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A little fraud goes a long way

Both parties only care about malfeasance on a scale that changes the results

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Trump supporters attempt to enter a room where absentee ballots are being counted in Detroit, Michigan (Getty)

Written by:

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Two things seem to be agreed upon by most reasonable people debating the November 3 election. First, there was election fraud. There is some degree of election fraud in every cycle. Second, the presidential election of 2020 was susceptible to more than the usual dosage of deceit because of the large number of mail-in ballots. Whether or not you believe that enough fraud existed to change the election results, these realities seem to share consensus.

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But fraud on any scale should be of interest, not just as an ethical matter but as a political consideration too. When entire counties are flipped, dead people are voting and signatures are not matched and no one is held accountable, voters understand that all the talk about the foundations of our democracy is itself the fraud. What counts is the win.

What are the consequences? First, a little fraud can go a long way when it isn't disincentivized. It can eventually become a lot of fraud, one day even enough fraud.

Second (and in this election, of particular concern) a little unindicted fraud leaves open the door for the massive distrust that renders tens of millions of people in this country unable to accept the results of the election. If it happens a little, why couldn't it happen a lot? They reject the system, the new president and the other half of the country's voters as

collaborators. If fraud were prosecuted anywhere it were found with the same zeal that [New Year's Eve party-goers](#) were for social-distancing violations, two-thirds of the skeptics and cynics in this election could be converted. If they knew their local authorities were serious watchdogs, prioritizing the issue even when it didn't push their guy over the line, public trust could be restored. If anything undermines our democratic process as much as actual election fraud, it is the mass perception that no one cares enough to prevent it.

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Finally, voter disenfranchisement has become something of a meme, tossed around by cynical politicians trying to leverage manufactured anger for votes. But when one single person arrives at a polling station on Election Day and is told her ballot has already been cast, even though she didn't cast it, she is on the receiving end of fraud by a bad actor. When authorities do nothing to follow it up and prosecute the perpetrator, she is being truly disenfranchised by her own government. Every voter should matter, and every perpetrator who engages in fraud should be subjected to public, front-page-of-the-local-paper, photo-captioned shame. State and city leadership that don't put this toward the top of their priority lists may one day lose their own elections to fraud and wish they had.

By Rebecca Sugar



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