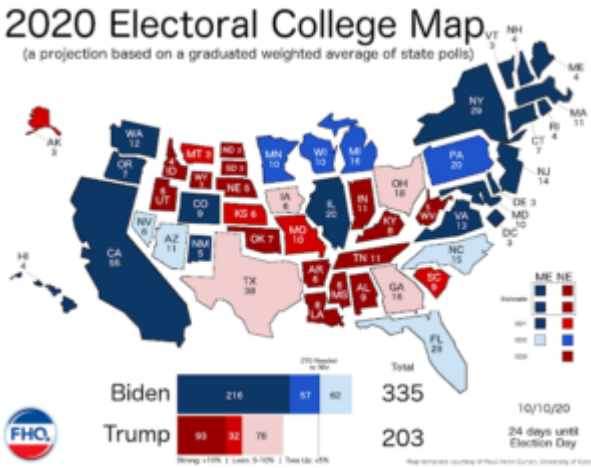
Trump’s Campaign Stumbling, Biden Rising, Still Danger of a Coup Attempt—Coronavirus Surges, Economy Stagnant, Armed Groups Plot Insurrection

written by Dan La Botz | October 11, 2020



This article was written for L’Anticapitaliste Revue, *the monthly journal of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) of France.*

We are now three weeks from the U.S. presidential election as the country sees a worsening of the pandemic, a continued economic crisis, threats of armed violence from the right, and an increasingly erratic President Donald Trump whose own experience with coronavirus leads him—perhaps because of side effects of his steroid mediation—to see himself as a superman. Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi announced that the House of Representatives would create a commission to investigate the removal of the president under the 25th Amendment to the Constitution, because he is in “an altered state” and may be unable to carry out his duties. She and some other legislators apparently believe the president is going insane following his remarks that he survived COVID because he is “a perfect physical specimen,” while attacking his closest allies in the cabinet and planning to go back on the road campaigning before ending his ten-day isolation period.

Meanwhile, Trump appears to be losing the election following his disastrous performance in a national presidential debate and then his infection with COVID and hospitalization.

Trump’s fall in the polls began with the first presidential debate held on September 29, degenerated into chaos as the moderator lost control and Trump repeatedly interrupted Biden. While Biden made coronavirus the central issue, Trump’s bullying behavior made it impossible for the candidates to hold a discussion, and with Trump badgering him, Biden responded by calling Trump “a clown” and telling him to “shut up.” Typically the debates have little impact on polling, but in this case it was followed by Trump’s loss of support in the polls.

Democratic Party candidate Joseph Biden now leads in the polls everywhere including in the battleground states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Florida. Overall, Biden leads by about 10 points. Many older voters, white working class voters without a college education, and suburban women have all turned away from Trump and toward Biden.

The danger of the far right and the possibility of Election Day violence became clear on October 8 with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrest of thirteen men, members of an illegal armed militia accused of planning the kidnapping of Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the violent overthrow of the Michigan government. Whitmer, a Democrat, who has faced repeated demonstrations by armed protestors who called her a "tyrant" for imposing health restrictions because of the COVID pandemic. Whitmer thanked the FBI but blamed Trump for encouraging such rightwing and white supremacist groups, leading him to attack her as ungrateful.

The Michigan insurrection plot increases the fear that the president will use federal marshals or other police or troops and mobilize his armed supporters to attempt to steal the election and may promote violence and perhaps even attempt to stay in office if he loses in what would be in effect a coup d'état. Around the country groups are now organizing to insure a safe election, to protect the ballots and the count, and to resist a coup.

Trump' Failure to Handle the Virus

The principal cause for Trump's decline in the polls is his disastrous handling of the coronavirus pandemic. He has overseen the worst health crisis in U.S. history and the worst handling of the pandemic in the developed world: 215,000 have died, and they are still dying at a rate between 900 and 1,000 per day; there re about 50,000 new cases each day and 7.7 million people have contracted the spreading disease. The U.S. government still has no comprehensive plan for testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine. Trump created a coronavirus task force, but then the he constantly contradicted the health experts, provided false information, offered up bogus cures, and flagrantly disregarded best health practices. And we are now on the verge of the second wave.

Then, on top of all of that, Trump—who has refused to wear a mask and scorned those who did—held a series of events without masks, without social distancing, some held indoors, that created super-spreader incidents leading to the infection of Trump himself, about 20 White House advisors, an admiral, and three Senators. Altogether since March twenty senators and representatives have fallen ill with coronavirus as well as123 Capitol employees. Trump's flagrant violation of his own administration's health standards led to his own infection and brief hospitalization.

After his brief, three-day hospitalization, still sick with COVID and being treated with remdesivir, regeneron, and the steroid dexamethasone, Trump returned to the White House where he ostentatiously stood on the balcony between American flags and, still gasping for breath, took of his mask. He refused to stay in quarantine in the White House residence and went into the presidential Oval Office to work with staff members. He tweeted, "Feeling really good! Don't be afraid of Covid. Don't let it dominate your life. We have developed, under the Trump Administration, some really great drugs & knowledge. I feel better than I did 20 years ago!" Physicians and public health authorities were aghast that he suggested the disease was not to be feared. And many criticized the president for his failure to mention his infected colleagues and the hundreds of thousands who have died. It is exactly this kind of behavior that is now driving Trump down in the polls.

The United States now appears to be on the verge of a second wave of coronavirus as cases in many states resemble the situation back in March. It is expected that the late fall and winter months will lead to more COVID cases because more activities must be held in doors. The coronavirus will also coincide with the seasonal flu that takes about 34,000 each year. No vaccine is expected before next year and the distribution of the virus may take six months, so relief may not come until next summer.

The American Economic Crisis

Trump's failure to deal effectively with the coronavirus led an economic crisis in the United States as

great as that of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Since March 15, 62 million individuals have filed unemployment claims, and about 900,000 continue to file for unemployment benefits each week. Some people have gone back to work, but the U.S. Labor Department reported in September that 13.6 million or 8.4 percent of workers remained without a job, though the actual figure may be over 11 percent.

The pandemic has affected workers very unevenly. Many white-collar workers have able to work on their computers from home. Workers in essential industries—hospitals, childcare, agriculture, food processing, and grocery stores, water and waste, energy, transportation, and a few other sectors—have had greater exposure and have suffered more sickness and deaths. Many of these essential workers are women, Blacks, Latinx, and immigrants, documented and undocumented. The economic crisis has also brought a fiscal crisis leading to state and city budget cuts, reduction in services, and layoffs of public employees.

On March 27, Congress passed the CARES Act, a $2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill that provided financial support to businesses, state and city governments, and to workers. The CARES Act provided a one-time-only payment of $1,200 to each unemployed person and families would get $500 per child. There were also additional weekly payments of $600 to unemployed workers, but those ended on July 31.

The state unemployment benefits vary dramatically, from Florida, which pays only $275 per week, to Massachusetts, which pays $803. Some workers' unemployment benefits will have run out and some workers who were paid under the table never received such benefits. Many undocumented workers have received nothing. And still the recession continues: United Airlines and American Airlines are laying off 30,000 workers, Walt Disney is laying off 28,000 from its theme parks, and Allstate Insurance is letting go of 3,800 workers. Congress is now debating another stimulus bill similar to the CARES Act, but it is stalled.

The pandemic and the depression have battered the American people. Tens of millions were facing eviction but first a temporary federal law, then an order from the Centers for Disease Control, and some state laws have prevented most evictions. Still landlords have thrown out some tenants and in any cases the rent due is still accumulating. When the pandemic ends and the orders are lifted, tens of millions will owe tens of thousands of dollars in rent.

Health insurance, which in the United States is usually received through one's employer, is also an issue. When workers are laid off, they lose their health insurance. At an earlier point it was estimated that as many as 27 million people had lost their health insurance. Many can no longer afford to visit the doctor or dentist.

Food insecurity is also an enormous problem. One in four families lacks adequate food and one in three families with children have too little. Food insecurity in Black and Latinx households is 19 percent and 17 percent, respectively, compared to 7 percent in white households. Charities now provide food to millions.

Climate Crisis

Climate change has also had a disastrous impact on the United States in the last year with tremendous forest fires in California, Oregon, and other Western states and hurricanes and tropical storms in the Gulf States. In Southern California temperatures reached 51 degrees and the heat has been accompanied by strong winds. In these conditions, fires mostly caused by lightening strikes, have burned 2023428 hectares, destroyed thousands of homes, and took 34 lives. The fires also created dangerous air quality for millions on the West Coast.

We hve had two-dozen tropical storms this year; eight are hurricanes. There has been at least $16 billion in property damage, many homes and businesses ruined, and 125 lives lost. Millions have had to evacuate for either fires or floods, and economic activities have been disrupted. All of this contributes to the sense of a national catastrophe.

The Social Struggles and the Left

The coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying economic crisis closed workplaces and schools making possible the largest social protest movement against racism in American history. With the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 between 15 and 26 million people participated in the months of protest. The police murder of Breonna Taylor of Louisville and several others also fed the outrage. Marching under the banner "Black Lives Matter," the Black-led, protests, involved mostly young people of all races and religions. The participants generally masked, so they did not lead to new COVID outbreaks.

Police brought the violence to the demonstrations with their heavy-handed use of batons, tear gas, pepper sprat, and flash grenades. In response, some in the crowd throwing plastic water bottles or returned the tear gas canisters and some leftists destroyed property. In other places, white nationalist militants infiltrated the crowds and encouraged violence, hoping to generate a race war. Where deaths occurred, such as they did in Kenosha and Portland, it was where protestors on the right or the left were armed. Still, despite police provocation, 90 percent of the protests were peaceful.

While the anti-racist protests were enormous and spirited their impact has been limited. The protests raised consciousness about racism in America. Newspapers published educational articles, TV and radio and the social media broadcast videos on the Black experience. Universities, government agencies, and even private businesses organized discussions of racism. But the movement had no national organization and no political party to speak for it and its political demands were quite minimal or currently unrealistic.

The movement's most prominent demand was "defund the police," a demand some interpreted as cutting the police budget and transferring those funds to social services, though some interpreted it as a call to abolish the police. While people want an end to police racism and violence, few people want the abolition of the police, especially those in Black, Latinx, and poorer white neighborhoods with higher crime rates. Only the far left calls for the abolition of the police with little echo in the society at large. A very few cities have reduced the police budget or reallocated funds to social services, but not many.

There have also been worker protests, particularly by heath workers, but also among public transportation workers, hotel and restaurant workers and others. Nurses unions and their members have called protest demonstrations at hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes. Many workers in various industries have engaged in short walkouts or small strikes. The heads of most national unions, however, have not provided leadership; they have not advocated protests or strikes. The labor leaders look to the election of a Democratic president and Congress rather than to the power of its members. So, despite the many small and local actions, there is no sense of a national working class response to the health crisis or the economic crisis.

The left has grown. Most visible and quantifiable is the expansion of the Democratic Socialist of America, which now has 70,000 members. Other left groups—socialist and anarchist—are also growing and producing new Internet sites, newspapers, and videos. While the left has grown, it remains too small to have a great influence on the major political and social events taking place. Leftists participated in the massive anti-racist protests, but they had little impact upon on them.

Some left groups have a presence in the unions, but most are too weak to take many initiatives. The level of class struggle remains low and the left small.

The Green Party remains the most important party on the left and its presidential candidate Howie Hawkins and his running mate Angela Walker are both open socialists, but the party has never won more than 2 percent of the vote. DSA, the largest socialist group, has shown little confidence in the Green Party and does not back its candidates. The real contest this year is between Trump and Biden.

With the election in danger of being stolen, groups such as Protect the Results, Defend Democracy, Fight Back Table, Working Families Party, Movement for Black Lives, and Majority Rising are working to protect the voting process and the count. They may also have to help stop a coup. Trump may send federal marshals to seize the ballots and claim victory. The period between the November 3 election and the installation of the president on January 20 could be chaotic, violent–and decisive for American democracy.