

November nightmare: How Trump could exploit absentee ballot counting delays to contest the election results



With less than four months remaining until the presidential election, former Vice President Joe Biden holds a substantial lead over President Trump in the polls. US Centre Director, [Professor Peter Trubowitz](#) writes that the COVID-19 pandemic means that there will be far more absentee ballots cast this year, and that we should not discount the likelihood of President Trump using this difference to claim that the final result is a fraud if he does not win.

If the US presidential election were held today, former Vice President Joe Biden would win soundly. The Democrats would likely take the Senate while maintaining firm control of the House. Most of the polls are pointing in this direction (see [here](#) and [here](#)). However, the election is not being held today. There is time for Trump to close the gap, and in 2020, the year of the absentee ballot, that may be all Trump thinks he needs to claim victory.

It is a safe bet that Trump will do whatever he can to stay in the White House, including claiming the election was a fraud. Indeed, he is already preparing the ground for this by claiming that [absentee ballots are unreliable](#). Absentee voting in November is going to take place in record numbers because of the COVID-19 pandemic. And a disproportionate number of those ballots will likely be cast by Democratic voters, especially since Trump is urging Republicans to vote in person. Those absentee ballots will take days, and in some cases longer, to count. This could mean that the Election Day state tallies we see on November 3 look more favorable for Trump than the final tallies, once all the absentee ballots are counted.

Consider, for example, last month's special election in New York's [27th Congressional district](#). This is a seat that Trump won by 25 percent in 2016. Chris Jacobs (R) led Nate McMurray (D) 70 percent to 28 percent on election night, but as of Wednesday, his edge had dropped to just 53 percent to 45 percent. Jacobs will likely win the seat (most absentee ballots have been counted), but the considerable change in the margin since election night is indicative of how much the presidential vote could change in the days following the November 3 election (see [here](#) for one scenario).

It doesn't take much imagination to see why Trump's claims that absentee voting is fraudulent, [baseless](#) as this claim is, could matter come November. If the presidential race comes down to a few close battleground states and the Election Day returns favor Trump, you can bet that Republicans will contest absentee ballots to raise doubts in many voters' minds about the integrity of the process. Little wonder that Biden has hired more than [600 lawyers](#) to insure that voters get to cast their ballots, and also to make sure absentee ballots are properly and fairly counted. (For more information about perceptions of voting integrity across the fifty states, see [here](#).)

For Trump, driving down Biden's sizable lead in the polls is the immediate challenge. Look for Trump to try to deflect blame toward everyone and anyone for his gross incompetence in handling COVID-19 — China, the Democrats, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Antifa, etc. Biden's challenge is the opposite: to keep voters focused on Trump's botched handling of the health care crisis. This is Trump's key weakness and Biden's best bet for turning the election into a referendum on Trump, and to ensure the election doesn't come down to a debate over absentee ballots.

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Date originally posted: 2020-07-20

Permalink: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2020/07/20/november-nightmare-how-trump-could-exploit-absentee-ballot-counting-delays-to-contest-the-election-results/>

Blog homepage: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/>



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