**US Democracy at a Crossroad**

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From where I write this essay, the White House, the official residence of the US presidents, is less than twenty miles away, and that is where the 45th US president, Donald Trump, has been largely sequestered since the November 3 rd elections. He was decisively defeated by now president-elect Joe Biden who secured, as of this writing, 306 electoral votes as opposed to 232 received by President Trump. A minimum of 270 electoral votes are required for winning the election. Also, Joe Biden received almost six million more popular votes than did Donald Trump.

Trump has adamantly refused to acknowledge his defeat, blaming it on fraud and election irregularities for which there is no evidence. The US presidential elections follow an archaic, byzantine system that was put in place more than two centuries ago. It assigns a certain number of votes to be cast in the presidential elections, to each of the fifty states, loosely based on population; however, the system favors smaller states with fewer people, such as Wyoming (550,000) over large states such as California (40 million) and New York (19.45 million), giving them more votes than justified by their population.

The opinion polls for months had been predicting that the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate, former vice president Joe Biden, will win with a big margin, capturing new seats in the Congress and gaining a majority in the Senate. However, most of these forecasts turned out to be incorrect, as they did in the 2016. Although Biden did win the presidential election with a clear majority, the Democratic Party lost seats in the Congress, though still retaining a majority. In the Senate, the Republicans so far hold a majority; however, the outcome of two seats in the state of Georgia, where a runoff election will be held on January 5, 2021, will decide which party commands a majority.

Besides mortality and morbidity, the explosive proliferation of the virus has generated other serious challenges. Millions of Americans have become unemployed, as businesses, restaurants, hotels, and airlines have laid off employees

The 2020 election was hard fought. President Trump during his four-year term pursued a narrow, rightwing populist agenda that exacerbated the polarization and division of the nation across ethnic, religious, and racial lines. Among the first actions he took as president was banning the admission of people from Muslim majority countries. Pursuing his America-First agenda, he pulled America out of the World Health Organization, Paris Climate Accord and abandoned the nuclear deal with Iran, so painstaking negotiated by the Obama administration. He cut off all aid to the Palestinians and instituted a highly partisan policy against them. His power is rooted in millions of American, mostly working-class whites, without a college degree, who are fiercely devoted and loyal to him. Some among them are Evangelical Christians and white supremist, unhappy that the character and cultural, religious visage of the country is undergoing a change not to their liking. The resentment against the growing influence of ethnic minorities, immigrants and liberal elites has been simmering for a while, but Trump has coalesced them, giving a new life and momentum.

Policy issues aside, the refusal of Trump and his acolytes to accept the outcome of a fair and transparent election bears sinister implications for the democratic foundation of the country. Since the second President John Adams peacefully transferred power on March 4, 1801, to Thomas Jefferson, this tradition has been unfailingly honored. However, for the first time, efforts are being mounted to subvert the results of the election by a bevy of Trump lawyers, headed by former Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani. A number of frivolous lawsuits alleging improprieties in the conduct or counting of votes, without any evidence, have been thrown out by the courts. The country’s judiciary, irrespective of their political affiliations, has set a shining example of integrity, impartiality, and reinforced belief in the supremacy of law.

Attempts are ongoing, using the powers of presidency, to persuade or intimidate Republicans state representatives, who are involved in overseeing the fairness of the elections, to throw out the legally cast votes in favor of Biden, declare the elections invalid, and nominate instead new unelected delegates committed to vote for Trump. However, these desperate maneuvers, bordering on illegal, are unlikely to succeed. Their ostensible purpose is to delay and create a sense of chaos and sow doubt in the mind of Trump supporters about the validity of the election. The effect may be long-lasting, as according to polls, a great majority of Republicans believe that elections were stolen by the Democrats and in fact Trump won the second term. These problems will haunt the duration of the Biden presidency.

This country is currently going through a rough time. It is being ravaged by Covid-19, which is out of control. Over 12.8 million people have had the disease and over 262, 000 have died of it. The hospitals are coping with this pandemic with great difficulty and some are already out of beds to admit new patients. The doctors, nurses, and other staff, many of whom have been victims of the disease themselves, are exhausted and emotionally drained. The state Governors are struggling to cope and have had to adopt draconian measures to combat the virus. Many towns and cities have been placed under lockdown, while many schools and colleges are conducting online classes only. Unfortunately, there is no leadership at the federal level. President Trump has largely divorced himself from the governing process and is consumed with his endeavors to prolong his presidency.

Besides mortality and morbidity, the explosive proliferation of the virus has generated other serious challenges. Millions of Americans have become unemployed, as businesses, restaurants, hotels, and airlines have laid off employees. Thousands of Americans are shown by the news media standing in line for hours waiting for food donations supported by churches and other charities. Unless the Congress passes a Covid-19 aid package, many more will lose unemployment benefits by Christmas time and will face starvation.

The likely availability in the near future of at least two highly effective vaccines is like a ray of sunshine in the dark. Finally, America has weathered many crises in the past, and I feel sure ultimately it will summon the will and resources to overcome the latest troubles.

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