ridiculed those who did, and encouraged their followers to ignore masks and social distancing.

Toward the end, Trump's chief aide, who was just reported to have contracted Covid-19, declared that the administration was giving up on attempting to control the pandemic and would wait for a vaccine meanwhile administering therapeutics. Trump himself told his rallies—completely contrary to what government health experts were saying—that the virus was disappearing. He promised he would reopen the economy and return the country to prosperity tomorrow. Biden on the other hand refused to hold mass rallies, always appeared masked, promised to rely on the scientists and to come up with a national plan to stop the spread of Covid-19. He said that he too was for reopening the

economy, but while bringing the pandemic under control.

As a result of all of this, the election became a referendum on the candidates' attitudes about Covid-19, though of course it was also a referendum on Trump himself. He was still running on his 2016 principles the center of whose politics was the slogan "Make America Great Again," which he suggested and his followers understood meant, "Make America Great Again for White Men." (Some critics mocked his slogan as "Make America White Again.") Racism and misogyny are the glue that holds together Trump's cross-class coalition of wealthy capitalists, small business people, farmers, white workers, and the rural poor.

Throughout his campaign, Trump also argued the election was about socialism. He claimed that Biden was controlled by Bernie Sanders and Alexandra Ocasio Cortez and that once elected he would implement socialist programs that would fundamentally change America and lead to an economic disaster and violence. Trump had the support of the police unions and border patrol agents. He was backed by the QAnon conspiracy followers—perhaps millions—who believe that the Democrats and government generally are controlled by satanic pedophiles who traffic in children or drink their blood. Then too the militant white nationalist and neo-fascist groups support him.

Biden and his Backers

Biden was far from the ideal candidate for progressives. As a U.S. Senator from Delaware, he had supported conservative welfare reform laws that took support away from the poor, women, and children, backed reactionary reforms to the legal system that filled prisons with Blacks and Latinos, voted for tax cuts for the right and helped carry out the Democratic Party transition to neoliberalism. As President Barack Obama's vice president, he shares responsibility for the weak response to the 2008 recession, serving the banks better than he did working people. Yet today he runs with the rhetoric of liberal principles: support for labor unions, for Black and Latino civil rights, or women's equality, and gay rights. Still, though he is a neoliberal, to most of the broad left he appears as far superior to the authoritarianism, racism, and reaction of Trump.

After he won the Democratic Party primary election, the capitalist class began to make it clear that Biden was their candidate. More billionaires plumped for Biden than for Trump and in the last couple of months that group gave the Democrat more than twice as much money as they gave to his opponent. Renegade Republicans formed the Lincoln Project, criticized Trump and advertised in favor of Biden. Dozens of former high-level government officials, attorneys general, nearly 500 military generals, 70 Republican former FBI, CIA, and other national security officials, and many other in the highest reaches of the state came out against Trump and many made clear their support for Biden. The major media, which had often been critical of Trump, became more so, and in the last days of the election even Rupert Murdoch's Fox News began to differ with the president.

Biden has had the support of weighty sectors of the capitalist class, like tech and entertainment, as well as pharmaceuticals and real estate. Many professional organizations of doctors, lawyer, and others endorsed him. Like all Democrats he has had the support the AFL-CIO and all of the major labor unions with few exceptions, as well as most Black and Latino, women's and LGBT organizations. Trump, of course, still had much support from other sectors such as casinos and gambling, oil and gas, contractors and manufacturers and his own networks of professionals.

The election, as was to be expected, showed the country divided geographically along traditional lines, with the coasts going for Biden and the Midwest and South for Trump. Biden succeeded in flipping and winning two crucial states in the Great Lakes region, Wisconsin and Michigan, and he it appears he will win Pennsylvania. In the West, it also appears likely he will win Arizona and Nevada.

And in a surprising development in the South he is poised to take Georgia. Almost everywhere, the Democrats won the cities and the Republicans the rural areas. Ninety percent of Black people and 65 percent of Latinos voted for Biden. Only in Florida, dominated by Cubans, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans and other exiles with anti-Communist politics, did Biden do badly among Latinos. Biden won more women's votes, especially suburban women. The working class is completely divided, Trump winning 55 percent of men without a college degree while Biden won 43 percent. The majority of white workers support Trump, the overwhelming majority of Black and Latino workers back Biden.

The broad left—liberals, progressives, and the small socialist left—had hoped for a “blue wave” repudiating Trump, that is for a massive vote for the Democratic Party and an overwhelming victory not only in the presidential election, but also winning the Senate and the House of Representatives. That, however, did not happen. Trump held on to his base and mobilized it; he also won a very small increase in support from Black men, and a larger increase in votes of Latino men, and some increase in LGBT voters. Biden succeeded in winning back some white working class voters, many suburban women, and young voters. Biden seems to be winning the presidential election, but it is unlikely the Democrats will win a majority of the Senate and the party has lost several seats in the House. Though the “squad,” the four new leftwing Representatives—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan—were all reelected. The election was a defeat for Trump, but not for the Republican Party. Not only did the Republicans win more House seats and seem likely to retain the Senate, but they also maintained control in many state legislatures.

If he is finally elected and takes office, Biden will face a hostile Republican Senate, a reactionary Supreme Court dominated by Republicans, and will have a smaller majority in the House. The country will remain deeply divided. Trump's rightwing block will remain, though whether it can retain its weight and coherence will depend on what he and others can do to maintain its political significance.

Trump now claims that the election has been stolen, suggesting he will attempt to remain in office. He does not have to cede the presidency to his successor until January 20, and he might still attempt in some way to hold on to the office, but he will face massive resistance. Hundreds of thousands of Americans across the country have pledged to defend the vote, the count, and democracy. Several demonstrations have already occurred and large marches are planned for Saturday, Nov. 7. Many labor unions have also vowed to defend democracy and some have talked about organizing a general strike, something that has never happened on a national scale in the United States and not in any city since the 1940s. The plan of the social movements and of the unions is for massive peaceful civic resistance.

The Left and the Election

The small socialist far left in the United States, a few thousand people in a handful of organizations, have historically stood for the building of a revolutionary socialist party, a labor party, or a social democratic party or all three in some combination or another. Several small groups still have this perspective. Others have for the last couple of decades supported the Green Party, a leftist if not a socialist party, which this year ran former truck driver and open socialist Howie Hawkins for president. The party's highest vote came in 2000 when consumer advocate Ralph Nader received 2.7 percent of the vote but was accused of having cost Democrat Al Gore the election. The Green Party usually gets about 1 percent of the vote. While we have no figures yet, it seems unlikely that the Green Party will do better in this election, as most on the left seemed more likely to back Biden for

fear of contributing to the reelection of Trump.

Bernie Sanders 2016 campaign, when he ran as democratic socialist on the most progressive platform seen since the era of President Lyndon Johnson, revived the left in America, ending the post-war taboo on the discussion of socialism. Many young people rallied to Bernie and tens of thousands of them joined the Democratic Socialists of America, which supported his campaigns in 2016 and 2020. Sanders 2020 campaign proved to be weaker than his 2016 campaign because he no longer had Hillary Clinton as the embodiment of the Democratic establishment to campaign against and other progressives like Elizabeth Warren also put forward progressive platforms. There was also a fear among Democrats that a candidate who appeared to be as radical as Sanders could not defeat Trump. When Biden won South Carolina, all of the other 27 Democratic Party candidates lined up behind him. Sanders came to the conclusion that his staying in the race would not contribute to the defeat of Trump, and as promised Bernie endorsed Biden.

At its 2019 convention, DSA had voted to back Sanders but if he lost not to support any other candidate, though many DSA members did as individuals work on the Biden campaign. Biden and Sanders created a joint task force to work on the platform and the campaign, but in truth Sanders could have little real influence. DSA had hoped that it would be the leftwing of forces supporting President Bernie Sanders, the left of a rising tide of progressivism. Instead, DSA now finds itself looking forward to a Biden presidency, a neoliberal presiding over the economic and social catastrophe that is the United States today. Biden will likely have a presidency of what might be called "social liberalism," that is, fundamentally neoliberal, pro-business policies with large-scale programs to address the immediate disaster. Whether his pledge to carry out "action on COVID, the economy, climate change, systemic racism" becomes a reality will depend on the social and labor movement. The left will have to look forward to long hard fights to achieve reforms and to build a movement for more fundamental change.

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P.S.

• This article was written on November 7 for publication on November 8 in Viento Sur, a left journal in the Spanish state:

<https://vientosur.info/el-pueblo-estadounidense-depone-a-trump/>

<https://newpol.org/the-american-people-turn-trump-out-of-office/>

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