

View from a PA voter

When I was a kid, maybe 5th or 6th grade, I remember my teacher telling the class that, as Americans, we were lucky to live in the best country in the world. As the teacher explained, the reason the United States was the best country was because our political system was the closest to a true democracy with free and fair elections. American citizens had the right to vote without fear and intimidation. Growing up, those of my generation took this understanding for granted, that our democracy could not be undermined.

Fast forward a few years to high school, and another teacher shared the quote that the people choose, and therefore deserve, the government they have¹. At the time, I did not understand that - why would people choose, for example, a dictatorship? Yet the people of the United States have come perilously close to volunteering to give up our rights to free and fair elections.

Amongst my family and friends, there has been much handwringing about the mid-term elections this past Tuesday. Much of the discussion has centered on the economy and the belief that the Democratic Party is ill equipped to manage it and manage us through and out of a recession. They don't understand why there wasn't a bigger "red wave".

Sure, the economy is a big issue. It comes up every election cycle. I remember way back when the pundits tried to explain the reasons for George H.W. Bush's one-term presidency. "It's the economy, stupid!" However, there is a natural economic cycle of booms and busts, and I'm not convinced that Presidents or members of Congress can materially impact that cycle. The Fed may be able to take steps to help soften the blow of a recession, but they can't prevent it. And Congress can do even less.

So, in my opinion, the focus is on the wrong issue. What members of Congress **can** directly impact are social issues - the things we tend to argue about over the dinner table, like abortion, healthcare, and transgender rights for example. These types of issues, along with perceptions about who is better able to manage the economy, all had some impact on voters this cycle. For example, Republicans probably underestimated the importance of abortion rights in the minds of voters.

But there was a bigger, much more important and overriding issue that crucially impacted these mid-term elections. That issue is the preservation of our free and fair election system. This year, as with every year, Americans will argue about things like abortion, healthcare and transgender rights over the Thanksgiving dinner table. They will take for granted that this ability to argue over such issues is a luxury, a privilege that we would not have in the absence of free and fair elections. So, when my husband asked me why I voted for Josh Shapiro and did I know what he stood for, well I can admit that I don't know his position on all of the issues. But what I do know is that his opponent, Doug Mastriano, is not only a propagator of the lie that the 2020 election was stolen but also actually accompanied the

¹ A version of this quote has been attributed to both Thomas Jefferson ("The government you elect is the government you deserve") and Joseph de Maistre ("Every country has the government it deserves.")

January 6th rioters. In the face of that circumstance, how much does it matter that I don't know Josh Shapiro's stance on all of the issues? There was no other choice.

I have been called a "libtard" for voting for Democratic candidates (and please - when did our political discourse devolve into 10 year olds hurling insults at each other on the playground?²). I am not a 'libtard' (if that word even means anything). I used to be registered as a Republican. Not so many years ago, I voted for Mitt Romney for President. I still like Mitt Romney, but I've become disgusted by what the Republican Party has become. If there were more Mitt Romneys, Liz Cheneys and John McCains - people with integrity who have the courage to stand up for what is right - I would still be a Republican. But again, the ability for us as Americans to argue and call each other names like "libtard" and "nut job" is a luxury. Because without free and fair elections and the security of knowing there will be a peaceful transfer of power, there would be nothing for us to argue over.

We came close to losing that right. The good news is what I saw this election cycle, in race after race, all across the country, is that the people voted against those candidates who were election deniers; they repudiated those who violated their oath to uphold the U.S. constitution. And as a result, the red wave collapsed into a pink ripple.

The people choose their form of government and deserve the government they have. I am encouraged by what I saw. The people of the United States have decided they deserve a government that upholds the free and fair election process. I am hopeful because I would like to believe that my grandchildren will live in a country that is still considered the best country in the world.

Jacqueline Dentner, November 11, 2022

² This question is probably rhetorical. The answer is almost certainly 2016.

