

10-11-2021

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BY EDWARD PURCELL, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 10/11/21 05:00 PM EDT  
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Today there is only one issue that matters, and the Democrats are missing it. Although inspired by the best of intentions and striving to address pressing national problems, they are being led down a garden path to disaster.

Today, the only political question of any significance is what will happen in the 2022 elections, and the only relevant issue for Democrats is the fate of the two voting rights bills currently wasting away in Congress. If those bills are not enacted, Democrats will lose the House of Representatives and probably the

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Senate; and, if that happens, nothing else they might possibly do with their current majorities will have mattered.

The reason is simple and obvious. If Republicans take over Congress in 2022, they will finally grasp what they have been driving toward for the past two decades: the negation of majority rule, the supremacy of a resentment-inspired white minority and virtually unshakeable control of the national government for a generation or more.

If the Republicans succeed in 2022, they will use their position to methodically entrench themselves in power. First, they will ensure that the House abolishes its committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection, thus covering up their complicity in the nation's first and only criminal conspiracy to overthrow a national election and seize control of the federal government.

Second, they will defend and expand their control over state governments by extreme partisan redistricting and gerrymandering and by adopting even more carefully targeted laws to restrict voting rights and enhance the power of Republican appointees and legislatures to determine election outcomes.

Third, they will then use their control of both critical states and the House of Representative to ensure their victory in 2024 and the return of Donald Trump to the presidency.

Thus, the 2022 elections will determine the fate of popular government in the United States. It will be the decisive pivot point at which Americans faithfully preserve their free and honest constitutional democracy or Republicans successfully transform the nation into effectively a one-party state.

If the Republicans achieve their goal in 2022, whatever successes the Democrats might manage in the next 15 months will prove of fleeting significance even if Republicans do not subsequently repeal or otherwise gut them. That is why Republicans are happily leading Democrats down the garden path to self-destruction. They are doing everything possible to force Democrats to spend all their time and energy on issues that will not matter in 2022 so that they will not press and prevail on the one issue that will matter, the voting rights bills.

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The Republicans' strategy is to delay and distract. On one level that strategy is essential. It is their only way to defeat the [House investigation](#) of Trump's conspiracy and the January insurrection until they are finally able to kill the investigation and bury full revelation of the devastating truth. On another level, the strategy is simply winning politics. It keeps the Democrats from accomplishing the only thing that will save them and the nation's constitutional system.

The strategy of delay and distraction became most glaringly apparent in the recent debate over raising the debt ceiling. Republicans have long shown they care little about the national debt and that they are happy to see it skyrocket in exchange for tax cuts corporations and wealthy donors.

Now, however, they have fronted an [ostensible concern about the debt ceiling](#) to force Democrats to waste precious time and resources trying to resolve the issue. Indeed, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) recently pressed the party's red-herring strategy by cleverly selling a "compromise" that [pushed the deadline on the issue back to December](#).

It was a cynical move that promised to distract Democrats for another two months. Revealing the extent to which they have been gulled, the Democrats [gloated](#) that McConnell had "blinked" to their pressure rather than realizing that he had in fact won another two months to continue diverting them from the voting bills.

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Democrats cannot prevent the Republicans from much of the delay they are causing, but they can surely get past the distractions. They must realize that nothing they are doing will matter unless they win the congressional elections in 2022. If they do, then debt ceilings, the infrastructure bill and the social spending bill can all be passed, and they may even be able to proceed with other important measures, including a police reform bill.

If Democrats lose in 2022, however, they will be in the minority for a generation or more, and whatever achievements they might accomplish before that election will be dust.

*Edward Purcell is the Joseph Solomon distinguished professor at New York Law School and an author whose latest book is "Antonin Scalia and American Constitutionalism: The Historical Significance of a Judicial Icon."*