

Election Fraud

by Bill Herbst

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Let's talk about stealing elections through fraud — both illegal and legal. That last phrase — “illegal and legal” — is a misnomer of sorts, because really there is little to no illegal election fraud in America. No dead people casting ballots, no people voting twice, no imaginary voters with fake IDs and bogus addresses, no boxes of legitimate ballots dumped into the trash, etc. Oh, maybe one or two instances of those do occur in a decade, but none that is frequent enough to warrant legislative concern or swing the results of an election. No, the only significant election tampering in America happens through legal fraud.

What the mainstream media calls “The Big Lie,” known to its supporters as “Stop the Steal,” is Trump's insistent assertion that he actually won the 2020 election fair and square. That fiction is believed and beloved by most of the Republicans in Congress and by 50-or-so million Americans in the MAGA/QAnon Cult. Translated from fevered fantasy back into cold reality, though, what this means is that the Republicans tried to steal the election, just as they have in every national election this century, but they didn't quite pull it off. The theft failed, and they're pissed about it.

Beginning with the Bush v. Gore presidential election at the turn of the century, Republicans realized that demographics in America had turned against them, and that they would never again win the White House without cheating. So, being the good little power-hungry, win-at-any-cost sociopathic pragmatists they are, Republicans began honing their skills as cheaters. Over the ensuing two decades, they've evolved that project from crude thievery into an art form, then into a science. They've become so skilled at disinformation, disenfranchisement (gerrymandering), disqualifying legitimate votes, and targeted voter suppression that they cannot believe they didn't “win” the 2020 presidential election.

Greg Palast is an independent investigative journalist who has devoted much of his career to the study of how elections are stolen. He is the most well-informed and authoritative source in this field. Just months before last November's election, Palast published a book on the subject, titled *How Trump Stole 2020*. I haven't read the book, but I've followed Palast's career for a long time, and I did read Ted Rall's condensed/Reader's Digest/Cliff's Notes comic book version of Palast's book. It's good. (Google “Ted Rall Art of the Steal” for a link to download the free PDF file of Rall's comic from Greg Palast's site.)

I'm not Greg Palast (or Ted Rall), so I won't go in any detail about all the many different ways that elections in America are less than fair. I don't even know if Palast's book contains any discussion about what most interests me — the hypocrisy of American society in general and debasement of our political institutions in particular.

As is the case with so much of life in America, the principles we hold dear are often undone by the corruption (frequently intentional, but also sometimes unintentional) of people who hold the reins of power. Most of the prattle about "democracy" and "freedom" to which Americans are exposed from birth on amounts to manipulative propaganda designed to pull the wool over our eyes. Oh, the sentiments are sincere enough, but the principles themselves are so twisted in their application that they bear little resemblance to the original ideals. That part is on the citizens. But those in power who qualify as assholes are more than happy to use the gullibility of the public to further their nefarious, megalomaniacal aims. Having spent my entire life in this country, I'm not especially well-versed in what transpires in other countries and cultures, but Americans seem to me particularly vulnerable to mass manipulation through perversion of ideals.

The group dynamics of bell curves apply here. In any manipulation we might isolate, a certain percentage of people will be resistant or immune to the appeals of a given sales pitch. *"Oh no, you can't fool me into believing that nonsense!"* they will say. That percentage varies from tiny to large, depending on the issue and how it's framed and presented. But no matter how many people don't believe the con or resist being messed with, some percentage will succumb. Though that percentage is often significant, it doesn't have to be particularly large to gain traction and succeed. This is essentially the core truism behind mass marketing: You can get away with no response from 99% of the target audience, because all you need to make a profit is 1%. With political or cultural manipulation, the numbers tend to be more like 80/20 than 99/1, and sometimes even 60/40.

Also, repetition works. Say an obvious lie once, and only a small percentage of people will buy it. Repeat that lie over and over, and the percentage who accept or believe it steadily increases. Given the massive footprint of media in America — we spend much of our time glued to video screens watching fiction that too often masquerades as reality — once a narrative has been established, it's easy to hammer away with it until more and more people fall under its spell.

Whether the sales pitch is about convincing people to buy a new and spiffier mop or convincing them to believe a narrative about government or national security, the strategy of marketing is the same. And the success rates are similar as well. Truth or falsehood doesn't mean diddly-squat.

This applies to elections as well. The idea of "free and fair" elections in America is a crock. Consent is manufactured.

Do I regard this manipulation of the public as part of some Bilderberg-Illuminati-Deep State-QAnon-type conspiracy mounted in Davos by a super-wealthy, ultra-powerful cabal of elites? Nope. Oh, I accept that conspiracies are real, but I see them as being fomented at every level of social organization, from top to bottom and in all sizes. The games played on customers by used car salesman and their managers are conspiratorial, as are the larger games in politics played by the Republican and Democratic National Committees.

Was the housing bubble of bad mortgages whose bursting led to the financial meltdown of 2008 a conspiracy? Sure it was. Schemers in the financial industry working as mid-level execs at Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs, and J.P. Morgan concocted the scheme of derivatives as a way to increase profits, and damn near every bank in the country participated in it. But was it a secret conspiracy? No. It was done right out in the open, in full public view. As housing prices soared, not because of appreciation in real value, but due to the lure of easy credit, millions of Americans became “qualified” for outrageously inflated mortgages that would inevitably default and never be repaid.

A certain percentage of Americans recognized early on what this was — a ponzi pyramid scam where those who were first in would benefit handsomely from the thievery of the con, while those last in would suffer terrible consequences when the game eventually collapsed. The skeptics (read: sane people) sounded loud alarm bells, but to no avail. Enough people went along with the game at every level, from those running the con to those victimized by it, that this financial three-card-monte grew humongous and led to a major disaster that took down homeowners, pension funds, and threatened to tank the economy.

Elections, especially national ones, are not so very different. Candidates are filtered — those who fall within acceptable narrative norms get on the ballot, while those outside those narratives (think Bernie Sanders) are nixed. The few unacceptable candidates who for awhile slip through the early filters are neutered by media disinformation and knee-capped during the primary campaigns, so that even if they manage to make it onto the ballot (think Green Party), they don’t have a snowball’s chance in hell of getting elected. The upshot is that Americans are routinely offered only two “viable” choices, either Republican or Democrat (Tweedle-Dum or Tweedle-Dee). No, they’re not the same, but they’re much more similar than different.

Centrists and institutionalists hold that this is as it should be and is as good as it gets in society. Thus, we’d better accept it and be happy. OK, so maybe I’m just a malcontent or old curmudgeon. But when I hear either side pontificate self-righteously in the bogus debate over election fraud, whether *The Big Lie* from center-left or *Stop the Steal* from the right, I chafe. Neither side acknowledges that national elections are *always* fraudulent, nor that all the Big Decisions in America (such as war) are orchestrated not by elected officials in government, but by the bankers and Big Money interests.

And that hypocrisy rankles the hell out of me.