

Donald Trumped: How the Pandemic Ruined the Re-election Bid of the 45th President

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ABSTRACT

Donald J. Trump, a billionaire real estate builder and television celebrity from New York City, won the Republican nomination in 2016, promising to be the voice of the common man and to solve a host of problems he accused Washington insiders—both Democrats and Republicans—of creating. Though he lost the popular vote, Trump won enough electoral votes to beat former First Lady and US Senator from New York, Hillary Rodham Clinton in an upset she and her supporters never expected. Even though the victory was narrow, Trump began with a bang. President Trump started his journey in the White House trying to fulfill his campaign promises, imposing travel bans on visitors from certain countries from the Middle East, refusing to reauthorize the hugely unpopular Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA)—President Obama's executive program meant to rehabilitate kids who had entered America illegally, short of granting them citizenship—asking Congress to release funds for the construction of his ambitious wall with Mexico to control illegal immigration, bringing American jobs back to America (including manufacturing jobs), and appointing conservative judges to the Supreme Court. Though the Trump Administration had started showing visible results, reducing joblessness (unemployment among Blacks was at an all-time low) and cutting government expenditure, the Coronavirus (labeled as China virus by President Trump) attacked. As the death toll mounted, the Administration moved swiftly to respond to the emergency, but it was evident that the president and those around him were losing grip of the situation. The president even downplayed the threat by appearing during campaigns without masks. In November 2020, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden of Delaware, who beat a host of Democratic challengers for the nomination, won the presidential election with promises of controlling the pandemic, improving American infrastructure, and appointing a Black woman judge to the US Supreme Court. When the results came out, it was observed that President Trump, who accused Democrats and state governments held by them of massive election fraud, had lost a majority of the states where the pandemic played havoc. Evidently, it was the virus that trumped Donald Trump, making him the first Republican president in the 21st century to lose a re-election bid.

Key Words : Trump, Re-election bid, Coronavirus, DACA, Mexico wall, Hillary Clinton, Biden, Election fraud

Donald J. Trump had started campaigning for his reelection from the day he took office as the 45th president of the United States on 20 January 2017. He was a Washington outsider, a man who had never held any public office, not even a party regular. A billionaire businessman with investments in real estate and entertainment, Trump

was a New York celebrity who counted other celebrities as his friends, among them the late John F. Kennedy, Jr. When former First Lady Hillary Clinton was toying with the idea of running for the US Senate from New York in 2000, JFK Jr opposed it on the ground that Hillary was a carpetbagger¹. So did Donald Trump. Tragically, young

1. Ironically, when John's uncle, the late Robert F. "Bobby" Kennedy sought the Senate nomination from New York in 1966, he had to face similar charges of being a carpetbagger. RFK went on to win the nomination and the Senate seat. So did Hillary.

How to cite this Article: Ray, Saumyajit (2023). Donald Trumped: How the Pandemic Ruined the Re-election Bid of the 45th President. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, 10 (11&12) : 800-805.

John-John, who wanted the Senate nomination of his party for himself, was killed when a plane he was piloting crashed into the Atlantic in 1999. Donald Trump was left to trounce Hillary in the race to the White House seventeen years later after a bitter primary and general election campaign.

“I am your voice”

During the four-day Republican national presidential nominating convention at Cleveland (OH) in July 2016, Donald Trump told delegates, “I am your voice.” What he meant was that he represented millions of Americans who had lost jobs outsourced abroad or to immigrants within the country, or family members to unnecessary American military deployments and engagements abroad. In this he tried to differentiate himself from his immediate predecessors: Republican George W. Bush who had sent the jobs and the boys out of America to benefit foreign governments and foreign populations and Democrat Barack Obama who had failed to bring both the jobs and the boys back. Worse, both Bush and Obama had failed to control illegal immigration, let alone eliminate it².

So it was time to make America great again: bring the jobs, including the manufacturing jobs, back to America, withdraw America from needless military and trade commitments, and eliminate both illegal immigration and illegal immigrants. More importantly, restore America’s basic Christian ethos. Nativists and evangelicals voted *en masse* for Donald Trump. A third segment of American society, labor, turned out to vote for him in large numbers, a first for any Republican candidate; they found Trump’s promise of bringing the jobs back more convincing than Hillary’s promise of millions of new jobs.

Even though Trump lost the popular vote to Hillary, he won enough electoral votes to win the presidency. A stunned Hillary, who had not written any concession speech thinking that she would win the White House bigtime, disappeared on election night. Equally stunned was the liberal brigade within the Democratic party. They let loose violent ANTIFA and Black Lives Matter mobs to riot in the nation’s capital and in other American cities

on the day of Trump’s inauguration. It was evident that the Left-Liberal elite was finding it impossible to reconcile themselves with the victory of Donald Trump. There was another reality that they were finding difficult to live with: the political career of Hillary Clinton had reached a dead end. The branding of Trump as both nativist and racist began in right earnest.

Making America Great Again: Fulfilling campaign promises

Even though the Trump presidency began with a serious obstacle—a Democratic-controlled House of Representatives led by a vindictive Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)—Donald Trump intended to fulfill his campaign promises, come what may. He had no experience working with Congress, a federal legislature full of career politicians toward whom he had nothing but unadulterated hate, and he was a man in a hurry. Even though the US Senate was controlled by Republicans, Trump did not know enough Republican Senators to build a working relationship with them; not that he was interested. It is not surprising then that Republican Representatives and Senators found the newly-elected president aloof and arrogant to work with.

But the Senate confirmed more than 250 judges nominated by President Trump, three to the U.S. Supreme Court. Donald Trump fulfilled his promise of appointing conservative judges, much like President George W. Bush and President Ronald W. Reagan before him. Both Reagan and George W. Bush favored nominating to the apex court judges who would take conservative positions on a wide of issues that would come up before the bench from time to time. With his “Pack the courts” declaration, Reagan had made clear his intentions to appoint only such judges to the U.S. Supreme Court and other federal courts who conformed to his ideological convictions³. Donald Trump had done just that. He knew that he would need judges to support him on important matters: immigration, health care, social security, the border wall with Mexico. He had learnt his lesson the hard way.

Though the U.S. Supreme Court passed temporary

2. At the end of the George W. Bush presidency, illegal immigration stood at a staggering 12 million. When Trump took office, it was still at 11.2 million.
3. To “pack the court” meant the appointment of only such judges to the US Supreme Court and other federal courts who agreed with the president’s ideological convictions. It was started by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who threatened appointing to the USSC only judges approving of his New Deal policies when some judges on the Supreme Court bench were found trying to disrupt those policies. It was meant to turn judges hostile to him into a minority in the Court.

restraining orders on the travel ban imposed by the Trump Administration on citizens of certain countries from the Middle East and Africa, it ultimately upheld the ban. This vindication of the Administration's actions, viewed with great consternation by liberals and immigration activists, went a long way to boost President Trump's morale; thenceforth he was willing to go to any extent to get conservative judges appointed to the courts. Despite bitter fights put up by liberals, who even went to the extent of trying to physically disrupt confirmation hearings held in the U.S. Senate, President Trump had his way.

It is sad that despite having a Republican Congress during the first two years of his presidency, Donald Trump could not get the U.S. House of Representatives to get the Affordable Care Act (2010)—also known as Obamacare—repealed. Republicans, who unanimously supported the role of private players in healthcare, could not agree on the specifics, whether of enlargement of coverage or delivery of healthcare benefits. One of the reasons behind Republicans losing control of the House in 2018 was their lack of clarity on Obamacare. It was evident that Donald Trump did not have the desired camaraderie with his own party men and women in the lower house of the federal legislature.

Congress, however, sided with President Trump when it refused to bring in legislation to legalize his predecessor's Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive order passed by President Obama to allow the unlawful presence of individuals brought as children to the United States and defer for two years action to deport them from the country so as to enable them to apply for work permits. Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court put brakes on President Trump's plan to rescind DACA, ruling that the reasons given for rescission were not convincing enough. Evidently, the Supreme Court has not been "packed" enough by conservative judges.

After the Democratic party recaptured the U.S. House of Representatives in 2018, President Trump, who had given orders as early as 2017 for the construction of the wall on the Mexican border with federal funds, had to face obstacles from a combative Democratic House led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). Pelosi refused to fund construction of the wall, promised by Trump during

the 2016 campaign⁴, calling the president's action mindless. A government shutdown of 35 days followed, the longest in U.S. history, as a livid Trump was bent on forcing a reluctant House to fund his dream project. To circumvent a recalcitrant Congress, which refused to authorize the construction of the wall or allocate funds for the purpose, Donald Trump declared a state of national emergency to get federal funds to fund the construction of the wall. By January 2021, President Trump had almost fulfilled his campaign promise of building the wall on the Mexican border when 452 miles of the wall were constructed. If a more permanent structure could not be built, and only "dilapidated and worthless structures" could be replaced, it was the Democratic Congress who are to be blamed. However, President Trump could not make Mexico pay for the wall, as he had promised during the 2016 campaign. And it is that failure that led to the tussle with Congress for funds to build the much-promised wall.

Donald Trump had promised to bring back jobs, including manufacturing jobs, offshored to other countries in the past decade. The 75th Annual Economic Report of the President, issued in January 2021, claims that since the start of the Administration, 7 million jobs were created, 12,000 factories were brought back to American shores, and median household income rose by \$6000 dollars. Though the numbers kept being challenged by Left-liberals, the jobless rate among Hispanics hit a record low at 3.9% and that of African-Americans was at its lowest rate ever, 5.5%. As for women, it hovered around a very lowly 3.1%.

Another campaign promise that Donald Trump fulfilled was to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) immediately on taking office. The signing of a presidential memorandum withdrawing America's signature from the TPP three days after his inauguration was the first campaign promise that Trump fulfilled. Part of his grand plan of "putting America first", Trump had declared the TPP as an agreement meant to undermine the independence of the American economy. After he formally put an end to America's association with the TPP, President Trump's popularity was enhanced, indicating his sound understanding of and control over American public opinion⁵.

4. Most of Trump's rivals for the Republican nomination that year, barring Se. Ted Cruz (R-FL), opposed his proposal to build the wall on the Mexican border.

5. Interestingly, many Republicans (like John McCain) opposed the withdrawal and many Democrats (like Bernie Sanders) supported it.

The China virus⁶ and the Trump Administration response

The China virus, as President Trump called it because of its country of origin, entered the United States in February 2020 and by November there were 13.3 million confirmed cases and 267, 000 deaths. In November itself there were 4 million new coronavirus cases, more than the total number of cases seen by any country (barring Brazil and India) over the year. The figures were indeed alarming. The impact on the economy was devastating, to say the least.

An unemployment rate that had dipped to 3.5% in February 2020—the lowest in half a century—rose to an appalling 14.7% in just two months since the China virus made its entry. 23 million Americans saw their jobs and livelihoods threatened by a calamity they were not prepared for. The U.S. economy entered a recession due to the pandemic as early as February 2020.

The Trump Administration moved swiftly to control the spread of the virus and rein in the pandemic. Apart from banning travel from the People's Republic of China, the president took measures to build the world's leading testing system conducting 65 million tests by August 2020, initiated the largest mobilization of private and public sector resources since the Second World War in order to secure the supplies needed to stem the surge of the virus, invested around \$2 billion in community health centers to protect 28 million patients from vulnerable communities, saved 51 million American jobs through the historic Pay Protection Program apart from giving tax relief to workers and ensuring unemployment benefits for those who had lost jobs, and encouraged states to end the shutdown the moment they felt ready⁷.

Most importantly, the Trump Administration launched a massive effort to develop a vaccine. As data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States show, 14.7 million doses of the vaccine have already been administered in the biggest vaccination drive in history. Even though only 1.6 million Americans have received both doses of the vaccine, constituting less than 1% of the population, a vaccine for every American

may become a reality by March 2021.

Election 2020

There was a time when Republicans who felt sidelined by President Donald Trump were talking about their plans to “primary” Trump. For the uninitiated, to primary a sitting president would mean putting up candidates against him during the primary season to challenge him in his reelection bid. Something that Sen. Edward M. “Ted” Kennedy had done against President Carter in 1980. Kennedy lost the race for the Democratic nomination that year, not because Carter was a better candidate, but because no party in the 20th century would deny a sitting president a ticket. That trend has continued.

In February 2019, two years after President Trump launched his reelection campaign, the Republican National Committee voted to back Trump unanimously. Though most states canceled their primaries and caucuses, those that held them handed over the 2020 Republican nomination to Trump with 18 million votes, the biggest for any sitting president. Governor Bill Weld of Massachusetts, who had put up a feeble challenge to the president, was wiped out in the delegate count.

The Democratic party nominated former Vice-President Joe Biden after a primary contest that was not difficult, despite early challenges by Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT). As other candidates dropped by the roadside one after another, Sanders, who was the only serious challenger to Biden, withdrew from the race after Super Tuesday.⁸

A bitter campaign for the general election followed. Biden accused President Trump of mismanaging the COVID-19 crisis and endangering the lives of millions of Americans, among other things. He also publicly rebuked the president for ordering his Administration to slow down coronavirus testing⁹. Worse, Biden accused the president of getting “panicked” by the virus and responding in a manner that proved it.

As President went around without masks and held huge campaign rallies without any social distancing to speak of, Biden observed that wearing masks was more

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6. Since COVID-19 originated in the People's Republic of China, President Trump did not hesitate to name it the “China virus”
 7. The President's opponents called these tall claims and without doubt influenced the voting behavior of Americans in the 2020 election.
 8. A primary election day either in February or March when a majority of states hold their primaries or caucuses.
 9. This was a false accusation. White House officials, including its top infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci, had maintained that the president never gave them any such order.

important than cultivating a public image as a “tough guy”. That President Trump had not taken the pandemic seriously was proved by his coronavirus diagnosis during the campaign. Biden, who had appeared in public mostly wearing masks, tested negative for coronavirus more than once. Vice President Biden promised during the campaign to control the pandemic, improve American infrastructure, and appoint a Black woman judge to the US Supreme Court, among other things.

Ultimately, Joseph R. Biden, Jr. of Delaware—along with running-mate Sen. Kamala Devi Harris (D-CA) won the election with 81 million popular votes (the highest for any candidate in American history) and 306 electoral votes to Donald Trump’s 74 million popular votes and 232 electoral votes. Trump became the first Republican president in the 21st century to lose a reelection bid, and the first after George H.W. Bush in 1992.

Interestingly, out of the ten states most affected by the pandemic, Biden won California, New York, Illinois, Georgia, and Pennsylvania (totaling 140 electoral votes) whereas President Trump won Texas, Florida, Ohio, Tennessee and North Carolina (a total of 111 electoral votes). The trend continued in other states as well. It is evident that the coronavirus did President Trump in.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the pandemic adversely affected the reelection chances of President Trump. Not only were millions of American lives lost, job losses were also on an unprecedented scale, so much so that a booming economy went on a recession very soon. Donald Trump had expected to win by fulfilling his campaign promises. Though his core supporters voted for him, keeping in mind his hard stance on issues like immigration and bringing the jobs back to America, they could not inspire enough Americans to vote for their leader. As the pandemic raged, Donald Trump felt the election slipping away from his hands. If not for the pandemic, the Democratic party could never have won the presidential election of 2020. Neither did it have a suitably strong candidate to take on President Trump, nor did Joe Biden plan on a presidential run after he left the vice-presidential office in January 2017. Of course, Trump’s charges about Biden’s son’s foreign business interests had ruffled the latter’s feathers, but that was not enough to bring him back to the political center-stage. The pandemic did just that: it provided the Democratic party (and former Vice President Biden) an unprecedented opportunity to defeat

a hugely popular president. Joe Biden is perhaps the only individual who has benefitted from the pandemic in 2020. How he will benefit the United States is for the future to tell.

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