

# Bush's Plan B: "October/November Surprise"

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In-depth Report: [Election Fraud in America](#)

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Back in the sunnier days of September, George W. Bush's political team was hoping that his lead would grow, as John Kerry was bedeviled by Swift boat ads questioning his Vietnam heroism and by taunting chants of "flip-flop." But Bush's clunky debate performances and weakening poll numbers mean it's time for Plan B.

Bush's Plan B looks to be a kind of "October/November Surprise," a coordinated strategy to suppress the vote in battleground states like Ohio and especially in Democratic strongholds. The heart of the plan will be to swarm the polls with Republican activists who will use challenges against individual voters to tie up the process, lengthen voting lines and cause time-strapped voters to give up and go home.

To some political historians, the scheme has the offensive smell of Jim Crow tactics used during the days of the segregationist South to keep African-Americans from voting. But the strategy has a more recent precedent, the disruption of recounts in Florida in November 2000 as Bush was clinging to a tiny lead.

To make sure that the recounts didn't change that result, the Bush campaign flew in Republican activists from Washington to stage noisy disruptions. One demonstration in Miami became known as "the Brooks Brothers riot," for the preppie clothes the rioters wore. With Republican demonstrators roughing up Democrats and storming the doors of the Dade County canvassing board on Nov. 22, 2000, the vote counters hastily abandoned their recount plans, effectively throwing out 10,750 uncounted ballots.

After their storm-trooper-style victory, the rioters celebrated at the Hyatt Regency Pier 66 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Crooner Wayne Newton sang "Danke Schoen," German for "thank you very much." Another highlight of the evening was a thank-you conference call from George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, who joked about the successful riot, according to the Wall Street Journal. [Nov. 27, 2000]

The tab for renting the hotel — \$35,501.52 — was paid by the Bush-Cheney recount committee. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "Bush's Conspiracy to Riot."]

## 'October Surprises'

In preceding decades, there also has been a rich history of Republican "October Surprise" operations that have undercut the Democrats.

In 1968, for instance, historical records show that Richard Nixon condoned back-channel contacts with South Vietnamese leaders, promising them a better deal if they boycotted Paris peace talks called by President Lyndon Johnson. As South Vietnamese negotiators stayed away and Johnson's peace talks floundered in the days before the 1968 election,

Nixon narrowly beat Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

Though Johnson was livid when he learned of Nixon's subterfuge, the Democrats kept quiet to avoid further dividing the country, according to former Johnson administration officials. The Vietnam War dragged on another four years as tens of thousands of more U.S. soldiers died as did hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese. [For an account of the 1968 case, see Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*.]

Nixon's success in 1968 may have contributed to his decision to undercut the Democrats again in 1972, when his political operatives waged a clandestine campaign to drive the strongest Democrats out of the race and to spy on the party's strategies. Nixon overreached, however, when a team of his burglars was caught planting bugs at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate building.

Despite Nixon's ouster over the Watergate scandal — the one time the GOP paid any serious price for a dirty trick — the Republicans were back at it in 1980. This time, the Republicans were concerned that President Jimmy Carter might pull off his own "October Surprise" by managing to free 52 American hostages in Iran right before the election.

The evidence is now overwhelming that this fear led to a Republican operation — which included then-vice presidential candidate George H.W. Bush — to establish clandestine contacts with Iran's Islamic leaders. Those contacts, in turn, appear to have culminated in a secret deal for the American hostages to be released only after Carter lost to Ronald Reagan. [For details on this 1980 "October Surprise" case, including new incriminating evidence, see *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

In 1992, in a tough fight for reelection, the elder George Bush couldn't resist the temptation to try another "October Surprise." Trailing Bill Clinton in the polls, Bush ranted to his staff about the need to find information that would discredit Clinton. Under this White House pressure, State Department officials pawed through Clinton's passport file, looking for a rumored letter in which Clinton supposedly sought to renounce his citizenship.

Though no such letter turned up, assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Tamposi drafted a baseless criminal referral, suggesting that a Clinton associate might have tampered with the file to remove damaging material. The criminal referral to the FBI was then leaked to the news media, enabling Bush to raise doubts about Clinton's loyalty.

Some Bush supporters went so far as to suggest that Clinton had been recruited by the Soviet KGB while a Rhodes scholar traveling in Eastern Europe over Christmastime 1969. But the Bush administration's passport gambit backfired, sparking an embarrassing campaign scandal that became known as Passportgate. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com's "Bushes Play the Traitor Card."]

### **Common Thread**

The common thread through all these "October Surprise" cases is the determination of the Republicans to grab or hold onto power even if they must break the rules to do so. "First win and then worry about the consequences," their motto seems to be.

The Republicans also have found that the Democrats are hesitant to call them to account for campaign abuses that do come to light. The Democrats are either afraid of sore-loser

charges or they believe that disclosure of the dirty tricks would undermine the American people's faith in the democratic process.

A key difference in the 2004 case, however, is that George W. Bush's campaign is being forced to reveal its plans before the election. As Kerry pulls even or ahead in some polls, the Bush campaign is finding itself with little choice other than to conduct this year's "October/November Surprise" out in the open.

Already, Republicans have challenged the eligibility of 35,000 voters in closely contested Ohio. The Republicans also are planning to send activists into 8,000 Ohio polling places to challenge newly registered voters. [Washington Post, Oct. 26, 2004]

The prospect is for these Election Day challenges to gum up the balloting, stopping not just questionable voters but also lengthening lines and extending wait times so many voters will grow discouraged and head home. Similar aggressive strategies to whittle down the Democratic vote have surfaced in Florida, another top battleground state.

Yet while these hardball tactics may succeed in depressing the Democratic vote, they also run the risk of reminding voters across the country about Bush's tainted victory in 2000. And unlike the Florida recount battle in November-December 2000, American voters can do something about what the Republicans are planning for this election: the voters can go to the polls on Nov. 2 and make the Republicans pay a price for what looks like voter suppression.

Indeed, maybe the only way to stop the GOP's historic pattern of "October Surprise" gambits is for American voters to demonstrate, once and for all, that messing with the people's right to vote won't be tolerated.

**Robert Parry, who broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek, has written a new book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*. It can be ordered at [www.secrecyandprivilege.com](http://www.secrecyandprivilege.com) .**

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