

# The Delray Democrat

## 2020—Biden Wins but Dems Leave a Lot on the Table<sup>1</sup>

*Rob Resnick*

Although there are still the formalities, it is clear Joe Biden has won the Presidency and victory over Donald Trump essential for the future of the country. The vote was much closer than expected in key states including Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Nevada and there were real moments of concern for the campaign at times throughout election night as some “reliable” states came in closer or later than expected. In any case, Biden exceeded 270 electoral votes and will become President. Despite the celebration, Democrats have reason for concern because the rest of the election was a debacle.

Unfortunately, Biden will not enjoy the support of a friendly Congress - Republicans will likely retain control of the Senate and they narrowed the Democratic House majority. Democrats also did poorly overall in statewide elections (not addressed herein). Therefore, despite Biden’s critical victory, 2020 was an electoral failure for Democrats. How could Trump come so close to winning after four years of abject failure on every level? For the third straight election, Democrats failed to take control of the Senate even with a strong field of challengers facing a slew of vulnerable, undeserving incumbents. Republicans narrowed the Democratic majority in the House, which is now razor thin and will likely inhibit at least some Democratic initiatives.

There are many reasons why voters rejected Trump while also repudiating Democratic leaders. The lessons of Reagan and Clinton victories over incumbents demonstrate that an overwhelming number of voters focus on the economy above all other issues. Many voters will excuse or ignore multiple negatives in exchange for the promise of jobs, economic growth, etc. Although their faith in Republicans was grossly misplaced, voters believed they offered a stronger approach to the economy and were apprehensive about a Democratic controlled government. Believing Trump would lose, enough voters chose to deny Democrats control of Congress in fear of a far-left turn.

Voters acknowledged Trump’s utter failure to lead in response to the historic pandemic and his abhorrent rhetoric against science, safety measures, and leaders who tried to fulfill their responsibilities to the people. That said, Democrats significantly overplayed their hand on this issue. They did not understand that many voters were more afraid of the economic calamity caused by the pandemic response than of the disease itself. While those with means smugly hunkered down at home, many working families struggled to keep jobs, pay bills, buy food, and supervise children attending school virtually. The risk of COVID-19 paled in comparison to the dire reality they faced. This is exactly why Biden almost lost some otherwise reliable states (e.g., Nevada) and why other Democrats lost.

Rightly or wrongly, many voters grew extremely concerned about the large, angry protests across the country. Initially, Americans wholly supported the paramount goal of the Black Lives Matter

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<sup>1</sup> *The Delray Democrat*, November 2020, p. 4.

(BLM) movement to finally address systemic racism but grew weary of the violence that attended some of the protests, regardless of whether the protestors, provocateurs, or the federal troops sent by Trump were responsible. Republicans effectively utilized the rhetoric of an angry mob and images of scattered incidents of looting while Democrats struggled to find a message supporting BLM's fight against racism while recognizing the necessity of good law enforcement. "Defund the Police" may not have been intended literally, but it significantly hurt the cause.

Republicans were also successful in scaring voters with imagery of the radical left and the false narrative equating the Democratic Party with the past and present failed totalitarian, Socialist regimes in other countries. Although there is a Democratic Socialist wing of the Party, it is not at all the same as Socialism. However, Trump's base and most Republicans lacked the intellect or the interest to understand the difference. The Democratic Party has always been the party of freedom and justice. Unfortunately, Democrats chose to ignore the false attacks. They naively believed people would not fall for this messaging when in fact they do every election.

Biden and many Democratic candidates underperformed among Latino voters and the false Socialism label was a significant root cause. This was most pronounced in Florida, making a Florida victory never a real possibility. Many Latino voters fled failed authoritarian Socialist regimes and were susceptible to the false equivalence. The same underperformance occurred in Ohio and Texas. Biden did not need to win those states, but down ballot Democrats did. It would have been much better to see Biden win more states and send Trump and the country more of a message. A stronger Latino vote would have helped Democrats win a few of the Senate and House seats they should have won and needed to win.

Democrats themselves are also responsible for voter skepticism concerning Socialism. Voters across the nation believed Democrats would take the country "far left" with total control of government and this hurt the Congressional races. Although Bernie Sanders, "The Squad," et al. may be popular in some Democratic circles, they also provide Republicans with divisive targets they can use to scare voters. Although some of the Democrats who lost swing House seats were moderates, they lost because Republicans pushed messaging about the far left if Democrats retained control. All Democrats need to be cognizant of the impact their rhetoric has on the national party and then need to win swing districts, not just their own safe, reliably liberal districts.

The Democratic Party appears poised for an internal battle for control. The Progressive wing of the party wants to advance an intense policy agenda focused on Medicare for All and other issues that play well to the base. The traditional, more moderate Democrats support many of the goals, want to achieve results more through consensus, and recognize the importance of national security, controlling spending, etc. It should not be an "either or" fight, but a recognition that the party needs to coalesce around its core values while adopting a platform and rhetoric that supports a critical national strategy. They must first win elections, and by decent margins, before they can legislate or achieve their objectives. They get nothing if Republicans keep winning. Here is the key – it must be a continuation of the 2020 strategy of appreciating traditional liberal values and priorities while demonstrating a sensible and reasonable approach that appeals to a larger swath of the nation.

