

Elections Turn on a Dime

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Elections can turn on a dime and a lot more money than that. One of the issues in the current matchup between President Trump and challenger Joe Biden addresses the security of an election utilizing mail-in ballots. While the question has tweaked the passions of President Trump, who fears that a mail-in election will be a sham, it has also aroused the wrath of the Biden forces who see the very foundations of democracy about to crumble if mail-in voting is restricted.

The question of voting integrity is a backdrop to the issue which will ultimately decide this election: Are the people happy or angry about the way the COVID-19 pandemic has been handled in the United States? Those who believe that President Trump acted promptly and aggressively in shutting off international travel from China and creating Operation Warp Speed to develop a vaccine will have no trouble voting for the President. Those who are convinced that the President has bobbed the ball and been tone deaf to the relentless march of the disease will gladly vote for Joe Biden. Dramatic turn-arounds in the electoral mood at the last minute are not new to elections.

In 1864, it was quite apparent that President Lincoln might not even receive the nomination of his party, no less win the election. The Civil War had been poorly managed by the North with a group of generals who were both political appointments and militarily incompetent. Finally, Lincoln put his trust in Grant, whose march through Virginia created a bloodbath that shocked even the most ardent opponents of slavery. When Tecumseh Sherman marched into Atlanta, Georgia, it became a forgone conclusion that Lincoln would receive the nomination and would win the election conducted in the Union North.

Prior to General Sherman's Atlanta triumph, there were all kinds of shenanigans going on concerning Northern Democrats and a panoply of Republicans which were endemic to American history. *Deliver the Vote: A History of Election Fraud, An American Political Tradition, 1742-2004*, by Tracy Campbell, recites the degree of ballot stuffing, intimidating voters, buying votes, and other practices which became part-and-parcel of the American political motif.

It is hardly a secret that Lyndon Johnson's first congressional election was secured by voter fraud, and that had Mayor Richard Daley not turned out the vote for Senator Kennedy, it is likely that Richard Nixon would have been elected President in 1960. Tammany Hall, Huey Long, Boss Tweed, and many others regularly delivered the votes in return for political patronage, money and power.

Typically, new immigrants to this country were preyed upon by political leaches to turn the election one way or another. The party that benefits from those on the bottom of the totem pole, has not hesitated to benefit from corrupt politics. Likewise, those at the top of the heap have spared no lack of integrity to maintain their control over the political process. This is true even if the standard bearer was not personally involved in the crime of political chicanery.

We forget easily the election of 2000 between Vice President Gore and Governor Bush. The Republicans sued the Democrats to stop an electoral recount in Florida. The election results in the Sunshine State became the butt of jokes by late-night comedians, but was deadly serious business. We probably will never know just how much fraud really occurred in Florida, but the United States Supreme Court determined to stop the recount in order to, in its view, preserve democracy. That decision placed Governor Bush in the presidency.

The current dispute over mail-in ballots is difficult for a fair-minded person to comprehend, given the cacophony of background noise. While we are told that only nine (9) states have sent out ballots for the 2020 election to all registered voters in that state, many other states have made voting easier because of COVID-19. Many states have introduced the concept of the stay-at-home vote. How we are going to secure that the ballot received was from a real, live eligible person is not entirely clear to those who would like to comprehend the truth. Those of us who have previously voted by mail, because we were out of the area or not otherwise available to vote at the polling station, cannot help but be impressed with how easy it is and how little verification exists. Utilizing a voter ID card, driver's license or other uncontested evidence that the voter is really the person who sent in the ballot and exists as a living human being needs to be the turnstile for what is trustworthy.

Since this election will not turn on whether the candidates are right or wrong to trust mail-in voting, but rather on the COVID-19 response, the real issue is whether the American public, at the end of the day, can trust their voting system. Given America's history of turning a blind eye to corrupt elections, assurances cannot easily be given to the American public. The only guarantee that Americans will have as to whether the candidate they voted for is actually the candidate who is elected is by a robust system to guarantee a legitimate election based upon recognized and respected standards. Most voters have yet to hear a principled and informed explanation as to how any sort of voting this year will guarantee that the signature on the bottom of the ballot is a person with a right to vote and that the votes have been accurately counted. Americans have a right to be concerned, given the extent to which party promises over COVID-19 overshadows the entirety of the election, and given the absolute novelty of an election likely to be based, more than in the past, on mail-in ballots.

The reality, based upon American history, of this election being any more honorable than those in our history is slim. Since the election can and will turn on a dime, perhaps we need to spend more than ten cents to guarantee that our elections are safe.

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