

An Election Fit for 2020

by Conrad Black



Some comments in the media on the recent and still officially unresolved election amount to expressions of relief that despite the bitter campaign, the demoralizing complexities of the coronavirus pandemic, and the widespread fatuous practice of deliberately misinterpreting President Trump's assurances that he would not have the election stolen from him as a threat of civil violence, the election has come off smoothly and the country may pat itself on the back for casting over 150 million votes in a very close election without serious incident.

This must unfortunately be seen as the latest chapter in a very long and dismal sequence of almost uniform media misreporting of practically the entire Trump political phenomenon, from the historic descent of the Trump Tower escalator in June 2015 to the current lawsuits and recounts.

As the false alarm of Trump's inciting domestic violence lost its utility, it was discarded into the same dumpster as the endless promises of Russian interference in the election, the Pelosian ravings against the postmaster general for voter intimidation, the false polling projecting a Biden landslide, and the accompanying impure Democratic dreams of a decisive "repudiation" of Donald Trump and his program.

One aspect of the election result certainly is an expression of fatigue with the endless controversy of the Trump presidency, derived in competing measures from the president's egotism and craving for constant attention and the almost unfathomably rabid hatred of his enemies. Thus were the Democratic television commentators (i.e. practically all of them) able to claim that the "peaceful protesting" that killed scores of people, injured more than 700 police officers, and did billions of dollars of damage during the summer in Democratic-governed cities across the country, but went miraculously unmentioned at the Democratic National Convention, was just an inevitable consequence of "Donald Trump's America." Now that there is an apparent election result, the Never Trumpers who have been hiding in their foxholes for the last three years, and elements of the tiny band of reasonably neutral national political-media commentators, believe that an all-clear has sounded and they may safely emerge from their Trump-neutral bomb shelters and express their relief that the dreadful meteor has passed.

Whatever façade of constitutional orderliness is painted onto this dubious election, the Democratic strategists (who, to do them justice, have accomplished a considerable feat in hanging the COVID-19 crisis around Trump's neck and plucking the political cadaver of Joe Biden out of the snowbanks of New Hampshire and raising him to the exalted dignity of general recognition as president-elect) will have to consider the underlying facts. With 95 percent of the national political media almost dementedly hostile to Trump, who was outspent

more than two to one, after three years wrestling with what amounted to an unfounded treason trial followed by a congressional smearfest falsely presented as an impeachment case, and finally deluged by tens of thousands of falsely harvested and cast election ballots, Donald Trump, at the very least, has come as close as Hillary Clinton did four years ago in an honest election – a margin of fewer than 40,000 well-placed votes – to winning this election. This falls far short of the “repudiation” hoped for, complacently expected, and even haltingly announced, by his enemies; taken with Republican congressional gains and legislative advances in many states, and even if the questionable presidential result survives, this election is, as Jefferson said of Missouri’s proposed admission as a slave state, “a fire-bell in the night.”

Every remotely knowledgeable observer is aware that the Democratic Party is now a rickety coalition of irreconcilable elements, ostensibly led by an unprepossessing and enervated legislative journeyman with no demonstrated aptitude or accrued moral authority to deal with such complicated political circumstances. The Republicans are likely to retain a Senate majority, and in accord with long-established custom, to retake the House of Representatives in two years, and the euphoria of the Trump-haters will soon have to give way to a sober assessment of the deteriorated condition of America’s political culture and institutions. The relevant facts include that former prominent IRS official Lois Lerner attacked conservative Republican political-action committees’ tax treatment illegally and was not prosecuted, and that former attorney general Eric Holder paid no penalty for illegally running guns across the Mexican border as part of a hare-brained intervention in Mexican gang wars. So far, no one has paid any legal price for the false and almost certainly at least partially fraudulent investigation of a purported relationship between the Trump campaign and Russia, for which there was never any significant evidence. Congressmen Adam

Schiff (D., Calif.) and Jerry Nadler (D., N.Y.) repeatedly lied about the information they had about collusion and about President Trump's relations with the president of Ukraine and have paid no price whatever for that. At this point, there is a consensus that the horrifying vulnerability of American elections to ballot harvesting and stuffing was unjustifiable and was not exploited in this election despite a high likelihood that voting irregularities took place on a scale that would embarrass notorious regimes in much less well-developed countries.

A very large number of Americans now fear that a shoplifter, arsonist, or looter cannot legally be intercepted and stopped, that social media are arbitrarily censored by the social-media cartel (even Trump's Twitter was censored), and that a great many of the 140 million Americans who wish regularly to attend their chosen house of worship to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed liberty of religious practice are prevented from doing so and officially despised for having the impulse. All the while, American prosecutors win approximately 98 percent of their criminal cases, more than 95 percent of those without a trial, because of their ability to deform and exploit the plea-bargain system by granting immunity for perjury where they have extorted false inculpatory testimony, and because of their ability to intimidate those disinclined to provide such testimony by threats of indictment, however spurious. For many years, I, as someone who was imprisoned in the United States for three years for crimes that it is now officially recognized I did not commit, have no doubt tediously made the points that Americans, 5 percent of the world's population, have a quarter of the world's incarcerated people, and that the United States has six to twelve times as many incarcerated people as the most comparable large prosperous democracies (Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom).

There is irrefutable evidence that scores of millions of

Americans are concerned about the state of their democracy. However this election turns out and the ensuing politics unfold, if the incoming administration, a product of preternaturally fanatic efforts for regime change, does not take the need for fundamental reform of America's legal institutions and practices seriously, the United States could become a rotting nation from the jailhouse to the White House. Despite noisy pretensions otherwise, dispensing with Donald Trump, at least for now, does nothing to address that terrible fact. The entire magnificent American experiment is at some risk, and not just from the charlatans and myth-makers who concocted the nonsense about 1619 and other perversions of the often-inspiring American story. All who love America are more fearful than reassured by this election.

First published in National Review.