

Biden's Victory: A Eunuch Presidency Beckons

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Whatever was set to happen on November 3, President Donald J. Trump would not lose. Falling in that establishment firebreak against democracy known as the Electoral College would not erase, let alone repudiate him. His now victorious opponent, far from convincing, strengthened by only one fact - not being Trump - remains a projection of all the unresolved problems of the republic.

A Joe Biden presidency promises to be a return, not a progression. But a glance at the US electoral map suggests no easy pathway to political amnesia. A vote count shy of 71 million for Trump will be a hard statistic to ignore; even harder for the new administration will be the Republicans in the House of Representatives and Senate. The high priests and priestesses of news at CNN attempted to strangle any suggestion that they had gotten the election so horribly wrong. Embarrassment would not be countenanced; Biden, despite struggling in various key states in the initial count, would come through on the mail-in ballots so [vigorously slandered](#) by Trump.

CNN anchor Jake Tapper could not be accused of any complexity, preferring [to summarise](#) the Trump administration as a “time of extreme divisions... it’s a time of several significant and utterly avoidable failures, most tragically, of course, the unwillingness to accept the facts and science and do everything that can be done to save lives during a pandemic.” A “long national nightmare” for Americans had concluded.

What various networks were loath to admit was how Trump, despite the pandemic calamity, the worst economic performance since the Great Depression, the misinformation, the conspiracies, the misogyny, the racist claims, scandals and corruption, could still outperform his own showing in 2016 by millions of votes.

Trump’s performance till January, before the pandemic struck, was such as to make the Democratic challenge indefeasibly weak. As Luke Savage [suggests](#) in *Jacobin*, “Had the virus never hit and the situation that prevailed in January remained - which saw Trump’s economic approval rating rise to levels not seen by any president for two decades - there can be little doubt that the former host of TV’s *The Apprentice* would have flattened the hapless Biden on his road to a second term.”

Biden, straightjacketed by the DNC establishment, barely disturbed the policy manual. As good parts of the West Coast burned, he uttered pieties on climate change [while refusing](#) to saddle himself to the Green New Deal, preferring his own “Biden Green Deal”. He also rejected Medicare for All and held out on the issue of abolishing the legislative filibuster. On the issue of whether he would expand the Supreme Court beyond nine justices, [he suggested](#) the creation of a national commission. But in all this, a nod of approval was made to Trumpist rhetoric in an effort to lure back rust belt voters: the [“Buy America”](#) plan making US manufacturing “the Arsenal of American Prosperity”.

The elections for Congress did nothing to indicate that Trumpism had been washed blue. Quite the opposite. The cash expended on attempting to dislodge various GOP Senate incumbents went begging. Lindsey Graham held firm in South Carolina; likewise Joni Ernst of Iowa. Susan Collins [survived in Maine](#), despite the challenge from Sara Gideon, funded to the tune of \$130 million. (Collins received \$76 million.) The Democrats actually lost five seats in the House of Representatives. Such outcomes prompted Eric Levitz to [remark](#) that, “The 2020 election was likely a nigh-catastrophic setback for progressive politics in the United States.”

The results reveal a reorientation in US politics that Biden’s team will struggle to cope with. So will some Republicans, who find themselves, [according](#) to Steve Bannon, architect of Trump’s 2016 victory, a “working class party.” Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri certainly thinks so, [making the claim](#) on Election Day that, “We are a working class party now. That’s the future.”

Trump did increase his share of the vote, but the composition was not identical to that of 2016. An increased base among Latino voters in Texas and Florida was secured, suggesting the failure of the Democrats to convince them of Trump’s racist credentials. There [was a rise](#) in Black American votes for Trump, notably amongst males, despite the Black Lives Matter protests. Biden can also claim to have snared some former Republicans, notably of the middle-class, who found Trump a meal too rich to digest. Democrats seemed [to better](#) the Republicans in numerous suburban counties.

The remarks by the Biden-Harris team on the occasion of declaring victory did little to suggest a patching up of differences, a desire to understand the voters who cast their ballots for Trump. The illusion of “people power” was promoted by Kamala Harris. She also positioned the Democrats in such a manner as to continue the sneer against Trump’s voters. A vote for the Democrats was one for “truth” and “science”. By implication, those who voted against the Democrats were ignoramuses. Identity politics was reiterated: race, colour, sex. The lines in the sand, affirmed again.

Then came Biden, wishing to look more alive than not by running to the podium. Had he received a jab or two, a handy stimulant? Certainly, the commander-in-chief to be would have to dispel notions of lethargy and sleepiness. In animated, forced fashion, he claimed that a “clear victory” had been achieved. He spoke of an “outpouring” of joy across the globe. He promised to unify the country, again claiming that he was colour blind to “Blue States” and “Red States”. The electoral jigsaw suggests something glaringly different.

He thanked the African-American vote that always had his back as he had theirs. Identity markers were carefully inserted into the speech: African-American, White, Latino, Asian, Native American, straight, transgender, gay. This would have had Mark Lilla rolling his eyes, having [warned](#) in 2016 that celebrating diversity is “a splendid principle of moral pedagogy but disastrous as a foundation for democratic politics in our ideological age.”

There was the briefest mention to Trump supporters: “time to lower the temperature again.” He called for a “fair shot”. Enemies were not to be found, only Americans. Forces of fairness, science and hope were to be mastered. Scientists were to be appointed as advisors to the transition team to “turn around this pandemic”. He wished to “restore the soul of America”. Then, predictably, the words of his grandfather to him to “keep the faith”; and of his grandmother, to spread it.

More than faith, kept or spread, will be required. What this election victory for Biden promises is a eunuch presidency, one weak and emasculated before it begins. Anticipate deadlock and the agitations of continued tribalism. Trumpism, maddeningly, will linger behind the curtain, ever threatening to bromide politics.

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