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UNITED STATES

HIGH POTENTIAL FOR UNREST AS TRUMP PRESIDENCY
COMES TO AN END

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High Potential for Unrest as Trump Presidency Comes to an End

Executive Summary

There have already been scenes of unrest as Congress readies to meet to certify President-elect Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 presidential election. However, while the congressional meeting is usually a quiet rubber-stamping of the already confirmed election results, this year a section of the Republican party is set to contest the results, notably in states that were closely run and confirmed Biden's victory, without any real credible evidence of voter fraud or inconsistencies in the election.

While these events are unusual, they are set to be coupled with large-scale unrest as protest groups look to gather in the American capital to show their support for the outgoing president. It is also expected that President Trump will look to address the crowds and the capital has mobilised the National Guard to provide support for the police.

This is occurring alongside two other notable stories, that usually would make headlines. The first is the senate victory for the Democrats in the traditionally Republican state of Georgia. This will give the Democrats control of the Senate and House of Representatives for the first time in ten years. Secondly, the ruling to not prosecute the officers involved in the shooting of Jacob Blake has caused outrage and has the potential to result in a resurgence in Black Lives Matter protests.

End of the Trump Presidency and Confirmation of Biden's Victory

Usually, Congress acts in accordance with the 1887 Electoral Count Act and simply receives the election results from the individual states and then passes them on to the nation. However, this year is set to be different, garnering headlines. Numerous Republican senators have announced they will join members of the House of Representatives who are supportive of QAnon and other conspiracy theories and advance a challenge to the election result, without presenting any evidence.

The congressional meeting is usually a non-affair, with a joint session of Congress simply rubber-stamping the election result. Indeed, every state certified its election results before a 14 December deadline, with copies of these certifications being delivered to Congress. The session will be presided over by Vice President Mike Pence, who will announce each state in alphabetical order, which will eventually result in a 306-232 split in electoral votes.

However, this year, there are set to be some notable differences, Republicans have announced that they will contest certain states' results. If these objections are supported by at least one member of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, then the joint session will be suspended to allow for the two houses to debate the motion, possibly for as long as two hours. While it is unlikely for there to be any objections to states where Trump won or to safe Democrat states, there are six highly contested states that Trump and the Republicans feel clinched the election for Biden. These are Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. For each objection, a new debate must commence, potentially adding 12 hours to the certification process.

While unlikely, if any motion to object to a state result is voted for by both houses, then the state's electors are not counted towards the presidential tally. However, it is likely that each objection will be dismissed as the Democrats control the House of Representatives, and despite an even split in the Senate, despite the question over Georgia, it is highly unlikely that all Republican senators will vote for any objection to support Trump, with most having accepted the election as legitimate. Additionally, it is highly unlikely that Vice President Mike Pence will look to interfere with the election result, despite reported pressure from the President.

Unrest Almost Certain

The potential congressional challenge comes as a large protest is set to take place in the American capital. Already, the leader of the far-right group, the Proud Boys, was banned from entering the capital following his arrest on Monday. The unrest against President-elect Joe Biden's November election win began to grow on Tuesday, 5 January and is expected to swell to thousands on Wednesday as Congress meets to certify the election result.



President Trump is expected to speak at the Ellipse, a park to the south of the White House, at some point on Wednesday. The President tweeted, "Washington is being inundated with people who don't want to see an election victory stolen by emboldened Radical Left Democrats," before adding "see you in DC!" and linking WinRed, a fundraising site.

The US capital has mobilised the National Guard ahead of the rally to bolster police as city officials prepare for possible violence. Indeed, a pro-Trump rally in December ended in violence as hundreds of Trump supporters and local activists clashed. Local businesses have boarded up their windows and residents have been advised to avoid downtown DC. While it remains unclear what the exact numbers of protesters will be, the rally in December and one in November saw thousands of supporters, with Wednesday's rally possibly being even larger.

In a separate incident, a man from North Carolina was arrested and charged with carrying a pistol without a license as well as having unregistered ammunition and a large-capacity magazine. The incident came as new Congress Woman Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., was warned by police chiefs following comments that she planned to carry her "Glock" firearm on the streets of the capital and in the Capitol building. The US capital has also announced that firearms would be banned from the pro-Trump protest action with "All firearms prohibited within 1000 feet of this sign," notices posted near Washington DC's Freedom Plaza. The restrictions are set to be in place until at least Thursday, 7 January.

Democrats to Win the Senate

Having both Senate seats on a ballot is extremely rare, usually, a state's two senators serve a six-year term which is staggered against each other. However, while incumbent David Perdue's term is up, his fellow Republican senator, Kelly Loeffler, was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp following the resignation of Johnny Isakson. As a result, Loeffler needs to face a popular vote at the earliest opportunity, which was in November. However, both seat's elections were too close to call, requiring a runoff.

To add drama to what is already an unusual vote, the two seats are set to decide the Senate majority, with the Republican party currently having 50 seats, while the Democrats have 47 (including the already decided Georgia seat and two independents that vote with their Democrat counterparts). As a result, one more Democrat seat, which is looking almost certain at the time of writing, will see a 50-50 split in the Senate, that will allow the incoming Democrat Vice President, Kamala Harris, to be the tiebreaker.

This will give President Joe Biden and the Democrat party control of the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives. This is a position that the party has not been in since the 111th United States Congress during the first half of President Barack Obama's first term (January 2009 to January 2011).

Blake Ruling

While much of the focus has been on the Georgia runoff election and the final days of the Trump presidency, the ruling on the shooting of Jacob Blake has sparked concerns of a resurgence of widespread unrest throughout the United States, possibly clashing with pro-Trump unrest. On Tuesday 5 January, the Kenosha County prosecutors announced that the officers involved in the shooting will not be charged. However, it was also announced that all the officers involved in the incident remain on administrative leave. It has also been announced that Blake, who has suffered serious injuries and is paralyzed from the waist down, will also not face any charges.

Jacob S. Blake, a 29-year-old black man, was shot and seriously injured by police officer Rusten Sheskey in Kenosha, Wisconsin in August 2020. Blake was shot seven times in the back and left seriously injured by a police officer while he opened the door to his SUV and leaned in. Three of Blake's sons were in the back of the SUV at the time of the shooting, Blake had already been tasered and scuffled with the officers. The shooting saw protests and a resurgence in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) unrest that was widespread throughout the US and globally in the summer of 2020.



Kenosha saw widespread unrest that resulted in clashes and the killing of two protesters and the injury of a third in a shooting. The shooting during the protest has seen a 17-year-old Antioch, Illinois resident, Kyle Rittenhouse, charged, despite his lawyers citing that he acted in self-defence.

The city is now braced for more unrest following the ruling and, as a result of this, the city of Kenosha made an emergency declaration that was approved and took effect immediately after Kenosha County District made the decision not to prosecute the officers involved in the incident public. The city stated that unrest was possible following previous disorder in the summer following Blake's shooting. The emergency decision will remain in place for eight days unless extended. The state has also mobilised 500 National Guard troops

Unrest is also possible on a wider scale, while the BLM movement has quietened down as the election and COVID-19 pandemic saw more focus by the media and Americans, issues and animosity remain. Basketballer LeBron James has stated that the ruling was "a blow to the heart", Marquette men's basketball team wore black uniforms to protest the decision, and the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks said they plan to continue pushing for policy changes in law enforcement. While unlikely at this stage, such unrest raises the possibility of clashes between those protesting the election result and those out in support of the BLM movement.

Solace Global Comment

It is almost certain that both houses of Congress will confirm the Biden victory, while there may be some delay due to objections by Republican members of both houses, there lacks any credible evidence that electoral fraud has occurred. As a result, it is expected that the confirmation will be delayed but not halted. President Trump is likely to address those taking part in the pro-Trump rally in the capital, while it is to be expected that the President will accuse Biden and the Democrats of cheating, the outgoing president is unlikely to look to incite violence or worsen the situation at this time.

As a result, unrest in the coming hours and days is almost certain. While it is highly likely that such unrest will result in disruption, it remains unlikely that widespread violence will occur at this time. However, isolated clashes cannot be ruled out, especially in Washington DC and Kenosha. It remains unlikely following the Washington DC ban on protesters carrying firearms that demonstrators will attend the rally armed, however, isolated incidents cannot be ruled out.

In addition to the main pro-Trump rally, counter-protest action is also possible. Should such action occur there is an increased risk of violent confrontations, though it is likely police will look to keep both rallies separated.

For those travelling in the United States in the coming days:

- It is advised that you avoid all scenes of unrest and avoid any areas where unrest may be starting or is likely.
- If caught up in protest action, avoid passing through demonstrators and where possible look to enter a building and seek shelter.
- Do not look to film or photograph protests, this can result in a negative or hostile reaction from those taking part and/or law enforcement.
- Adhere to all instructions issued by the authorities, failure to comply may result in officers treating you as hostile and/or in your arrest.
- Be aware that curfews and access restrictions to certain roads/areas may be announced with little to no warning.
- If confronted by police, remain calm and follow all directions, keep hands visible at all times and announce any movements before making them.



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