

In the United States nowadays, everything is all politics all the time. The culmination of American politics is the presidential election, but after one ends, the next one immediately begins in terms of political maneuvering and fund raising. Now it is different, The 2020 election added a Kafkaesque quality to the process. Trump contested it, charging that it was stolen. If he doesn't win, he was robbed, as he has publicly announced many times. Imagine sports taking place in a similar situation: if your team loses, the game was rigged against you, but not if you win. In sports there are ways to appeal judgments, and there are in politics as well. The Trump campaign exhausted all the appeals by going to the courts—and lost 83 cases. Even his Attorney General William Barr said that there was no widespread fraud that could have changed the results. After publication of the book by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, *Peril*, one thing is very clear. Trump tried to steal the election. Crucially, Republican officials in his government blocked him in the end. However, the Republican Party has behaved very badly following the election and has discredited itself in terms of its history and ideology. The problem as it now looms is that the former president is planning to run again in 2024. If he wins, we can be certain that he will not brook any more establishment Republicans in his government and he will probably be unstoppable from inside the powerful presidential office. The President, both head of government and of state (unlike parliamentary systems), will have no one to contradict him. If that happens, the

consequences will be dire. Americans rightly worry about the “crisis of democracy,” the likelihood of an authoritarian coup d’état, mass protests, or a civil war.

These frightening possibilities are being openly discussed. On December 17, 2021, *The Washington Post* published an extraordinary article by three retired generals. As the first anniversary of January 6 approached, they warned of turmoil in the armed forces and advised the Pentagon to take steps now to stop it. They wrote: “The potential for a total breakdown of the chain of command along partisan lines — from the top of the chain to squad level — is significant should another insurrection occur. The idea of rogue units organizing among themselves to support the “rightful” commander in chief cannot be dismissed.” The strong possibility of coup succeeding in 2024 “chilled” the generals “to our bones.” It should appall all of us.

For a brief window of time, the possibility exists to head off the danger through political means. Before the 2020 elections, polls not only showed Trump losing but the Republican Party taking heavy losses in both the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Alarmed Republican leaders hoped that their losses would be limited to ten seats in the House. Instead, there were Democratic losses there, whittling down the Democratic majority, while the Senate split 50-50. In the United States, the Vice President breaks a tie, but in this case, two Democratic Senators have opposed fundamental legislation presented by President Biden—Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema (an aside: Manchin is of Italian descent, his original family name being

Mancini). As a rule, no Republican supports Biden's legislation, so these Senators have a lock on what the Democrats can and cannot do in Congress.

The fact that the Republican Party did so well while Trump lost the election demonstrates that Americans came out to vote against him, rather than the Republicans. This reality has spurred the Republicans to let up attacking him, so his politically active base will not turn against the party. If only they can exploit him to keep his base, they expect to win Congress in 2022. This would be a major step to a Republican President (Trump or someone else) in 2024, giving them control of the country even though they have been proven over and over to be a minority party. For this reason, Republicans at the state level are strengthening their holds on state election processes, which really determine who the president will be. They have been extremely active on the local scene, passing legislation that *de facto* suppresses the Democratic vote. This move is both parallel to and independent of Trump, who, however, has used his popularity among 35-40 percent of voters to gain control over the Republican party and over the vote-counting apparatus of the states. Establishment Republicans see him as both an asset and a liability to their coming to power, refusing to take seriously his threat to the country.

In addition, polls demonstrate an erosion of President Biden's popularity. This has been true to such an extent that a Republican victory in the 2022 mid-term elections has been accepted as a "given," not only by Republicans, but, worse, by Democrats. Electoral polls back up predictions of a Republican victory in 2022.

In a way, these events can be seen as politics as usual—but they are not. The Democrats should understand that the country now faces an unprecedented emergency and that they need to act immediately. It is no longer a question of Biden's legislative

effectiveness, the conviction that the Democrats will win if they pass good legislation. Ironically, Biden's legislative record is far from poor despite Republican obstruction and lies. He has successfully passed crucial infrastructure legislation that has eluded congress for decades, including Trump who was unable to pass it despite having a legislative majority. After the setback of the "Build Back Better" initiative, Biden focused on right to vote legislation, but the filibuster that requires 60 Senate votes stymied him. The Senate sticks to this antique procedure on the spurious grounds that it protects the rights of the minority and that it can stop authoritarian legislation. Oddly enough, a majority of 51 votes can suspend the filibuster on certain issues. The Democrats tried to do this last week, but they lost the two Democratic Senators mentioned above; all the Republicans voted against them.

Given the political emergency in the United States, it is incumbent on the Democrats to back off from their laser-like focus on legislative achievements, although they should by no means de-emphasize them. However, the state of the country and Republican obstruction is such that Biden's idea that he could win simply by touting his legislative achievements seems unlikely to be a winning strategy. The policy now should be to expose Republican obstruction. Republicans have become vulnerable because the scuttled popular legislation—increased child credit credits, lower drug costs, more support for education, defending voting rights, and more. Democrats must point out—again and again—and yet again—that the Republicans are obstructionists and nothing more.

The practical problem is that the Republicans have mastered modern means of communication, crucial for getting an accurate message out, and the Democrats are behind in this field. For example, an investigation has shown that Facebook groups

posted 650000 attacks on Joe Biden's legitimate election as President between November 20 and January 6, following his election. Many of these posts called for violence. Facebook did little to stop the attacks and the disinformation. The Republican superiority in exploiting social media and the Internet is not a new phenomenon. They have demonstrated their superior skill in the field for years. It is time that the Democratic party concentrated on utilizing these modern means of communication to emphasize the obstructionism of their opponents, using the latest techniques and memes, before it is too late. Before Trump, there was disagreement, but both parties supported democracy; now Republicans distorts the concept and exploits the political system. The Democratic Party needs to make this its main theme and get its message out.

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