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Why Ann Coulter Has Power: U.S. Politics are Authoritarian by Design

Recently a correspondent from overseas wrote to ask me how it is that Donald Trump perseveres with his absurd nativist demand – replete with threats of a second government shut-down or a Declaration of National Emergency – for a completed wall to stop a fake and racist brown menace on the southern United States border despite the fact that his demand and his threats are opposed by a solid majority of U.S.-Americans.

The demand and the threats are still very much on the table in the wake of a State of the Union Address in which Trump made literally not a single mention of the 35-day nativist shutdown he ordered (at no small cost to hundreds of thousands of federal workers) last December and January.

The short answer to my correspondent’s question is that Trump has strong support for his terrible Know Nothing Wall from white-nationalist Republicans who are granted political leverage far beyond their numbers by the nation’s militantly undemocratic political system. Just a third (34 percent) of the U.S. population – of “We the People” – thinks Trump should declare a national emergency if Congress does not fund a border wall.

But so what? Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of Republicans think Trump should declare a national emergency if Congress won’t agree to pay for the wall. And it’s the second group, not the popular majority, that matters most to Trump under the American system.

Winner-Take-All: A College That Flunks Democracy 101

“Oh, but that’s not a democratic!”

No, it isn’t. And that’s by design going way back.

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U.S.-American presidential electoral polling data is commonly cited as if U.S-Americans elect their presidents on the democratic basis of one person-one vote.

They don't.

We hear that presidential candidates X, Y, and Z are supported by some certain percentages of U.S. American voters surveyed in national polls. That's nice, but there's a problem. "We the People" don't elect U.S. presidents, founding finaglers Alexander Hamilton and James Madison's Electors do.

Their Electoral College (EC) flunks the democracy test by granting each of the nation's fifty states presidential votes or "Electors" equal to the total of (A) how many House of Representatives members it has and (B) the number of U.S. Senators it has. (A) varies with population size, so that California, the nation's most populous state, has 53 House members while Wyoming, the nation's least populous state, has just 1 House member. (B) does not vary with population: every state has two US Senators, regardless of its population. Thus, California has 55 Electors and Wyoming has 3.

Except for just two low-population states, Maine and Nebraska, the Electoral count system in the states is winner-take-all. If the Republican incumbent Donald Trump defeats, say, Democratic candidate Kamala Harris by just 15 votes, the Party of Liberty and Socialism's Gloria La Riva by just 16 votes, the Green Party's Jill Stein by just 17 votes, the Libertarian Party's Gary Johnson by just 18 votes, and the Independent Howard Schultz by just 19 votes in Ohio (likely with no small help from racist voter suppression in that state) in 2020, Trump gets all 18 of that state's Electors/votes.

If the Electors were allotted in democratic accord with the real numerical breakdown of the state's popular vote, it'd be an even Electoral College split in Ohio: 3 for Trump, 3 for Harris, 3 for La Riva, 3 for Stein, and 3 for Schultz. But it's not a democratic system, it's a winner-take-all system where the tiniest plurality gives the biggest popular vote-grabber all the constitutionally relevant tallies (the Electoral College votes).

Now, thanks to strong historical correlations between geography, race, ethnicity, and partisan voting behavior at the state level, most of the nation's fifty states are already locked up for one of the two dominant and capitalist-imperial political parties – either the corporate and militarist Republicans or the corporate and militarist Democrats – before presidential campaigns begin. In more urban and racially and ethnically diverse "blue" jurisdictions like California, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New York, it's generally understood in advance that the state's presidential voter plurality and hence all its collegiate Electors will be Democratic. In more rural and whiter "red" states like Texas,

Mississippi, Tennessee, and North Dakota, presidential pluralities and hence all Electors are usually sewn up for the Republicans long before elections.

Most of the fifty states regularly lean strongly to just one of the two major parties and are therefore known as “safe states.” Only a minority are “contested” or “swing” states that could be reasonably seen as winnable by either the Democratic or the Republican presidential candidate. A generous listing of these “swing” jurisdictions includes just fifteen states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Where do you suppose presidential campaigns focus their get-out-the-vote energies as the quadrennial election cycle heats up? Contested states, of course. There’s not much incentive for presidential campaigns to invest in trying to push up vote totals in the big majority of states where their candidate is almost certain either to win or to lose. If Trump is going to lose the popular vote and hence all the Electors (the real “voters” under the U.S. Constitution) to Harris (or whoever else the Democrats put up against him) in California (he is), what does it matter to his campaign managers and funders if he loses the popular vote there by one instead of two or three million? If Harris (or whoever the Dems run) is certain to win the popular vote and hence all the Electors in New York, how much difference does make for her get three million instead of one million more million votes than Trump there?

Besides not being genuinely democratic, the U.S. presidential election process is not genuinely national. Until 2006, the present writer lived in three safely Democratic states: the formerly reliably blue Michigan (ages 0-4, 14-17), Illinois (4-12, 18-46), and New York (12-14, 24-25). He never saw firsthand a presidential campaign in full swing until he hit middle-age, when he lived for the first time in “contested” Iowa (where the presidential-electoral obsession shines doubly bright thanks to the state’s famous “first-in-the-nation” presidential party caucuses.) This reflects a peculiarity of the American Electoral College system: presidential elections are won, lost, and fought in a small number of states.

Trump’s chances for a second term depend on getting out his right-wing racist and nativist, anti-immigrant base in just fifteen states.

Gerrymander: Absurd Representation

Why is that base so basely racist and nativist, susceptible to Trump’s preposterous brown menace demagoguery even as “illegal border crossings” at the southern border are at a

fifty-year low? Part of it has to do with some other and related peculiarities of the U.S. political system. Decades of radical state-level partisan gerrymandering of the nation's House of Representatives districts have empowered the white-nationalist right wing in the Republican Party. By making House districts safely Republican, gerrymandering (the drawing of district lines to ensure that only one party can win a legislative seat there) strengthens the hand of reactionary extremists. In safely Republican districts, noxious Amerikaner activists don't have to save resources for general election contests with Democrats. They don't have to worry about alienating non-Republican voters. They can pour the lion's share of their money and energy into defeating more moderate Republican opponents in the presidential primaries.

According to the Cook Political Report, fully 165 Republican House members currently sit atop districts where Democrats don't have a chance and the only competition is in the primaries, between Republicans. (The Democratic Party, which has participated in its own brand of gerrymandering, currently enjoys 184 "solid seats" in the House.)

Red Senate

A similar dynamic involving the over-representation of rural and white America helps feed the power of the nativist right in the upper chamber of Congress. The U.S. Constitution assigns two U.S. Senators to each U.S. state regardless of population.

Red Wyoming, home to 573,720 Americans, holds U.S. senatorial parity with blue California, where 39.54 million Americans reside. That's one U.S. Senator for every 19.7 million Californians vs. one U.S. Senator for every 287,000 Wyoming residents. If solidly Democratic California had U.S. Senators at the same Populace-to-Senator Ratio (PtSR) as Wyoming, in accord with the core democratic principle of one person, one vote, it would have 138 U.S. Senators.

Blue Chicago (which is one-third white, one-third Black, and one-third Latinx) is home to 2.7 million people. If Chicago was a state and U.S. Senators were apportioned there at the same PtSR as Wyoming, it would have 9 national Senators.

(The District of Columbia is home to 693,972 people, more than all of Wyoming and just roughly 46,000 less than that of Alaska. It is absurdly denied voting representation in either the House or the Senate. It would send no Republicans to Congress.)

This preposterous apportionment system means that the current Republican U.S. Senate majority answers to a disproportionately white, rural, and reactionary section of the electorate. Due to "a growing population shift from the agricultural interior to crowded corridors along the coast," Daniel Lazare noted two years ago, it is mathematically

possible now for the Republicans to “cobble together a Senate majority with states that account for just 17.6 percent of the popular vote.” Talk about the preposterous anti-democratic super-empowerment of a minority of the electorate.

Because it includes the undemocratic Senate apportionment method in its assignment of presidential Electors, moreover, the Electoral College “triples the [presidential vote] clout of the eight smallest states and doubles that of the next six” (Lazare).

This system for not democratically electing the U.S. president has put the right-wing Republican loser of the popular vote in the White House in 2 (2000 and 2016) of the last 5 presidential elections.

As with the partisan gerrymandering of House districts, the constitutionally generated insulation of many Republican U.S. Senators from Democratic competition opens space for disproportionate racist-nativist power in the upper chamber

“Money is Speech”

Another important if less obvious part of the Republicans’ absurdly super-empowered rightward, white-nationalist, and nativist trajectory is related to the U.S. Supreme Court’s constitutionally ordained veto power over the legality/constitutionality of government policy. The God-like appointed-for-life high court has ruled on numerous occasions (Buckley Valeo 1976 and Citizens United 2010 being the two most outstanding cases) that concentrated wealth can control the nation’s elections through gigantic campaign contributions (defined as constitutionally protected “free speech”) that ordinary citizens can’t match. This plutocratic “wealth primary” is part of how and why the Democratic Party shifted so far to the corporation-serving right (quite dramatically under Bill Clinton and Barack Obama but with clear origins under Jimmy Carter) that it challenged the Republicans’ longstanding status as the true party of Big Business. This in turn compelled Republican politicians to tilt further to the hard racist, nativist, and sexist right to help their party retain a viably distinct identity.

At the same time, with big corporate and financial money compelling the Democrats to abandon past New Deal-era commitments to labor, the working-class, minorities, and the poor, much of the Democratic Party’s traditional base was demobilized and depressed. A vacuum of popular resentment was opened for Republican exploitation. Consistent with the fascistic-political style of right-wing “populists” in Europe, the neoliberal era Republicans have worked to blame declining the white working- and middle-classes’ declining fortunes and chronic insecurity on immigrants and minorities. Also targeted by the authoritarian right (here and abroad) are brown- and black-skinned Others’ purported

liberal and left professional-class allies, who are accused of letting “undeserving” minorities “cut in line” ahead of supposedly more virtuous and hard-working white Americans. It doesn’t help that identity-politicized and Wall Street-captive “progressive-neoliberal” Democrats have (in historian Nancy Fraser’s words) “compounded” the injuries of deindustrialization and de-unionization with “the insult of progressive moralism,” arrogantly typecasting white “flyover zones” as inherently vicious and culturally retrograde lands of “deplorable” reaction. The tragic potency of the nativist-racist “reactionary populist” Republican right draws heavily on the bi-coastal and metropolitan-globalist corporatism and intimately related professional-class elitism of the “Inauthentic Opposition” (Sheldon Wolin apt description of the dollar-drenched neoliberal Democrats).

A seriously “progressive-populist” Democratic Party on the Bernie Sanders-Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez model – one that advanced social-democratic transformation and interracial and cross-ethnic working-class solidarity in accord with majority-progressive public opinion– could defuse and dilute much of the fascist-style drift in the white “heartland.” But big money, deeply empowered by the Supreme Court’s oligarchic money-politics rulings, isn’t having any of that – not in 2016 and not in 2020. Neither is the nation’s powerful corporate media, including its supposed left outlets like MSNBC, where U.S. global imperialism currently finds its heartiest cheerleaders and where Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez’s moderate calls for some elementary majority-backed social democracy (e.g., Improved Medicare for All) are smeared as insufficiently “pragmatic” leftist fanaticism.

Tough Shit, Snowflake: One Thousand Four Hundred and Sixty More Days!

There’s something else worth mentioning and related to the Holy U.S. Constitution here. In some rich nations operating with parliamentary systems, terrible heads of state who grossly defy public opinion can be forced to call or otherwise accede to new national elections. Such a common-sense remedy is unthinkable in the U.S. America’s widely venerated but antiquated Constitution (penned and passed behind locked doors in a time when Louis XVI still reigned in Versailles) says that voters go to the polls to select presidents once every four years and (lower) House representatives once every two years. The Senators (originally elected by state legislatures) are elected once every six years. Don’t like the ridiculously scarce, time-staggered nature of these “democracy” moments? Tough shit, snowflake. As George W. Bush’s White House spokesperson Dana Perino explained in March of 2008 when asked if the citizenry should have “input” on U.S.

foreign policy: “You had your input. The American people have input every four years, and that’s the way our system is set up.”

Perino was on strong constitutional ground, sadly enough. And we all just go along with the big time-staggered election-cycle mindfuck, like we’re playing “Simon Says.” Dead Rich Founders Say that you get to select a U.S. president in a voting booth (from a list of viable candidates selected in advance by your ruling class, courtesy of the winner-take-all Electoral College system and the constitutionally approved hegemony of big money in U.S. politics) for two minutes or so once every 1,460 days.

Check out [the “2020 Election Countdown Clock.”](#) The last time I looked (two mornings ago), we were 635 days, 13 hours, 15 minutes, and 26 seconds away from our next chance to participate in our “great democracy” – you know, the one that Vladimir Putin “undermined.”

There’s no presidential vote in-between. True, the founding finaglers set up an impeachment and removal process. But it that process is so difficult to enact that it has only been successful used once, sort of, to remove a horrible president (in 1974, when Richard Nixon resigned with the awareness that he would have been impeached by the House and removed by the Senate).

And Dead Founders Say that a bad president like Trump can discourage his removal through any other means than election by having a despicable Vice President (like the Christian Fascist Mike Pence) who would ascend to the top job after the removal.

Absurd but Not from a Class-Rule Perspective

All this authoritarian madness is a big part of how a vapid, vicious, and widely hated neo-Nazi like Ann Coulter and a fat old millionaire fascist like Rush Limbaugh had the power to disable much of the federal government for thirty-five days this winter. Maybe they’ll be empowered to spark another government meltdown in one week.

Absurd? Yes, from a democratic perspective. But not from a ruling-class perspective. Please bear in mind that democracy, also known as popular sovereignty, was the Dead Rich Founders’ ultimate nightmare. It’s also a living nightmare for a contemporary American bourgeoisie whose inherent systemic hostility to popular self-rule is nicely matched to the un- and anti-democratic nature of the Dead Rich Founders’ holy charter.

Political institutions and national charters and electoral and representation frameworks matter. The United States government acts absurdly far to the right of its population under the inherently plutocratic rule of capital but also by authoritarian, constitutional design. American democracy activists could learn a thing or two from the French Yellow Vests,

who are fighting among other things for a new national charter, one based on direct democracy and popular sovereignty beyond the sham egalitarianism of bourgeois constitutionalism.

It's long past time and basic common sense for U.S.-Americans to not merely amend but to fundamentally overhaul and re-write their national charter – to call by popular referendum for a Constituent Assembly to construct a new governing structure dedicated to popular self-rule instead of top-down class rule.

In the meantime, remembering that there's always a peoples' politics beneath the national governing structures, let's recall how air-traffic-controllers and other air-travel workers re-opened the government two weeks ago: by exercising their strategic capacity to idle capital and disrupt business-as-usual.

The working people of this nation have a hidden and under-utilized power in the workplace. Maybe they should show the nation's nativist and neoliberal fascists what a real shut-down and national emergency looks like, from the bottom up