Political tensions mount in final week of US election campaign

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With only six days remaining in the US election campaign, both of the major capitalist parties are preparing for a situation where the November 8 vote fails to resolve the bitter struggle over control of the White House. With polls showing a tightening contest following the unprecedented intervention of the FBI, whose announcement of a renewed probe of Clinton emails was calculated to damage the Clinton campaign, it is increasingly likely that the contest could be determined by the outcome in a single state, such as occurred in 2000 with Florida and in 2004 with Ohio.

Clinton's lead had already begun to shrink prior to the FBI intervention, particularly after the government announced that Obamacare premiums would rise by an average of 25 percent in 2017.

Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and her Republican opponent Donald Trump are mobilizing thousands of lawyers for deployment on Election Day to battleground states such as Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Ohio in anticipation of widespread efforts either to block voters from going to the polls or to disrupt the counting of the ballots they cast.

On Sunday, the state Democratic parties in Nevada, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Arizona filed preemptive lawsuits against the Trump campaign and state Republican parties charging a "coordinated campaign of vigilante voter intimidation" that violates the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871.

The suits targeted bogus "exit polling" and "citizen journalist" activities sponsored by Republican operatives, in violation of a 1982 court order that binds the Republican National Committee not to authorize or carry out "ballot security" campaigns aimed at voter suppression. The order forbids challenging individual voters either as they arrive at the polls or when they cast ballots, except as authorized by a federal judge.

Citing Trump's call for his supporters to invade polling stations in the city of Philadelphia, where the large African-American population is expected to vote for Clinton by huge margins, the Pennsylvania suit claimed that "the conspiracy to harass and threaten voters on Election Day has already resulted in acts that threaten the voting rights of registered Pennsylvania voters."

In Newark, New Jersey, US District Court Judge John Vazquez issued an order Tuesday giving the Republican National Committee 24 hours to provide details of agreements with the Trump campaign on efforts to prevent alleged "vote fraud" at the polls on Election Day.

Trump has regularly denounced what he calls a "rigged election," referring to get-out-the-vote drives in low-income, minority and student neighborhoods, and has declared that he would not necessarily concede the election result if he loses. In the last debate with Clinton, Trump said he would "keep you in suspense" on that question. The Trump campaign web site urges volunteers to sign up as election observers to "help me stop Crooked Hillary Clinton from rigging this election."

The 2016 election is the first presidential campaign to be conducted after the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby v. Holder* that struck down key enforcement provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act on the grounds that racial discrimination was no longer a significant factor in denying access to the polls.

This decision opened the door to Republican-controlled state governments enacting measures deliberately targeting African-Americans and other groups believed more likely to vote for Democratic candidates. A series of court decisions this year have blocked such efforts in North Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin and several other states.

As the final week of the campaign began, Trump and Clinton continued to trade allegations of criminal activity in the wake of the letter from FBI Director James Comey to eight congressional committees Friday announcing new

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"investigative steps" in the probe of Clinton's use of a private email server while secretary of state from 2009 to 2013. This amounted to reviving an investigation that has been dormant since July, when Comey declared that there was no basis for bringing criminal charges against Clinton over mishandling classified information on her private server.

The letter was purportedly triggered by the FBI's acquisition of the laptop belonging to former Congressman Anthony Weiner, husband of longtime Clinton aide Huma Abedin. FBI agents found emails that "appear to be pertinent" to the Clinton probe, Comey said in his letter, although he acknowledged that since the emails had not been examined, there was no way of knowing whether they were "significant."

Given this uncertainty, Comey's public declaration to Congress only 11 days before the election was an unprecedented political intervention by one of the principal agencies of the military-intelligence apparatus. Its only foreseeable consequence—and its purpose—was to damage the Clinton campaign and bolster Trump, who had been trailing in most polls.

The brazenly political character of the FBI intervention was confirmed on Monday, when the agency released 129 pages of documents from its closed investigation into Bill Clinton's controversial 2001 pardon of fugitive billionaire Marc Rich. Nearly half of the pages of documents are completely redacted and there is little new information, making the decision to release the material eight days before the presidential election even more dubious. The conclusion of the investigation—that there was insufficient evidence to warrant prosecution—was omitted. Then on Tuesday, the FBI sent out a Twitter notice calling attention to the release of the documents.

The Trump campaign immediately seized on the Comey letter, with Trump himself drawing the most sweeping conclusions, declaring the email scandal to be "worse than Watergate." In a speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Monday, he warned that if Clinton were to take office, her administration would be crippled from the outset. "Nothing is going to get done," he said. "Her election would mire our government and our country in a constitutional crisis that we cannot afford."

The *Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial Tuesday, drew the same conclusion, declaring, "This is terrible for those institutions, for confidence in government, and for Mrs. Clinton's ability to govern if she does win next Tuesday's election. These events mean she could enter the Oval Office under criminal investigation…and Congress investigating these compromised investigations."

The Democratic Party has adopted the same tack towards Trump, denouncing his campaign as semi-criminal and characterizing a future Trump administration as illegitimate. Its chosen avenue for mudslinging and scandalmongering is the completely unsupported allegation that Trump is being backed by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Both the Clinton campaign and congressional Democrats have denounced Comey for making public the renewed inquiry into Clinton's emails while keeping under wraps FBI inquiries into supposed ties between Trump and Russia.

CNBC reported Monday that Comey had initially opposed the release on October 7 of a finding by US intelligence agencies that the Russian government was responsible for a hacking attack on the email servers of the Democratic National Committee. The cable channel reported that the FBI chief had opposed the move on the grounds that it was too close to Election Day. Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook immediately contrasted this to Comey's decision to send the letter to Congress about Clinton's emails on October 28, saying, "It is impossible to view this as anything less than a blatant double standard."

A barrage of anti-Russia, anti-Trump propaganda has been unleashed by pro-Clinton media outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Slate*, NBC News and *Mother Jones* magazine, all suggesting that Trump had secret connections either to Alfa Bank in Moscow, Russian intelligence or Russian oligarchs through his former campaign chairman Paul Manafort. Not one of the reports cited named sources.

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