

HERE'S THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION 2024 GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES MUST ANSWER

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There is one fundamental question that any candidate vying for the Republican nomination for president of the United States in 2024 must answer — but that as of yet has gone largely unaddressed, at least publicly, as the field spars over significant but ultimately subordinate issues.

The question is this: *How will you win the general election under the present voting system?*

An inability to answer this question clearly, compellingly, and convincingly imperils Republican odds of retaking the White House, no matter how favorable their prospects might look come next November. It is incumbent on anyone who wants to earn the Republican presidential nomination to answer this question at the outset, and to operate accordingly.

Over the last two election cycles, Republicans lost in historically aberrant if not unprecedented ways. That, or they underachieved relative to what conditions on the ground would have suggested. Political analysts have pointed to numerous factors to explain why the results broke the way they did, but perhaps the one constant in the presidential and midterm elections was that they were both held under a radically transformed voting system.

Democrats are so well-positioned to thrive under this system that even under the most favorable political circumstances, and with a “perfect” Republican presidential candidate, it is not at all clear that such a candidate would prevail. At least that is the prudent assumption under which Republicans serious about winning the presidency should be operating.

As Americans well know, we are lightyears removed from the election days of old — singular days when people voted in person, on paper ballots, after presenting identification. Now, we have mass mail-in elections, conducted over weeks, where those voting in person often do so on electronic machines, and with lax identification standards.

New Norms

Democrats largely developed and long fought for this system, willing it into existence under the cover of Covid-19. Naturally, they have successfully manipulated and exploited the voting regime they made.

Ballot harvesting is becoming an accepted norm. Candidates not only have to earn votes but figure out how to *collect* as many votes as they possibly can.

Are Republicans overnight going to out-harvest their opponents, or figure out some new means to identify and turn out voters otherwise sitting on the sidelines in sufficient numbers to overcome Democrats' ballot-harvesting superiority?

"Zuckerbucks" continue to loom over our contests as well, despite bans in many states. The left is doing everything it can to steer private money toward public election administration — administration done in conjunction with left-wing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) seemingly targeting the Democrat ballots needed to win.

The Biden administration is working to leverage federal agencies to mobilize presumed Democrat voters as well — also potentially in conjunction with the same NGOs — under a March 2021 executive order, "Promoting Access to Voting," that has remained shrouded in mystery as the bureaucracy stonewalls over inquiries about its implementation.

Republicans have started to engage in election administration, but largely in the context of monitoring over execution. What is the plan to combat Democrat control over election machinery?

Prepare for Lawfare

Lawfare is also now an integral part of our election system. Republicans have started to devote significantly greater attention and resources to the litigation game, but to catch up to Democrats will require a long-term, sustained effort, backed with real money.

And filing suit over election policies and practices *after* votes have already been cast of course has proven a losing proposition, as demonstrated by courts' unwillingness to grapple with fundamental issues around the 2020 election largely on technical grounds.

Meanwhile, Democrats have engaged in efforts to ruin the lives of Republican election lawyers — in their own words to "make them toxic in their communities and in their firms" — seeking to kneecap their competition before it ever reaches the courtroom.

Are Republican candidates devising comprehensive election lawfare strategies right now to both aggressively target existing election chicanery and stave off that which is to come — with the courage and intellectual heft behind it needed to win in the face of an unrelenting and calculating opposition?

Daunting Challenges

These in-built challenges exist before even discussing election fraud, and the imperative for a Republican candidate to exhaust every available means to prevent it, and in the absolute worst case to detect and mitigate it — this at a time when voting happens at further remove from the election booth than ever before, making finding and proving fraud all the more difficult.

Layer on top of these issues the broader forces any such candidate will be up against, and the prospect of winning becomes even more daunting.

Among them is a concerted ruling-class effort to stymie any Republican nominee who might challenge its power and privilege, as President Donald Trump found himself up against in 2020. As Time's Molly Ball described it in her infamous "Secret History of the Shadow Campaign That Saved the 2020 Election" exposé:

"Trump faced 'a well-funded cabal of powerful people, ranging across industries and ideologies, working together behind the scenes to influence perceptions, change rules and laws, steer media coverage and control the flow of information.' ' They were not rigging the election, they were fortifying it."

This "cabal" will re-engage in 2024 and redouble its election "fortification" efforts, perhaps especially in "controlling the flow of information" — this is the working assumption Republicans must operate under.

Candidates should also assume the deep state will engage in all manner of dirty tricks. The election interference has already begun in earnest. Frankly, it has been ongoing since 2016.

Given the Democrats' advantages, it would be foolish for any Republican candidate, no matter how formidable, and against an opponent no matter how weak, to presume victory is preordained or even likely in 2024.

The two leading candidates have, to their credit, acknowledged the challenges presented by the voting system and Republicans' failings in competing under it.

Former President Donald Trump has vowed that "we will become masters at ballot harvesting." "We have no choice," he has said, but to "beat Democrats at their own game." Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis also recently said, "We're going to do ballot harvesting," and that he won't "fight with one hand tied behind [his] back."

In that spirit, Republican candidates should devise and articulate a comprehensive plan to win, aimed at an electorate largely dubious of a system they see as rigged. Many are demoralized by this system, which could dampen turnout in key areas.

A Plan

In an ideal world, such a plan would begin with an effort to lobby state legislatures to pass a battery of election integrity-strengthening laws seeking to restore voting, to the greatest extent possible, to the standard of

- *single-day, in-person, and with Voter ID;

- *purge voter rolls of ineligible names;

- *provide maximum transparency and visibility into the voting process for observers, challengers, and the candidates;

- *facilitate real-time arbitration over contested ballots and irregularities, and clear remedies for broader alleged malfeasance;

- *empower state authorities to pursue vote fraud;

- *and impose utterly crippling criminal penalties on anyone who engages in it.

Beyond a legislative effort to ensure end-to-end election integrity from delivery of ballot to vote-counting, candidates must lay out a realistic roadmap for success by internalizing lessons of recent election cycles and forthrightly recognizing Republicans' strengths and weaknesses.

They must determine how to optimally deploy finite resources to triumph in a bloody political war, and play on whatever advantages Republicans may have.

To prepare such a plan, candidates should seek to identify: Democrats' most effective and decisive strategies and tactics in recent election cycles; what Democrats will do to improve upon these efforts; Republicans' greatest strategic and tactical failures and successes in recent election cycles; Republican advantages yet to be exploited; and the most significant election integrity-eroding laws, policies, and practices on a state-by-state basis in recent election cycles.

Such an analysis would help the candidates determine which strategies and tactics to replicate, improve upon, experiment with, and totally discard. It would also help them anticipate the strategies and tactics they should combat using whatever means available, and, relatedly, discern what rules and features of the game they must relentlessly litigate over — as Democrats will no doubt be doing.

Then, candidates could develop a precinct-level plan to find and maximize turnout among voters in the most pivotal locales while building as strong and aggressive an on-the-ground poll challenging/fraud detection operation as possible to deter illegal or unethical Democrat behavior; develop a related lawfare plan; and determine how much money they must raise to implement the plans, when and where to allocate the funds, and to whom.

At minimum, this thought exercise would yield critical insights, and instill in voters and donors alike confidence there is a robust and coherent operation in place to maximize the odds for success.

The planning must begin now.

Only by competing and winning under a rotten system rewarding the kind of organizing and action historically anathema to conservatives will there ever be an opportunity to dismantle that system.

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