American democracy on the eve of the 2020 election

Bright Line Watch (www.brightlinewatch.org)

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Threats to the 2020 election

▶ Attacks on public confidence in the vote count
▶ False perceptions of widespread voter fraud
▶ Minority support for political harassment/violence
▶ Risk of nightmare scenarios during/after Election Day
Public confidence in the vote

Calling Foul
President Trump has alleged that illegal voting was widespread during previous elections. In 2020, he has shifted to questioning the legitimacy of vote by mail.

Selected tweets from @RealDonaldTrump mentioning election fraud

Source: WSJ analysis of Trump Twitter Archive
Katherine Riley/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
Public confidence in the vote count

Confidence that votes will be counted as intended

**Nation**
- Trump disapprovers: 61%
- Trump approvers: 56%
- Overall: 59%

**State**
- Trump disapprovers: 76%
- Trump approvers: 77%
- Overall: 76%

**Personal**
- Trump disapprovers: 78%
- Trump approvers: 82%
- Overall: 80%

Darker shades are "Very confident" and lighter shades are "Somewhat confident."

Source: @BrightLineWatch
Legitimacy of change in vote count

Would you view the final electoral result as legitimate if the candidate who is ahead on election night loses?

Horizontal axis is percentage of respondents in each category.

Source: @BrightLineWatch
Public perceptions of voter fraud

National Counsel to Bush campaigns:

**Republicans have insufficient evidence to call elections ‘rigged’ and ‘fraudulent’**

Opinion by Benjamin L. Ginsberg

The lack of evidence renders these claims unsustainable. The truth is that after decades of looking for illegal voting, there’s no proof of widespread fraud. At most, there are isolated incidents — by both Democrats and Republicans. Elections are not rigged. Absentee ballots use the same process as mail-in ballots — different states use different labels for the same process.
Public perceptions of voter fraud

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[Diagram showing public perceptions of voter fraud]

From darkest to lightest shade: A million or more, Hundreds of thousands, Tens of thousands, Thousands. Source: @BrightLineWatch
Support for political harassment and violence

When Armed Vigilantes Are Summoned With a Few Keystrokes

Kevin Mathewson, who quickly organized the Kenosha Guard on Facebook, said the Wisconsin city's police were outnumbered during protests. The streets turned deadly after his call to arms.

Reports: Michael Reinoehl, suspect in fatal shooting of 'Patriot Prayer' backer in Oregon, killed by federal task force

Michael Balsamo and Ted Warren Associated Press
Published 12:25 a.m. ET Sep. 4, 2020 | Updated 12:54 p.m. ET Sep. 4, 2020

The Washington Post

Trump’s attacks on political adversaries are often followed by threats to their safety

By Greg Miller and Isaac Stanley-Becker
Oct. 28, 2020 at 7:00 a.m. EDT
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Concern about destabilizing events on Election Day/after

The 10 scariest election scenarios.

We asked 10 experts for their worst election nightmares—and how to prevent them from happening.

By JEREMY STAHL

AUG 14, 2020 • 1:58 PM
Nightmare scenarios: Expert forecasts

- False social media claims
- Trump attacks "blue shift"
- Long lines on Election Night
- Trump encourages violence
- Trump loses, won't concede
- State w/ 5% mail votes denied
- Early count favors Rs
- Early declaration of victory
- Trump seeks legal amnesty
- DOJ tries to block count
- SC decides election disputes
- Safe harbor deadline missed
- 1M+ ballots delayed
- Many polling places close
- Trump deploys forces
- VP/speaker dispute over EC
- State drops pop. vote for EC
- Competing electors to EC
- Russia election hacks
- COVID order blocks voting
- States switch EC format
- House of Reps. decides race
- Acting president under 20A
- Temporary transfer to Pence
- Biden loses, challenges EC
- Faithless elector decides race
- RNC/DNC replaces candidate
- Millions of counterfeit ballots

Blue crosses denote medians. Densities normalized to fall within range of data. Source: @BrightLineWatch
The risk to the peaceful transfer of power

Donald Trump suggests delay to 2020 US presidential election

President Trump declines to commit to peaceful transfer of power if he loses

By Aamer Madhani and Kevin Freking The Associated Press, Updated September 23, 2020, 7:33 p.m.
The risk to the peaceful transfer of power