**Trump Still Shaping American Democracy**

[Hafeez Khan](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/hafeez-khan/" \o "More Articles by Hafeez Khan)

December 14, 2021

England is the oldest democracy in this era, yet the US is viewed as the ultimate showcase of a successful and functioning democracy. Right to free speech, bear arms, and freedom to progress under a capitalist system are all enshrined in their Constitution. As a melting pot, it has captured the imagination of immigrants worldwide. It acts as a magnet pulling the best brains from around the globe. All this was glamorized through Hollywood, now overtaken by Netflix, HBO, Disney, and Google; modern cyber tools dominating social media.

It is not all glamour. American institutions evolved over two centuries to lay the foundations of a strong functioning democracy. It had built-in safeguards through its judicial system, congress, and the executive branch. The free press acts as a check and creates a balance to uphold the rule of law. Their bedrock of democracy has been challenged many times. The Watergate scandal led to President Nixon’s resignation. The civil rights movement, despite all resistance, came out ahead granting rights to black people.

The United States is not flawless; far from it. It started with legalised slavery having millions abused in bondage. It took a bloody and destructive civil war that brought them to a breaking point, to end this unjust system. Women were disenfranchised without voting rights. It took the grit and courage of brave women and their leaders to overcome this hurdle. The emphasis is on the ability of the US to auto-correct its distortions to move towards a just society.

Freedoms enshrined in their system led to innovation and an economic explosion, making the US the richest and most powerful nation on earth.

Their focus has been on how to do things the right way. Deviations were highlighted, impacting negatively on the person responsible. Example; exposure of Hillary Clinton using her email for official business. It played a big part in her presidential election loss. Leaders were held to higher moral standards than common folks. It was proudly proclaimed that the system is more powerful than any individual. For all the above reasons and many more, the US emerged as the leader of the free world.

Freedoms enshrined in their system led to innovation and an economic explosion, making the US the richest and most powerful nation on earth. It became a beacon of democracy emulated around the world. Their commitment to upholding the rule of law became the envy of nations striving for similar goals.

It took a single term of a convoluted American President to undo the edifice of democratic structure built brick by brick over generations. Donald Trump catapulted to the presidency in 2016 by tapping into anger and discontent amongst frustrated voters. These reasons will require another article. However, soon after coming to power, it became evident that the premise of his governance would be based on division, lies, disinformation, and systemic breakdown of established norms.

He was voted out in 2020. Trump refused to accept the results, unlike all his predecessors. He resisted the peaceful transfer of power coming up with a powerful slogan “stop the steal”. After failing to obstruct the process through meaningless court challenges, he mounted an insurrection on January 6th, 2021; not experienced in the USA since the Civil War. He instigated his supporters to storm Capitol Hill to stop the final vote count that would declare Biden as the new President.

Where does he draw his support from? He used his ‘bolo knife to cut through the fibre of American society along racial lines. His core supporters are ultra-rightists and white supremacists. They have always existed in the USA, but largely on the fringes. Trump has brought them into the mainstream. Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln who abolished slavery, is now in the hands of extremists.

After his defeat, Trump mounted wicked challenges to resist the voters’ verdict. His efforts ranged from trying to use the military to mount a coup, to forcing his own Vice President to falsify results. All these details are emerging now. After his failure to resist the transfer of power, he has rebooted very quickly. As a shady business magnate, he made his fortune through fudged numbers, disinformation, and manipulating the legal system. He is deploying the same strategy on the US political landscape.

He has tightened his grip on Republican Party. He has bullied party leaders into subservience and sidelined those who disagree. He has switched the canvas of political discourse. It is no longer issue-based; rather it is a cultural war appealing to baser sentiments of race and religion.

What is really dangerous is his well-planned and funded strategy to disenfranchise voters through changing laws in the Republican-held States. He is rigging the system to prevent free and fair elections unless you vote Republican. Crafty lawyers on his payroll are spearheading this convolution of laws.

There is a backward slide of democracy. It’s a coup in slow motion. Extremists are engineering election districts to prevent minorities the freedom to elect their candidates. The US that promoted democracy, is being undermined from within. Institutions are being torn down. Judicial appointments are politics-based rather than merit. Trump has raised a billion dollars for his media empire and a 100 million to fund his nefarious designs.

The Democrats have to rise to this challenge and legislate to prevent harm to their once model democracy. They have to do it before midterm elections are stolen in 2022 by Republicans. It will pave the way for Trump’s re-election as President in 2024. Will the US become the most powerful autocracy? Do you notice any similarity between Trump and Nawaz Sharif’s modus operandi?

*The writer is the director of CERF, a non-profit, charitable organisation in Canada.*