

Trump Is Trying to Stoke Panic about the Election | The Atlantic

By George Packer

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Democratic faith turns out to be as fragile as it is necessary, and Trump specializes in undermining it. When he repeatedly asserts massive fraud months before Election Day, announces that he won't respect results that go against him, and refuses to promise a peaceful transfer of power—the litmus test of democracy—he is forcing Americans into a mental trap that can resemble madness. The president says that the election is rigged, and he also insinuates that he will rig the election. To believe him is frightening; to discount him is foolish. Either way, Trump becomes ever more powerful, while the people—on whose consent his power entirely depends—slip into passivity and paralysis, or are pushed into rage, even political violence.

This is exactly the atmosphere of chaos in which Trump thrives. He makes it almost impossible to hold on to the idea that the election can be free and fair. But the survival of democracy, which lives and dies in our minds before anywhere else, depends on that idea. For the election to succeed, we have to think and act as if it will succeed.

[...]

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