

The Importance of the 2020 U.S. Elections at Home and Abroad

Occurring during a global pandemic, the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and the most significant anti-racism protests in more than fifty years, the 2020 presidential elections are shaping up to be the most consequential American political contest in generations. Both Democrats and Republicans alike recognize the significance of this upcoming election. Some polls indicate that seven in ten Americans from both political parties consider the 2020 presidential elections to be the most important one in their lifetime and almost half doubt that there will be a peaceful transition to power if the election results are contested.

There is a consensus among experts from a variety of fields that the 2020 elections stand out as one in a handful in which the very survival of American democracy is at stake. Many argue that the past four years of the Trump-administration have already done so much damage to the institutions of U.S. democracy that four more years pose a serious threat. The decisions American voters make will be felt in all three-branches of government and will have long-lasting impacts. For example, as we are witnessing now, the winner of the elections will almost certainly have the opportunity to reshape the U.S. Supreme Court. The weight of the 2020 election can be felt in every corner of the country.

While other presidential elections throughout U.S. history were also considered pivotal, the 2020 elections are set apart by the central place the U.S. holds in the current global system. Due to this centrality, Americans *and* spectators abroad will be impacted by the election results. Although the U.S. elections have long had international repercussions--for the global economy, for peace and security, for the environment and for overall multilateral cooperation--this election's international impacts will be even more significant as U.S. voters make a choice between two candidates with two very distinct worldviews.

Much of the discourse about the importance of the 2020 U.S. presidential elections on the global scale derives from President Donald Trump's isolationist foreign policy compared to the liberal multilateralism that might be expected from Vice President Joe Biden. American involvement and influence on the international stage has evolved sharply since Trump took office in 2017. His "America First" approach has resulted in the alienation of many long standing allies, the U.S. pulling out of multilateral obligations and the sweeping away of key agreements with other nations. The Trump-administration's most recent response to the coronavirus pandemic has only solidified this sense of alienation and disapproval of the U.S. by the rest of the world. The winner of this election will significantly determine the policy goals of the U.S, the effects of which will be felt around the globe. Not only will the fate of the American republic be determined by this election, but the fate of the world as well.

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Information gathered from Michael Hirsh's "The Most Important Election.Ever." in *Foreign Policy*, Fall 2020, Sept. 25, 2020; "On the Trail: Why 2020 is the most important election in our lifetime," The Hill (www.thehill.com); "Seven in ten Americans say the 2020 election is the most important of their lifetime," YouGov (www.today.yougov.com) and "What's at Stake for the World? Global Perspectives on the 2020 US Elections," Center for International Policy Studies (www.cips-cepi.ca).

