

When Wasn't it Rigged? Donald Trump and US Presidential Races

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Hideousness is only one word that covers the third and last presidential debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. But prior to that, as a warm up of mischief, Trump was insisting that he would find accepting a public vote for Clinton hard to stomach at the electoral level. The only way he would accept any electoral result would be, in fact, if he won.

The Trump train is already finding tasks to occupy itself in that direction, promising to garner its own exit polls to combat the “rigging” disease. Roger Stone has been crowned with that role, hoping to focus on 600 different precincts in nine Democrat cities with considerable minority populations. He will have the assistance of 1,300 volunteers from the Citizens for Trump coalition.[1]

Visions of political spoliation more commonly associated with burdened African powers or unstable pacific states come to mind: well fought over electoral result, followed by a swift, incisive coup, and banishment of the elected leader.

The point was already alluded to by Zimbabwean opposition leader Tendai Biti in the aftermath of Trump’s pseudo-dictatorial marks. On questioning the 2008 election result that yielded President Robert Mugabe yet another victory, Biti was detained for a month and charged with treason for questioning the result. He duly suffered a good bout of deprivation and hardship.

“Donald Trump is a gift to all tin-pot dictators on the African continent. He is giving currency and legitimacy to rigging because if it can exist in America, it can exist anywhere.” Trump, in other words, had “no idea what he’s talking about, absolutely no idea.”[2]

While idealising the US electoral system as a wonder to emulate, Biti had missed the more sophisticated features in its limiting features. Trump’s remarks remind one, rather than deflect interest, from the fundamental rot at the centre of US politics, and the system that assures the perpetuation of special interests.

The “rigging” notion was certainly familiar to the rhetoric of Bernie Sanders, and it was one that Clinton was desperate to stomp upon. What has happened is a blurring of the rigging debate with that of fraud, which not necessarily the same thing.

The point about rigging is its permanent political appeal, and central to any political system that treats plutocrats, or some variant of elitism, as essential to stability. Democracy, ripe and raw, is always feared for its lynching excesses, a point made with clinical clarity at numerous points by the Founding Fathers. The American colonies may well have rid themselves of a monarch, but retained an aristocratic form which elevated private property,

including slaves, to the levels of the sacred.

Alexander Hamilton, that great centralist of the union, provided food for thought in a June 1788 speech defending the necessary ratification of the US Constitution: "That a pure democracy if it were practicable would be the most perfect government. Experience has proved that no position is more false than this. The ancient democracies in which the people themselves deliberated never possessed one good feature of government. Their very character was tyranny; their figure, deformity." [3]

James Madison, who did the most cerebral ventilating on the Constitution, considered that a "pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and minister the government in person, can admit no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion or interest will be felt by a majority, and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party." [4]

The nature of the US political system is to ensure a decent, governing class jiggling of the vote. Representative democracy - or as we tend to see these days, distinctly unrepresentative questionably democratic figures - came to be the hallmark, monitored and tinkered with by party machines and the cohorts of pollsters and focus group priests. Electioneering became more science fiction than science, occasionally tempered by rhetorical flourishes.

So Trump is not far off in his bellyaching observations, even if they have a characteristic crudeness that denies political sophistication. The system is rigged, but not merely against him. Nor is it because of his folly, carelessness and buffoonery in letting his competition, Hillary Clinton, get away with some of the more notable smudges on the US republic.

No other candidate has been permitted a sliver of debate at the national level, despite the real prospect of Jill Stein of the Greens gaining a share of the Bernie Sanders vote, or a confused, news-averse Gary Johnson of the Libertarians causing some disruption. Since the infant days of the Republic, impediments against having such alternatives reach what constitute the self-appointed mainstream of media and public discussion have been in place.

Stacked the presidential system is: against anybody not favoured by the coalescing connivance of the establishment, the same establishment, more empire than democracy, that indulges in the whims and fancies of wars, financial collapses and, shall we say, ruin?

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Notes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/20/citizens-for-donald-trump-exit-poll--roger-stone-rigged-election-claim>

[2] <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-rigging-africa-idUSKCN12K23D>

[3] <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/alexander-hamilton-speech/>

[4] <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>

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