

New Sheriff in Town but the Rules Stay the Same: The Path of Joe Biden

by Alp Ünal Ayhan

After 4 long and gruelling days of counting and projecting and worrying (on both sides), the 2020 presidential election is finally over. Joe Biden is going to be the 46th President of the United States, ending 4 long (and brilliantly covered by our writers last month) years of the Trump Administration. Biden's running mate Kamala Harris will be the first woman, Black, and Asian-American and the second person of colour to be the Vice President. The Biden-Harris ticket has more than 80 million votes with more votes yet to be counted, breaking the record for the most votes in a presidential candidate in American history (1). Their win comes at a time of chaos at the very literal sense of the word. COVID cases and deaths are surging, Americans are living through an unprecedented income inequality crisis, and the problem of racism-not race-is simply not going away until January, when the President and Vice President-elect will inaugurate. The beginning of the Biden era will be tumultuous, as well as the political landscape the next administration will be handling the next four years.

The election earlier this month can be succinctly described as unprecedented. More than 101 million people voted by mail or early in-person to avoid crowds on Election Day and protect themselves from catching the virus (2). Despite the pandemic, this election was defined by the massive turnout it had. Voters on both sides rushed to the polls to secure their votes in what they thought was a history-making election. Almost 160 million votes have been counted so far (3), meaning at least two-thirds of the voting-eligible population voted, marking the highest voter turnout since 1900 (4). Voters for both candidates were highly enthusiastic about voting this year even though much of this enthusiasm was not shown physically this year, especially on the Democratic side because of the pandemic (a paper by Stanford researchers tied more than 30,000 COVID cases to Trump's in-person rallies [4]) and many candidates had to switch to digital campaigning.

The American people did not know who won the presidency on election night. Many battleground states needed for both major candidates were not called that night such as Georgia, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Michigan and Nevada. Both candidates went to bed that night, short of 270 electoral votes, but it was clear Mr Biden had a better chance at winning.

Then came 4 long, long days of counting the mail ballots, which could not be counted before the election day. While votes were being counted in pretty much every state, all eyes were on the key states, some even accusing certain states of wanting to keep in the limelight as the election turned out to be a nailbiter for the rest of the country. As the count went on, it became more and more apparent that the

American people rejected four more years of Trumpism in the White House. Mr Trump's lead in early returns diminished as mail ballots trickled in. Michigan's flip was followed by Georgia (5). Meanwhile, on Trump's side, accusations of voter fraud and some sort of big scam committed by Secretaries of State from both Republican and Democratic Parties and even some hard to believe conspiracy theories about election rigging (including one that Hugo Chavez, who has been dead since 2013 ordered the rigging of the election[6]) were running. According to a count of Mr Trump's Twitter profile, Twitter placed disclaimers on almost 150 tweets Mr Trump either tweeted or retweeted saying his claims about election fraud were disputed or he did not win the election since the election was called for Joe Biden on Saturday, November 7th. Frivolous lawsuits to stop the certification process followed. According to an NBC News analysis the Trump campaign filed at least 38 lawsuits in 6 states to challenge election results, but none of them have been successful (7). The effort to turn the election in favour of Mr Trump also resulted with some of the election's most hilarious PR blips: including the alleged booking of Four Seasons Total Landscaping, a landscaping shop in Philadelphia located between an adult store and a crematorium, instead of the Four Seasons Hotel for a press conference which was ridiculed by journalists and social media users.

After all was said and done, Joe Biden was called the victor 4 days after the election day by CNN. NBC, MSNBC, CBS, ABC followed within the next 2 minutes. The last outlets to call the election for Mr Biden were the Associated Press and Fox News who called the election 16 minutes after the original projection by CNN (8).

In a move that was never seen before; the General Services Administration, the federal government agency responsible for facilitating presidential transitions, withheld funding, resources and information from the Biden team after the election was called. It was argued this would hurt the peaceful transfer of power and hamper the Biden administration's efforts to curb the COVID pandemic. After public pressure and criticism, the agency declared Mr Biden the apparent winner of the election and formally began the work to get Mr Biden and Ms Harris to the White House on Monday (9).

The Biden campaign had a lot on its plate when it began in 2019. The Biden-Harris administration has even more. The "Priorities" section of the official presidential transition website buildbackbetter.gov has 4 items listed: COVID-19, Economic Recovery, Racial Equity and Climate Change.

The Biden-Harris transition team has made it very clear that their first agenda item is tackling the COVID crisis. According to the CDC, the US has logged almost 12.5 million cases and more than a quarter-million deaths (10). Mr Biden slammed Mr Trump repeatedly for not listening to the science on this matter. His stance and effort to highlight this continue, as "listening to science" is on top of the list of things he says he will do when he becomes the President (11).

Several interesting points are featured on the website; such as increasing testing by doubling drive-through testing centres and setting up a “Pandemic Testing Board” to produce more tests, giving scientists a more prominent voice in COVID decision-making, investing \$25 billion in vaccine manufacturing and distributing to guarantee everyone can be inoculated free of charge and restoring several public health institutions and programs to prevent further pandemics that were torn down in the earlier years of the Trump administration.

Even though the FDA will probably authorize the vaccine by Pfizer for emergency use in mid-December, the Biden-Harris administration will be overseeing the distribution and administration of the vaccine to almost all Americans (12). How fast enough people are vaccinated to end the pandemic depends on what Joe Biden does to have the vaccine mass-produced and distributed, so his actions during his first few months are of critical importance. Nevertheless, Mr Biden will be the President to lead the post-COVID economy in the US.

This is exactly why it is crucial that the next president has a plan to lead the economy to the right track, after both the Trump presidency that brought tax cuts to the wealthy and the big corporations and the COVID pandemic during which the world saw a massive transfer of wealth to billionaires. Billionaires in the US added almost a trillion dollars to their already working class-crippling wealth since the start of the pandemic (13). As of early November, more than 20 million people were receiving unemployment benefits (14). Aside from high-profile bankruptcies, small businesses are hurting. According to Yelp data almost 100,000 small businesses have been listed as permanently closed (15). The Biden-Harris administration has to address these issues head-on and stop the wealth of working-class Americans from slipping further away.

The President-elect’s rhetoric on this issue mirrors the rhetoric of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. On his transition website, he says “... Kamala Harris and I won’t just build back to the way things were — we’ll build back better.” The transition team’s economic agenda, at least the public version of it, is devoid of details and plans. There are certainly a lot of promises along with a sentiment of optimism and a revival of American manufacturing and frustration over the previous administration putting profits before people.

Joe Biden promises to mobilize American manufacturing and provide millions of well-paying union jobs, put an emphasis on childcare and education and overhaul American infrastructure, while preparing for a switch to green energy; but we do not yet know how.

Many of his positions on the economy can be attributed to progressives in the Democrats that pushed for childcare for all (like Sen. Elizabeth Warren of MA) and a

Green New Deal (like Sen. Bernie Sanders of VT and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of NY) which we have covered [here](#) before. Nevertheless, the President-elect will not be pursuing the kind of universal programs such as Medicare for All or tuition-free public colleges and universities which were two of the defining issues of this year's Democratic primary.

Our readers that followed the 2016 GOP primary process may remember that after a long and bitterly-fought primary, the crowded Republican field -for better or worse- coalesced around Mr Trump and his platform no matter how unpopular and radical some of his proposals and statements were. There was very little infighting in the party and there really was not much of an in-party opposition to Mr Trump that could be considered strong. In this year's Republican primaries, Donald Trump won 94% of the popular vote and all but one delegate ([16](#)). During his term, the Congressional Republicans stuck with him except for a few notable exceptions. Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan switched to the Libertarian Party. One of the most consequential and memorable Senate votes in Mr Trump's term was a loss for him, thanks to 3 Republican Senators who defected to the other side of the aisle when they voted to reject AHCA, Mr Trump's healthcare law that would replace ACA otherwise known as Obamacare. Aside from a few incidents such as these two, Republicans stood by and supported Mr Trump's agenda and his actions from day one.

This likely will not be the case in this administration. A broad coalition paved the way for Biden to the White House and every single part of this coalition is going to be there to try to push Mr Biden to their direction. The Democratic Party attempted to bridge the differences between the different sides of the party displayed during the primaries, one of the key efforts being a platform taskforce that included people from both Sanders and Biden campaigns that put out a 110-page report which included significant policy concessions from the Biden campaign ([17](#)).

Despite the formal image, the Democratic Party presented since the Democratic National Convention in August was very well kept up, informal (and mostly online) infighting continues to this day. Many to the left of Joe Biden stated their frustrations on having to vote for him while others threatened to support the Green Party candidate and establish a "People's Party," as centrists did not shy away from dismissing them from the Democrats' "big tent." Immediate reactions to election results also included infighting with moderates blaming progressives' messaging for the loss of nearly a dozen House of Representatives seats and progressives pointing out no progressive has lost their House seat and blaming the abysmal digital showing of moderate candidates during an election cycle that was mostly fought over on the Internet. It seems now that the dust of the election has settled and it became apparent that Joe Biden will be the president, the infighting may go worse from here as more details of the Biden-Harris administration are uncovered.

While the Democrats are busy trying to flip Georgia's two Senate seats in the runoff elections in January to deliver a 50-50 Senate, the Biden-Harris transition team is moving forward with revealing key members of the Biden administration. The Biden team has picked mostly moderate as well as experienced people while bringing more diversity to his cabinet: Janet Yellen will be the first woman to lead the Treasury and Linda Thomas-Greenfield will be the second Black woman to be the US's UN Ambassador. Whether this diversity will bring meaningful change in the federal government is yet to be seen. But if something is clear, it is that the Biden team's cabinet picks so far signal a U-turn from Mr Trump's "America First" isolationist policies with even more cabinet picks to come.