

## Organizing to Secure Democracy

Just a heads up here; this will be less of a reflection than it is a rhetorical quilt. In fact, today's reflection is so reliant on sources I stopped using quotes. It's mostly sourced, except for the parts that sound bombastic and combative. That's all me.

My sources are articles that appear in the Atlantic, Propublica, Reuters, and The New Republic. When I write in this research paper fashion, any discoveries I make tend to be more factual than spiritual and usually come in one of two varieties; oh, cool or oh, crap.

With that in mind, I should warn you that today, as we reflect on the nature of Democracy in Colorado and the United States and what we can do to keep them, there's going to be a heavy dose of oh, crap. There will also be some oh, cool. But we have to wade through an outhouse trough to get there.

Did that metaphor go too hard? I guess we'll find out.

Here's the thesis: the single largest threat to our future elections is disinformation. The primary source of disinformation comes from the White House and its allies. It is intentional. And it is the seedbed of all the more acute threats to our democratic process. And it is nothing less than treasonous.

Yet instead of being prosecuted, this disinformation has infested our body politic. Despite the determination of the President's own department of Homeland Security and court ruling after court ruling reviewing and affirming the results, 63% of Republicans still believe the 2020 vote was stolen due to voter fraud.

The truth is that fraud is infinitesimally rare. Peer-reviewed studies, including studies by the right wing think tank The Heritage Foundation... "place U.S. voter fraud rates in the range of hundred-thousandths to millionths of a percent...<sup>[1][2]</sup>." Do you know how many zeros exist between the decimal and the first number in a millionths of one percent?

Of course, the White House knows these numbers. What that means is that the White House is not really concerned with fraud. What they are really after is the destabilization of the democratic process.

In fact, they are actively and blatantly attempting to restrict democracy and steal an election before any votes are even cast; be it through redistricting, derailing mail in voting processes, intimidation. And, of course, they are also pushing the SAVE act, which the non-partisan League of Women voters has lambasted as a means of restricting the democratic process (particularly for women).

Since returning to office, Trump has insisted that American elections are rigged against the GOP, fired Democratic election officials, threatened to take over voting across the country, and issued executive orders that would tightly restrict the vote.

But maybe it's all necessary. After all, earlier this summer, the Trump administration reported that there were more than 15,000 noncitizens voting on Nevada's voter rolls. That's concerning. You should be a citizen to vote, after all.

Of course, more interested in headlines than truth, they reported this so-called fraud before investigating it (because that's the kind of professionalism constantly displayed by our executive branch). Upon investigation they found that by August that number of 15,000 dwindled to 185. "As for the 185 individuals," wrote Nevada Deputy Attorney General Greg Ott in a letter to DHS this week. "our records indicate that they were citizens. You have provided nothing of substance to suggest otherwise."

From a headline grabbing 15,000 to zero. Zero!

So, given the numbers, why do 63% of Republicans still believe voter fraud is an issue? There are 3 simple reasons. One is that they are too locked into the echo chamber of a great orange god who won't stop crying wolf. Two is the worship of power rather than love. And three is racism. Truth be damned.

But when destabilization is your aim, truth doesn't matter. What does matter, for us, is that this treasonous misinformation has eroded trust in democracy and in the processes that safeguard it. Not only is our democracy in danger, but the people charged with administering it are under threat.

The Republican clerk and recorder in Colorado's conservative Weld County, said she has had to train her staff to recognize FBI credentials, to know what a legitimate federal subpoena looks like, and who to contact if federal agents arrive unannounced. She has also discussed with the county attorney how her office would respond if federal law enforcement attempts to seize ballots, machines, or other voting materials. Their security preparations include a glass-breaking tool — typically used to escape a car — placed at windows in the clerk's office, in case staff need to evacuate immediately.

In La Plata County, another conservative swatch of southwestern Colorado, Clerk Tiffany Lee has said "I've done this 30 years. I've never seen this level of fear."

The shenanigans at the federal level are sobering.

Propublica reports that:

- At least 75 career officials who once held roles at federal agencies related to election integrity and safety are gone since 45 began term two. In their place are roughly two dozen people Trump has installed in positions that could affect elections. Ten of them actively worked to reverse the 2020 vote, and the rest are associates of those people.
- FBI Director Kash Patel dismantled the agency's public corruption team, which had previously been deployed to help monitor possible criminal activity on Election Day.
- The Foreign Influence Task Force, which aimed to combat foreign influence in U.S. politics, was also disbanded.
- An attorney named Kurt Olsen, who once worked to try to overturn Trump's 2020 loss in court and was later sanctioned by judges for making baseless allegations about Arizona elections, is now Trump's director of election security and integrity and was the driving force behind the January raid of the election center in Fulton County, Georgia.

Reuters reports that:

- Trump administration officials and investigators have fanned out across the country, seeking confidential records, pressing for access to voting equipment and re-examining voter-fraud cases that courts and bipartisan reviews have already rejected.
- Early in his new term, Trump dismantled key election-security functions at the department's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and slashed its budget and staff. For years, CISA had focused on protecting election infrastructure from cyber threats. In 2020, days after CISA publicly rejected Trump's claim that the election was stolen, [Trump fired the agency's director](#).

The ATLANTIC sounds the alarm that amid loud and continuing uncertainties, the Republican Congress could (in the event of contested elections) opt to exercise rarely used constitutional powers to override the voters will, and choose the winners of contested races themselves.

"If this playbook sounds familiar," the Atlantic reminds us, "it is because Trump and his allies pursued the same tactics in 2020, ultimately failing to persuade Congress and the courts to suspend the vote. Today, their chances of succeeding would be far higher."

Oh crap.

But wait. There's.... More.

You see, despite that litany of authoritarianism, the federal executive branch has not been very successful in doing anything more than eroding trust. That shouldn't be dismissed. But so far the law holds firms. However, as the ATLANTIC observes, "The true danger this November may not be Trump attempting to cancel the vote or ordering troops to barnstorm polling places, but smaller quieter ways that democracy could continue eroding in towns, counties, and state capitals."

As November approaches, the most serious threats are local, where much of the power over elections actually resides... In state houses and county offices around the country, a cohort of election deniers have taken control of significant parts of our nation's electoral infrastructure. To wit: a 2024 investigation by the center for media and democracy found more than 100 election deniers serving in election positions in eight swing states.

Not good. But enough wading through the outhouse trough of Trump's sceptic America. It's time to flush.

Here's the good news. Square your jaw, roll up your sleeves, look'm in the eye and know that key guard rails are still standing. Courts have largely frowned on Trump's efforts to change voting rules. David Becker, the executive Director of the center for election innovation and research, told the Atlantic that an army of lawyers is standing ready to help local election administrators beat back pressure campaigns. "We've recruited over 10,000 attorneys all over the country who are willing to serve pro bono."

REUTERS reports that here in Colorado, at least 63 county clerks are consulting with their statewide association on how to respond to possible federal subpoenas or the arrival of federal agents at polling places. This is hugely important as county clerks are the lynchpin of election management. You can hear our county clerk's plan tomorrow night at an event I'll tell you more about in a moment.

The El Paso County clerk, Steve Schlieker, told Reuters that a lobbyist, Jeff Small, called him to explore the possibility of White House partnerships and asked for access to El Paso County's voting machines. Schleiker, who is a Republican, refused, telling the lobbyist that granting access would violate Colorado law. According to Schlieker, the call then ended abruptly.

Just this week the El Paso County Clerk posted on social media that our county now has the most Voter Service and Polling Centers (41) and ballot drop boxes (44) it has ever had for an election.

Oh, cool! That's what our local officials are doing. What can we do? Well... maybe more than you think. But DOING is the thing.

First off, confirm that you are registered to vote. After our closing hymn you can check in with Sandra or Joan at the Justice Table in the small hall and they will be thrilled to help you know how to do that.

Indivisible Colorado will also be in the small hall. Indivisible Colorado is one of our share the plate partners and some of our members are leaders in that organization. Today they have set up a table in the small hall with opportunities for you to support our democracy. So during social hour, if someone asks how you take your coffee, you can say, "With democracy!" and then go sign the heck up to save our country.

Then, in two weeks, on October 17, ASUUC is hosting a ballot issues event here at church, from 12 noon to 3pm. Inform yourself so you can inform others.

Finally, earlier I told you about a County Clerk event that you can attend. Never in my life did I envision attending an event that had the word "clerk" in it would be a draw. But this one is. Coordinated by Faith Table and Together Colorado, we are trying to muster a big number of people to learn more about what our county clerk is doing to safeguard the democratic process and encourage him to keep doing so. We need you to show up to this. It will only be an hour and could be one of the most important hours you ever spend.

You are strongly urged to register and can do so here... now.

Here's the real real. The only way our elections get compromised, is if the White House and its lackeys compromise it. Otherwise, our election process is sound. Fraud is infinitesimal. Integrity lives. And the power to assure it is with us. Spread that word.

As if it needed more underscoring, this is more than a civic concern for us. It is nothing short of a sacred value of ours. We center love and understand that Justice is part of love. Our holy approach to Justice includes, "the use of inclusive democratic processes to make decisions within our congregations, our Association, and society at large." Let us commit to building a land based on love where justice flows down like waters and peace like an ever flowing stream.

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