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Research in Greater Depth: Voting Rights and Security

Instructions: Read the following news article excerpts and poll data and complete the “Source Analysis” handout.

Excerpts of News Articles

Source 1

NPR: “Voting And Elections Divide Republicans And Democrats Like Little Else. Here’s Why” by Philip Ewing, June 12, 2020 <<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/12/873878423/voting-and-elections-divide-republicans-and-democrats-like-little-else-heres-why>>

Republicans and Democrats seldom agree on much in 21st century politics—but one issue that divides them more than ever may be voting and elections....

Here’s what you need to know to decode this year’s voting controversies.

The Rosetta stone

The key that unlocks so much of the partisan debate about voting is one word: turnout.

An old truism holds that, all other things held equal, a smaller pool of voters tends to be better for Republicans and the larger the pool gets, the better for Democrats....

Traditionally, Republicans have tended to support higher barriers to voting and often focus on voter identification and security to protect against fraud. All the same, about half of GOP voters back expanding vote by mail in light of the pandemic.

Democrats tend to support lowering barriers and focus on making access for voters easier, with a view to encouraging engagement. They support expanding votes via mail too.

The next fight, in many cases, is about who and how many get what access via mail....

Access vs. security

The pandemic has added another layer of complexity with the new emphasis it has put on voting by mail. President Trump says he opposes expanding voting by mail, and his allies, including White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, call the process rife with opportunities for fraud.

Even so, Trump and McEnany both voted by mail this year in Florida, and Republican officials across the country have encouraged voting by mail.

Democrats, who have made election security and voting access a big part of their political brand for several years, argue that the pandemic might discourage people from going to old-fashioned polling sites.

If there’s rough agreement about that away from the White House, there are many disputes about the specifics—what practices will be permitted based on what the parties perceive as beneficial for them.

A study by Stanford University found that voting by mail yielded a small but roughly equal increase in turnout between the parties....

[A]part from the politics, absentee ballot-printing is a boutique business and its capacity will be tested—as may that of the Postal Service.

How common is voter fraud?

It exists, but it’s very rare.

Despite anecdotal cases of people voting fraudulently in person or suspicious ballots appearing in the mail, most of the time, in most places, the way elections in the U.S. are processed is legitimate.

Since the pandemic, some Republican officials at the state level have acknowledged that the party’s language around fraud may now be putting voting at risk by amplifying fraud concerns out of proportion....

Trump sometimes says that large numbers of people vote illegally in the United States, but a

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panel he appointed to investigate that ostensible problem could not substantiate it....

Still, anecdotal cases of fraud crop up across the country.

Voter suppression

Activists frequently call out what they term suppression.

In a dispute this spring in Nevada, for example, Democrats sued to stop the state from sending mail-in ballots only to people who had voted in recent elections rather than to all registered voters.

Democrats said the state's plan would disenfranchise some citizens by leaving them out of the primary; Republicans argued that states' voter rolls are often inaccurate and that sending out ballots to everyone could lead to the ballots getting lost or winding up in the wrong hands—opening up the prospect for fraud.

Voter rolls are often the focus of disputes for these reasons.

People die, move—and move out of state—and so authorities periodically need to delete names. How frequently that happens, and for what reasons, can become controversial and the kernel of legal and political warfare between the parties.

Likewise with voter identification documents.

In Texas, for example, the Republican-dominated state legislature deemed that handgun licenses were acceptable identification at the polls—but student IDs, even those issued by the state's own universities, were not....

Another battleground is early and absentee voting. Rules vary by state, with some requiring more explanation than others as to what's permissible.

Bitter lessons

The parties today have arrived at this moment after years of what they would argue were bad experiences with elections at the hands of their opponents.

Republicans, among other things, sometimes point to what they believe was cheating in the 1960 presidential race. Alleged Democratic chicanery, in this telling, threw the results to John F. Kennedy and cost the race for Richard Nixon.

Fraudulent IDs, undocumented immigrants voting, people being “bused in” on Election Day remain consistent themes when Republicans talk about elections.

Democrats look to the decades of Jim Crow discrimination that kept many black voters out of elections.

More recently, they look at the Supreme Court's 2000 decision that handed the outcome of that election to George W. Bush over Al Gore. The court halted the counting of ballots that Democrats argued could have changed Florida's results, swinging the state to Gore.

[Georgia Democrat Stacy] Abrams' group [Fair Fight Action] perceives what it calls a deliberate campaign by the establishment to purge Georgia voter rolls of mainly black or Democratic voters.

Problems with voting in Georgia's primary in June underscored those problems and that history, Abrams and other critics said.

Matters of principle

Many party leaders describe at having arrived at their positions based upon principle. Republicans are more likely to argue that casting a vote is a privilege of citizenship to be earned and safeguarded with restrictions and security....

Democrats are more likely to argue that voting is a right and that the barriers to casting a ballot should be as low as practical. President Lyndon Johnson and Democrats in the 1960s used the Voting Rights Act and federal power to dismantle racist state laws designed to prevent African Americans from voting, but those actions were later weakened by the Supreme Court....

Whatever the outcome of this year's election, these disputes over elections themselves likely will continue well into the future.

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Source 2

ABC News: “Trump vs. Biden on the issues: Election security and integrity” by Kendall Karson and Quinn Scanlan, September 29, 2020 <<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-biden-issues-election-security-integrity/story?id=73244844>>

Russia’s ongoing brazen efforts to interfere in the presidential election -- as they did four years ago—remains a principal concern among national security officials, along with other adversaries including China. But unlike in 2016, the rapid and sweeping embrace of vote-by-mail in response to the coronavirus pandemic injects new uncertainty about election security, as millions prepare to vote in an alternative way.

Fueling those anxieties over mail voting... is President Trump’s unsubstantiated allegations of rampant fraud, even as dozens of state election officials tell ABC News that they have confidence in the system. His campaign against vote-by-mail throughout the cycle exceeds similar efforts he made in 2016, when he argued, without evidence, that voter fraud was the only reason Hillary Clinton won the popular vote. His own voting integrity commission found no evidence of that.

The integrity of this year’s matchup between Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden has taken on an outsized role in the increasingly competitive political environment, as attempts to undermine confidence in the democratic process mount both from outside the country’s borders and from inside the Oval Office....

Here’s what we know about the candidates’ histories with and stances on the issue [of election security and integrity]:

The Russia question

Even before this year’s election, questions about the integrity of the 2016 race dogged Trump throughout his presidency after intelligence officials disclosed an extensive influence campaign directed by Russian President Vladimir Putin himself to aid Trump.

A bipartisan Senate panel this year affirmed the intelligence community’s assertions, rejecting the notion that the intelligence community was biased against Trump in its approach....

Ahead of the 2018 midterms, national security officials again warned that Russia was at it again. In

the wake of the midterms, the intelligence community reported that while the vote had not been compromised, influence campaigns, including from Russia and Iran, persisted. The review stemmed from a September 2018 executive order mandating regular election assessments.

States’ turn to mail-in voting for November

This year, election security has emerged at the center of the 2020 presidential race in part by Trump’s own making—he has relentlessly assailed the use of the mail-in voting with unfounded suggestions of widespread fraud.

“The only way we’re going to lose this election is if the election is rigged,” he said during a visit to Wisconsin in August. Trump made the same assertion in the lead-up to the 2016 race.

For months leading into this fall, Trump has sought to sow distrust in the voting practice, including baselessly suggesting that foreign actors could take advantage, just as the country is relying on it most.

Before November, at least 32 states, plus Washington, D.C. have adjusted their election blueprints to expand options for voters and to make voting more accessible due to COVID-19.

Trump ramped up his warnings of widespread fraud last week, even declining to commit to a peaceful transition of power if he were to lose the election, and pushing his belief that mail-in ballots will be the problem. “Get rid of the ballots and you’ll have a very peaceful—there won’t be a transfer,” he said.

“What country are we in?” Biden said, when a reporter asked him to respond. “I don’t know what to say about it, but it doesn’t surprise me.”

In a later interview with MSNBC, Biden said the American people will be heard.

“Every vote in this country is gonna be heard, and they’ll not be stopped,” he said. “I am confident all the irresponsible, outrageous attacks on voting—we’ll have an election in this country that we

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always have had. And he'll leave.”

The president's efforts come as his own campaign and state Republican parties encourage supporters to use mail-in voting through ads, online posts, and robocalls—and as his own intelligence officials refute his narrative.

“We have not seen, historically, any kind of coordinated national voter fraud effort in a major election, whether it's by mail or otherwise,” FBI Director Christopher Wray said before Congress Thursday.

Biden, for his part, explicitly backed the nationwide push to expand voting-by-mail in response to the pandemic, even calling on Congress to provide more funding to aid states in their efforts, while casting Trump's strategy as “un-American....”

Further stoking concerns over the integrity of the election regarding mail-in voting is the Trump administration's assault on one of the country's most storied institutions, the United States Postal Service.

The USPS implemented controversial cost-cutting measures under Trump-installed postmaster general Louis DeJoy, which some critics argued could have adverse impacts on the election by slowing mail delivery. Those changes were halted by a federal judge earlier this month.

House Democrats passed a bill in August that would've allocated an additional \$25 billion in funding to USPS, a cash injection the agency's board of governors—whose Senate-confirmed members were all appointed by Trump -- requested from Congress back in early April because of anticipated losses.

Trump has attempted to use this as evidence that USPS won't be able to handle the increased mail-in voting, asserting, “they don't have the money to do the universal mail-in voting. So therefore, they can't do it,” Trump said on Aug. 12. But DeJoy rebuffed Trump, saying on Friday, “we're equipped to do it and we're going to deliver the ballots.”

Trump claims foreign governments interfering with mail-in voting

The president has also raised the possibility of foreign governments trying to interfere in the

presidential election by taking advantage of the increase in mail-in voting, an unproven claim that he first made after Attorney General Bill Barr suggested that foreign countries could do this, and that it would be hard for U.S. election officials to detect it, during an interview on Fox News in June.

“The biggest risk that we have is mail-in ballots, because with a mail-in ballot—well, universal mail-in ballots, it is a much easier thing for a foreign power, whether it's Russia, China, Iran, North Korea...it's much easier for them to forge ballots and send them in,” Trump said in early August. “It's much easier for them to cheat with universal mail-in ballots.”

However, election officials, and the FBI, have disputed this scenario, citing the safeguards and specificities in place—like ballots being printed on special paper or having unique barcodes on them -- that make this highly unlikely to happen, never mind happen undetected.

Specter of Russian influence and interference once again

Russia's attempts to meddle extend beyond mail voting. In early September, ABC News reported that the Department of Homeland Security withheld publication of an intelligence bulletin in early July warning law enforcement agencies of a Russian scheme to attack Biden's mental fitness, according to internal emails and a draft of the document obtained by ABC News.

The bulletin detailing Russia's campaign against Biden's mental health again echoes Trump's own rhetoric—and indicates the most specific example to date of Moscow's intentions to influence November's election.

There is no evidence to suggest that Biden's not mentally fit to be president, and both he and his campaign have pushed against this narrative from Trump.

In June of last year, Trump even said in an exclusive interview with ABC News he would “listen” if foreign governments offered dirt on political opponents.

“I think you might want to listen, there isn't anything wrong with listening,” Trump told ABC News Chief Anchor George Stephanopoulos. “If

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somebody called from a country, Norway, [and said] ‘we have information on your opponent’—oh, I think I’d want to hear it.”

Other foreign powers a worry

But Russia isn’t the only foreign country seeking to sway America’s vote. Back in August, a public statement issued by the U.S. intelligence community revealed that three of the nation’s top adversaries are actively attempting to meddle in the presidential race, including efforts by Russia to advance Trump’s reelection efforts.

Intelligence officials also concluded that “China prefers that President Trump – whom Beijing sees as unpredictable—does not win reelection.” Iran, it found, “seeks to undermine U.S. democratic institutions, President Trump, and to divide the country in advance of the 2020 elections.”

Asked about the statement, Trump deflected, turning the question back on the reporter.

“We’re gonna look at that very closely, but you started off with Russia. Why don’t you start off with China? We think China’s maybe a bigger threat,” Trump said during a press conference at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

Trump has frequently downplayed intelligence showing Russia’s aim to aid his campaign in 2016, while Biden excoriated his rival’s administration for failing to take action to prevent foreign election interference, and said that he is putting the Kremlin and other foreign governments “on notice.”

“If elected president, I will treat foreign interference in our election as an adversarial act that significantly affects the relationship between the United States and the interfering nation’s government,” Biden wrote as part of a lengthy statement....

The overt differences between Biden and Trump on election security, experts say, crystallize the “stark illustration” between the two men in their approaches to national security....

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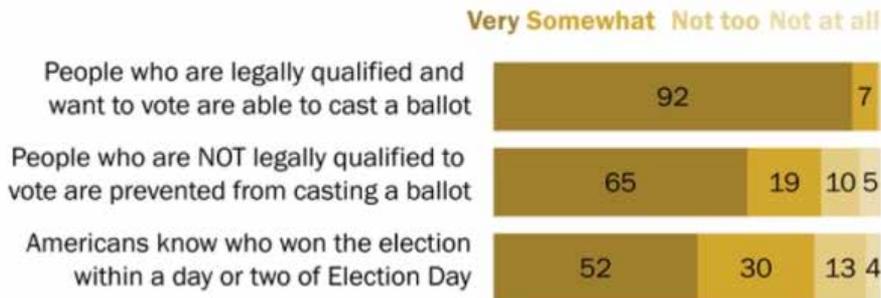
Polling Data

Poll 1

Pew Research Center, September 30-October 5, 2020 <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/10/14/deep-divisions-in-views-of-the-election-process-and-whether-it-will-be-clear-who-won/pp_2020-10-14_election-security_0-05/>

Voters overwhelmingly say it is very important all qualified voters are able to cast ballots in the election

% of registered voters who say each is ___ important for the presidential election this November



Notes: Based on registered voters. No answer responses not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2020.

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Poll 2

Gallup, September 14-28 <<https://news.gallup.com/poll/321665/confidence-accuracy-election-matches-record-low.aspx>>

