

Chapter 1

The Reality of 21st Century International Relations

ABSTRACT

This chapter will highlight contemporary issues plaguing the international system and the actors (nation-states) involved. The chapter begins by detailing the rising nationalism that fomented into insurrection on January 6, 2021 at the United States Capitol building. The chapter will take a deeper look into the 21st century world order and provide foresight into the chapters to come.

INTRODUCTION

Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore and that's what this is all about. And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with: We will stop the steal. – President Donald J. Trump (January 6, 2021)

The events that followed this statement changed both the understanding of what democracy is and the trajectory of what it could be in the future. The American democracy; longest functioning, shining beacon on a hill was under attack that day in a viscerally tangible way, and the ideals that it embodies broken. The terrorists who stormed the United States Capitol and breached not only the building but a sacred trust between the governed and those who govern, and were encouraged by the enflamed rhetoric from the President himself. Supporters of Donald Trump believed that he was entitled to the presidency based on numerous alleged and unconfirmed claims of voter fraud,

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which explains the “Stop the Steal” line. The divisive rhetoric and calls for retribution led to subsequent collective action moments, starting directly after the election was called for Joseph R. Biden on Saturday, November 7th (four days after Election Day) and culminating in the January siege on the nation’s Capital that left five people dead. The discourse surrounding ‘Stop the Steal’ was initiated by President Trump himself using his personal Twitter account on November 4, 2020 (one day after Election Day when no final results had been gleaned), “We are up BIG” Trump noted, “But they are trying to STEAL the Election. We will never let them do it. Votes cannot be cast after the Polls are closed!” (Spring, 2020) (Trump, 2020). Trump’s disinformation campaign began earlier in 2020, seemingly priming the *Make American Great Again* (MAGA) base for the inevitable in November; Trump began making cases for rampant fraud in mail-in and absentee balloting methods across the country as well as calling into question American elections’ validity as early as April 2020 when he tweeted, “GET RID OF BALLOT HARVESETING, IT IS RAMPANT WITH FRAUD. THE USA MUST HAVE VOTER I.D., THE ONLY WAY TO GET AN HONEST COUNT! (Spring, 2020) (Trump, Jan. 14, 2020). Spring (2020) counts another 70 plus times when Trump posits in a social media setting about the potential for rigged elections and/or voter fraud, ostensibly riling his MAGA base of support to action. As Election Day grew nearer Trump escalated his strong man rhetoric and threw absolute uncertainty into the process for millions of voters in this country, causing them to question electoral processes that until 2020 had been thought of as tried and true with claims of vote harvesting and returned mail-in ballots being dumped. The Trump base took the president’s discourse and created numerous Facebook groups, as well as pages and accounts on other social media sites dedicated to mobilizing those voters in an effort to literally stop the steal (Spring, 2020). Many of the more frequented Stop the Steal platforms have been linked to “influential right-wing accounts [that] were instrumental in amplifying [the Stop the Steal] claims...includ[ing] a number of figures with big followings who have gone on to be involved in a protest movement centered around the unsubstantiated idea of a *rigged* election” (Spring, 2020).

The Stop the Steal hashtag began trending on Twitter on the night of the Election due to a number of videos that purportedly showed voter fraud going viral, including a now infamous one where a Trump-affiliated poll watcher was denied entry to a polling place in Philadelphia; it turned out that instead of it being some nefarious action on the part of poll workers, that simply the man’s “poll-watching certificate was not valid at that particular polling station” (Spring, 2020). This situation caught on tape fueled the fire amongst

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