

COMMENTARY

US Elections: The optimistic worst-case scenario

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The US elections will come down to the wire, and will be determined by mail-in votes. While this was fully expected during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was also the worst-case scenario given Trump's persistent attempts to delegitimize mail-in votes, despite lack of clear evidence of their fraudulence.

Much like 2016, the key battleground states are Pennsylvania (20 EC votes), Michigan (16) and Wisconsin (10), with mail-in votes deciding their outcome. As of this writing, Pennsylvania has counted 700.000 out of 2.5 million mail-in votes, of which Biden has won 71.7% of them to Trump's 21.3%. Michigan has counted 425.000 out of 2.48 million, with Biden winning 65% to Trump's 33%. Finally, Wisconsin still needs to count 1.3 million mail-in votes. Should the trend of Biden winning 2/3 of all mail-in votes, Biden will be a clear election winner, giving the Biden camp cause for optimism.

However, Trump has already falsely declared victory, despite votes still being counted. Coupled with Trump performing above expectations, the months spent delegitimizing mail-in votes has paved the way for Trump to potentially challenge the election results in the Supreme Court, which as of Amy Coney Barrett's inauguration, is leaning towards Republicans 6-3.

The coming days might very well go down in history as the days in which the fate of the US is decided; between progress and regression, between belief in science or conspiracies, between isolationism and multilateralism, between compassion and hate. However, regardless of the outcome, "the American century" had ended before it ever really began. That this race is even close despite Trump presiding over a ruined economy, almost a quarter of a million dead, a record-high deficit and a senate that has refused vital stimulus to citizens during this unprecedented crisis, points to more structural divisions that hold dire ramifications not just for the US, but globally as well. One can surmise the lessons authoritarian leaders will derive from the US' current predicament; reality matters less than populist rhetoric and identity politics. In this sense, the US reveals a wider epistemic crisis that is also present globally – on climate change, education, inequality in all permutations, foreign policy, health, and even reality itself.

Neither candidate has managed to make decisive dents in the other's support. It is uncertain whether the divides marring the US can even be healed at this point. What is certain, however, is that Biden would try, while Trump would not and cannot. A second Trump term will mean unfettered gerrymandering, census manipulation, court packing, and inequality. Should he succeed in stealing the elections by discounting mail-in votes, which have been a part of US elections since 1775, the decline of the US will likely become terminal.

For the sake of all, one can only hope that the frayed checks and balances in the US will hold until all mail-in ballots are counted.



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