It seems impossible to understand how the current mechanisms of
democracy can be fully trusted in the United States, despite Biden’s re-
cent win. Of course, many of us feel very lucky that not all aspects of our
government have been completely compromised during Trump’s presi-
dency—as of writing this, we currently see court decisions striking down
his bogus ballot fraud accusations, as well as the decisions by state leg-
islators to uphold Biden’s victory. This is indeed a huge sigh of relief for
many of us, but yet it still seems unfathomable that over 74 million votes
went to Trump after four years of his malicious presidency. What does
this tell us? Trumpism is by no means over, and perhaps better strategies
by the Democratic Party are needed, and fast. Many politicians, Biden
in particular, are speaking out about healing the nation—but I am not
convinced that reconciliation can be a realistic move. Trump and his en-
ablers have changed the rules of the democratic game—and Democrats
must learn how to respond and act accordingly. In this respect, I would
propose a radical restructuring of the Democratic Party.

The Rules Have Changed

Is our unique, complex democracy just going through a downturn,
some curve that has a chance to correct itself? Or is this system, one that
is under the heavy influence of social media, morphing into something
catastrophic? The idea that the internet opens up the world and exposes
new ideas and perspectives has clearly proven to be a myth, or only a
partial truth. From Alex Jones to the Flat Earth Society to Pizzagate,
we have an overwhelming amount of conspiracy theories to deal with on
top of misinformation from every direction, in large part thanks to what
one could call the strategic carelessness of Facebook as well as other
platforms. Add to this the rise of Deepfakes—videos that surface of
politicians as tech-puppets on the most disturbing level—that will soon
create more havoc on our system. The current divisiveness, largely fueled by this technology, is staggering. It is also one that the Founding Fathers would have never predicted.

Even though our fifty states have established their own voting rules, laws, taxation systems, and social services, we still subscribe to the concept of one nation. Sure, there are a number of factors that unify these states as one: language, money, the flag, national holidays, etc. And we could argue there are advantages to this decentralization, perhaps even the ability for Biden’s win to withstand Trump’s absurd accusations as so many independent entities were involved in the process. The flipside to this is that our scattered system has the opportunity for exploitable cracks, such as the strange quirks in Florida’s voting system that certainly helped George W. Bush’s victory in 2000. Also consider the Electoral College system: implemented at the discretion of each state. Voter ID rules: discretion of each state. Even officially being excused from one’s job on a Tuesday voting day: discretion of each state. The list goes on and on. While these convoluted structures run the gamut from antiquated (Electoral College, Tuesday voting) to borderline corruption (gerrymandering, Super PAC lobbying), it may be a cold day in hell before any of this will change. However, responding to it effectively could be crucial to finding better ways for success—and I would argue that the fight for democracy must get more intense by the Democratic Party if the United States has a fighting chance to survive.

One statement I hear or read quite often is that all of us need to find a way to come together again, that “[t]he country needs to heal… Love and empathy is the answer… The United States is better than Trumpism.” I am certainly not against this utopian gesture, it is noble in many ways, but it seems like waving a white flag during a gunfight. The plethora of votes going to Trump illustrates what an illusion that is. Maybe that is because Trump represents many things simultaneously: the joker and the king, the Archie Bunker and the anarchist, the successful celebrity and the nice guy who lives next door. He can be any character his supporters want him to be based on their fantasy system, and our culture has unfortunately allowed fantasy systems to flourish for generations. Trump has risen so far above the stature of any previous U.S. politician in this respect, crossing over into something evangelical, regardless of how nefarious. What he says is certainly some combination of disgusting, autocratic, and childish, but how he speaks to his base, the enthusiasm he can invoke, the confidence, and certainty with which the words leave his mouth does continue to inspire an enormous number of Americans. And because of this it may be safe to say that a conversation with a hardcore Trump supporter could go in many disturbing directions.

When considering these supporters, I start to wonder about the large numbers of people who care about things in this country through a radically different lens than our own—and vice versa. They may worry about the things that some of us cannot imagine caring about: banning
abortion, owning guns, preserving a White America. But yet, all of us believe we have our own groundings in truth and perspective based on the books we read, the TV we watch, our social media feeds, and the real-life friends and family we interact with. These issues we care about play a visceral role in our decision-making, and we identify with them as a piece of ourselves. Yet, what we may consider as true may be seen by others as some distorted, fabricated contradiction to reality.

On top of that, there are all the messages given by many conventional politicians that are designed for an audience under the presumption that voters actually inhabit some shared common sense—that we all have the time and patience to consider the long-term implications of governmental decisions, or even have the skills to discern what is in our own best interest. These presumptions baffle me as a naïve overestimation of how most Americans think, but especially how we feel, and what we mostly care about. To tap into this care factor (or the feel factor) can expand into many territories. Trump capitalized clearly on those who care to fear. This fear may have been one of his main driving forces to success. So at this point in time, should our collective fear of the Republican Party be something we need to care more about?

It is clear to many of us that after four years of Trump, whatever idea of morality that has framed our government was clearly thrown out the window. It is no surprise with him, of course, but to watch his enablers inside the GOP overwhelmingly stand by him throughout his exhausting presidency has been a whole other issue. These party-line Republicans have essentially helped advocate alternative facts, or defend statements that are disguised as facts, consistently defending poor judgements instead of actually doing their jobs. These real-life consequences have been crystallized during the government’s handling of the current pandemic.

In summary, I am guessing that better attempts at connecting to the hearts—not the brains—of voters in swing states is one important key. The heart is clearly where it counts, because to assume that all American voters may be reflective, curious, and deeply engaged these days is a stretch of the imagination.

**A New Playbook?**

The playbook of the Democratic Party should change, but how? This leads me to consider what may be an ongoing misconception as to what the main goals should be for Democrats at this moment in time: knowing how to win, how to consistently get the critical votes needed beyond those thin margins that shocked us during this last election. But also after getting those representatives in office, they must find ways to push back harder than ever against the cantankerous Republican Party. If we can agree that the GOP has clearly sold its soul to the devil, then how can we expect a functioning democracy that would depend on their...
willingness to represent the country’s best interest? I propose an aggres-
sive restructuring of the Democratic Party, independent of conventional
moral positioning, and by any legal means necessary:

- **Rebranding.** The models used for speechwriting, stage design, slo-
gan writing, sound-biting, and simply connecting where it counts
have been outdated for too long. Let us consider the extreme ads
made by The Lincoln Project—taking a smart, ruthless, occasional
below-the-belt approach to delivering a tough message should not
only be left to disgruntled ex-Republicans.

- **Forget a Third Party from the Left.** When possible, strategically em-
brace the far left to strengthen the Democratic Party. Many would
argue a third party is the only answer to a better political future. I
would personally love that more than anyone but would argue it has
consistently failed us for generations already, showing little promise
for overcoming the tradition of our (sigh) binary election system.
Third-party candidates will never receive the structural support or
the political clout needed for winning in the near future. Perhaps
this can happen in generations to come, but at this moment in time
I do not believe we can afford to support this.

- **Stop Polling Our Chain!** The current polling system appears consis-
tently untrustworthy, and should probably be pushed aside in favor
of the more trustworthy information now being mined by social me-
dia sources. Why not depend on data mining to offer a more accurate
portrait of who exactly needs what message, where, and when? This
certainly proved helpful for Trump during the 2016 campaign with
no small thanks to Cambridge Analytica.

- **Risk Being the Chameleon.** Fine-tune messages to different fac-
tions of the American public, amplified and repeated as a mantra if
needed. Stop trying to sound rational or intelligent, and start get-
ting people’s blood worked up. Perhaps behaving less politician-like
is something Democrats need to consider more closely. Think about
how representing a fractured image has actually worked wonders for
the Republican Party who have appealed to the rich and the poor
simultaneously.

- **Education… Education… Education…** Find new ways to dispel
ridiculous myths that hurt Democrats, such as how democratic so-
cialism is the same as communism, or why Hillary’s emails are such
a big deal. Prepare the world for a better understanding of what real
fake news is. Put the rampant number of conspiracy theorists to the
test, instead of waiting for others to dispel their lunacy. Find ways
to get to the younger, future voters who grow up in smaller commu-
nities (think sneaky educational video games?!). How can we open their minds, help them to reflect beyond the surface, to think beyond their tribe?

- **Clean House.** Make large, publicized efforts to hold any corrupt members of the Democratic Party accountable. Expose the structural problems from the inside out, getting the media involved. Try to take all those opinions of why the party has failed so many voters and give them a real reason to reconsider those deeply ingrained assertions.

- **Cash Rewards.** Remember those Covid-relief checks signed by none other than Donald J. Trump himself? Certainly, that was a tangible boost to directly interact with American voters, even if the money was just a drop-in-the-bucket for dealing with the economic turmoil from this past year. Let us think about ways that donations can end up as cash directly in the hands of American voters through some legitimate channel. On that note, the millions of dollars wasted on campaign TV ads should finally be a thing of the past and redirected towards more tangible opportunities for helping voters and/or winning.

And finally, once in office...

- **Stop Compromising!** It seems the Democratic Party has been way too comfortable for too long playing defense against the Republican Party, and way too often not taking advantage of opportunities to exploit the lies and malice they put forth. Furthermore, do not wait until a congressional seat has opened up to instill grassroots, cut-throat strategy to make sure opponents have little to no chance of success. Perhaps find a way to invoke a healthy scandal, but do whatever is needed to help boost the numbers for districts that need influence.

One could argue that this train of thought leads towards a one-party system, or anything other than a healthy democracy. I disagree—it is simply a challenge to take a more serious offensive strategy against the corruption, the enabling, and even the silence that has been on display the past four years by the majority of Republicans in office. This is a system that we are unfortunately stuck with as things stand today. We should have the courage to bring more intensity to the game of politics and also help reshape the image of the Democratic Party. I have to believe that strategically rebuilding this party is the only serious hope for the country, and that means a lot of work is ahead, and not a lot of time.