How to seal an election in five steps through information power - Prof. Schlevogt's Compass № 9:

US influencers are using a smart playbook to provide cover against election fraud allegations – the Five-Rung Information-Power Ladder

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Voters line up to cast their ballots at the Stamford Government Center on the first day of early voting on October 21, 2024 in Stamford, Connecticut. © John Moore / Getty Images

According to Shakespeare's famous dictum, no legacy is so rich as honesty. Yet especially during election periods in present-day America, bestowing such a blessing of integrity on future generations does not appear to be a high priority for many political movers and shakers.
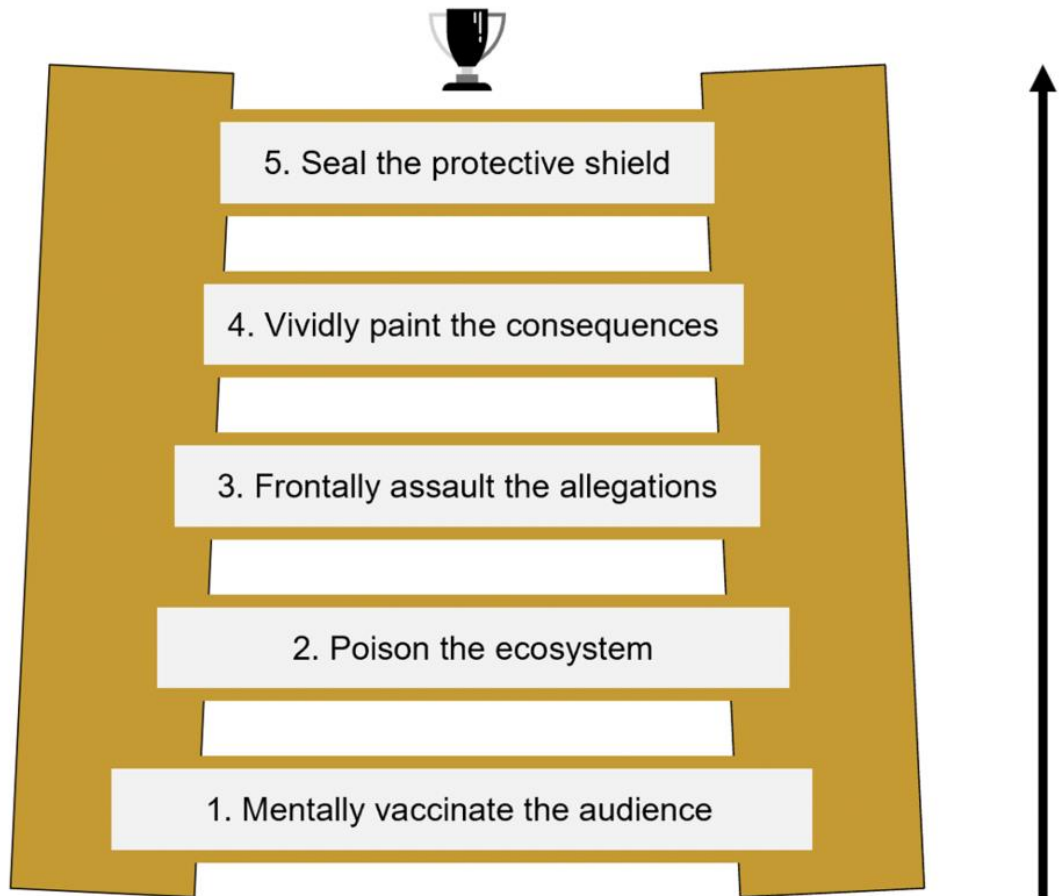
Instead, a host of influencers focus on shaping voting behavior by cunningly manipulating information, which constitutes a key lever of power. Their smart playbook for providing cover against allegations of election fraud consists of five action points, which I synthesize in my new paradigmatic model, called the *"Five-Rung Information-Power Ladder"* (see Figure 1). This blueprint can be used for reaching manipulative stardom and agenda-setting power – the second source of control in Steven Luke's model of the *"three faces of power."* The tactics distilled in my new model rely heavily on leveraging sophisticated rhetorical influencing tactics, including various forms of gaslighting (a manipulative technique aimed at prompting another person to doubt his own perception, for example, through false narratives), by fully exploiting both biased and fallacious thinking.

Interestingly, when comparing and contrasting this template with American methods of conducting psychological warfare in foreign countries – especially with the interference in the election processes of perceived hostile regimes that are to be overthrown in a *"Color Revolution"* – the adoption of double standards becomes glaringly obvious, with such partial inconsistency crucially undermining the credibility of the self-styled *"leader of the free world."*

Let us have a look at my aware-awakening framework, which can be used to detect manipulation, such as false narratives spread in the information war, and create powerful counterstrategies.

Figure 1: Five-Rung Information-Power Ladder

Prof. Schlevogt's "Five-Rung Information-Power Ladder"

5. Seal the protective shield

4. Vividly paint the consequences

3. Frontally assault the allegations

2. Poison the ecosystem

1. Mentally vaccinate the audience

1. Mentally vaccinate the target audience

In medicine, effective vaccines, due to their immunizing effects, serve as a shield when a pathogen attacks. Likewise, in an application of the ancient influencing tactic of anticipation (*prolepsis*), you can paint a scenario of a situation that bears the risk of being detrimental to yourself and attribute its gestation to certain malefactors, thus priming your target audience for its occurrence and forestalling the event or at least mitigating its negative effects, such as reputation damage.

For example, a government may announce that its foes plan a heinous act of sabotage (such as blowing up a nuclear station in a war zone) and thus want to provoke a desired reaction. If this is what the opponents actually planned to do, the prolepsis might prompt them to refrain from the act. Alternatively, if the event actually occurs, the recipients of the initial inoculating message, due to the mental priming effect, are likely to automatically attribute it to the action of the foes who had previously been called out.

In the 2024 US presidential election influencers leaning towards the Democratic Party, including liberal mainstream media such as CNN and the BBC, alleged before the election that the Republican Party devised an elaborate strategy for claiming election fraud in case the vote counting showed that it had lost. The effect of such an anticipatory move is that if subsequently Republicans cry foul, the audience, due to the priming, is likely to discredit their claims of election fraud across the board in a wholesale manner, not even looking at specific evidence, since it probably will categorize criticism of the election as a premeditated attempt at manipulation.

In a further refinement of the strategy, the Machiavellians stress that false claims alleging election fraud started even *before* the election. In this case, the mentally vaccinated audience will react with boredom to fresh fraud allegations after the allegations, thinking to themselves: *"Here the Republicans go again."*

When the US interferes in the elections of other countries, it adopts a radically different approach, though. There, preemption does not consist in warning the public against *claims* of alleged election fraud but in foretelling actual election fraud to be committed by the incumbent government. Once opposition groups have lost an election, they are routinely encouraged to cry foul and reject the popular verdict even if they lack evidence for their claims. All along, their grievances are broadcast to a global audience with the help of US media and finance power.

2. Poison the ecosystem that issues fraud allegations

The manipulative tactic and fallacy known as *"poisoning the well"* derives its name from the practice of literally putting toxic substances into water sources to destroy an enemy's strength at source. In rhetoric, the tactic involves discrediting the credibility of the very source from which an undesirable argument springs before the actual argument is made, so that there is no need to deal with the opponent's actual reasoning and evidence at all. Furthermore, *abusive* attacks ad hominem (on the person) here are understood as attempts made at discrediting opponents, too, but not by sowing doubts about their credibility beforehand, but by insulting their personal characteristics in the course of the actual debate. *Circumstantial* ad hominem attacks again attack the person, in this instance focusing on his special interests. In our case, the source of information is contaminated and its conveyors slandered in an ecosystemic fashion, crossing even national boundaries.

To start with, liberal mainstream media, such as the BBC, explicitly or implicitly convey the impression that allegations related to election fraud are issued by deplorable, far-right and partisan individuals and groups with vested interests, supporting the Republican Party. Such media outlets also claim that these actors – who are all lumped together into an *"othered"* outgroup – are using *"fringe message boards"* and live in an information bubble and echo chamber. In addition, they are said to be well-known for having lied before, such as by spreading unfounded *"conspiracy theories."* Incidentally, journalists who are using ill-defined labels such as many of the constructs mentioned above are committing the fallacy of unnecessary vagueness.

The liberal information warriors even highlight that the fraud-related information is *"crowd-sourced"* – examples being the operation of *"True The Vote,"* which collects evidence of voting irregularities, and a message-board community set up by the billionaire Elon Musk on X serving the same purpose. In the given context, the reference to crowd sourcing carries the negative undertone of deliberate collective attempts at manipulation. In cases of more aggressive slandering, the crowd-sourcing vehicles are described as rumor depositories containing vague, anonymous and *"bad"* information, even though the collection of evidence related to election fraud is a laudable endeavor.

Trump's win is a victory for the non-brainwashed Americans

Rather ingeniously, due to the negative initial framing of the informants, a liberal journalist may deem himself entitled to refuse listening to any subsequent defense from the slandered individuals and groups, since such rebuttals by the hamstrung libel victim, too, can be said to emanate from an allegedly contaminated source.

Importantly, the liberal influencers are adopting a holistic multi-method approach. They target the entire self-constructed information ecosystem, not only discrediting the information sources themselves, but also putting out system-wide *"red herrings,"* a tactic used to divert attention by directing focus on a side-issue. As happened so often in the past, liberal mainstream media in the US were quick to blame Russia, too, for meddling in the US election, this time alleging that Russian agents deliberately investigated and spread allegations of voter fraud to destabilize America. Curiously, even this article, irrespective of its line of reasoning and the evidence offered – due to its topic and publisher, might be framed as an attempt at undermining trust in the US electoral system and thus be rejected, even before it has been read! Like in many cases in the past, the accusers of Russia failed to provide any evidence for their exotic claims. While pointing the finger at others, US information warriors are not worried by the fact that the *"leader of the free world"* not only actively interfered in the elections elsewhere, but on many occasions even was complicit in instigating the removal of rightful foreign leaders, such as the democratically elected president of Ukraine during the Maidan unrest.

It needs to be stressed that both poisoning the well, launching ad hominem attacks and putting out red herrings are considered fallacies in a debate. It does not matter who says something, but what he says related to the issue under scrutiny. Even someone found to have lied frequently in the past may say the truth and construct a valid argument on another occasion (although a healthy dose of skepticism might at times be warranted when assessing the credibility of his testimony). An attempt to preclude debate altogether by attacking the person rather than his argument goes against the relevance criterion and is therefore not admissible. In this context, it is quite natural that election fraud allegations tend to be issued by the affected party in a process that forms an integral part of the democratic system of checks and balances. In a court setting, you would also expect damning testimony against the suspect being summoned by the prosecutor and the victim's lawyer that from the defendant, who is unlikely to be eager to incriminate himself. Likewise, diverting attention from the issue at hand is a sign of a defective argument, since the tactic aims at hiding one's argumentative weaknesses.

Again, it is instructive to compare and contrast the information tactics adopted by liberal media outlets in the US with their conduct elsewhere. When they claim that such voting irregularities occurred in foreign countries, where they intend to change the government, they routinely fail to mention that the emitter is a partisan, financed by foreign powers (a *"foreign agent"* in US speak). Instead, it is said that the allegations originate from independent groups. In doing so, the liberal influencers also commit the fallacy of special pleading, described as the inconsistency of applying a different, usually more positive standards, to oneself or to the object one wants to portray in a good light, coupled with loaded language, all constituting a sign of partiality and unfairness. Whereas the informers in the US are denigrated as *"warped peddlers of conspiracy theories"* or lumped together as an amorphous *"crowd"* or *"mob,"* in the foreign case, they are usually favorably called *"courageous members of a vibrant civil society."* Moreover, when liberal news outlets

such as the BBC want to highlight challenges with respect to official election results in certain foreign countries, they explicitly call on viewers and readers to submit evidence confirming such election fraud – contrasting with the negative framing of such crowd-sourced information in the US.

3. Frontally assault fraud allegations in ostensibly scientific manner

To impress their audience, liberal influencers in the US often try to hide themselves behind a smoke screen of purported scientific objectivity in an attempt to contrast themselves to warped, science-denying conspiracy theorists.

First, the information warriors appeal to authority, in order to sway their target audience – an approach colloquially known as *"name dropping."* In particular, they are referring to people or groups with a professional *"halo"* such as a *"voting rights expert."* In case such an appeal serves the purpose of replacing a valid argument, such a practice constitutes a fallacy. If the authority is cited as a source of evidence, this tactic can be criticized if the informant is not really knowledgeable and objective. In the above example, the title of *"voting rights expert"* appears dubious, since you will hardly find a degree course in voting rights, for example. Most likely, the title is self-styled as an impression-management technique. It should also be remembered that a balanced approach requires the reference to different individuals or groups standing on different sides. Moreover, liberal media outlets routinely dismiss vote fraud allegations by citing election officials, who are also people in authority with a special halo. Yet the officials' assertions to the contrary and descriptions of the steps taken to safeguard the integrity of the election alone do not make fraud allegations invalid.

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As another example of hiding behind a veneer of scientific objectivity, the political influencers usually claim that they are engaging in extensive *"fact-checking."* For example, when analyzing Elon Musk's claim of election manipulation, the BBC mentioned that it tried to find the source of some data used by the Tesla chief, but could not find it, implying that the billionaire's claim is unsubstantiated and thus invalid. However, this line of reason commits the fallacy of an appeal to ignorance or an argument ex silentio (from silence). The argument can be spelled out as follows: Since there is no evidence contradicting the BBC's claim that election fraud allegations are wrong, the BBC is right. Worse, the challenge related to the alleged lack of evidence is to some extent the result of the unprofessional behavior of the BBC journalist in charge of fact checking. Instead of trying to find the specific data source somewhere on the Internet, he should just have first contacted the person who published the data and ask for his source. For balance, it needs to be stressed, though, that it would have been helpful if this individual had indicated the source himself. Incidentally, the BBC's thin veneer of objectivity is pierced by the use of the expression *"far-fetched claim,"* since it contains a question-begging epithet, which, in circular and tautological fashion, states what needs to be proven, that is, that Musk's claims are outlandish. When faced with a large quantity of alleged voting irregularities, the BBC claimed that their sheer volume makes it almost impossible to check them. This type of surrender is clearly an unscientific posture, since the large quantity of fraud allegations should at least elicit healthy skepticism as to the integrity of the election and make the journalist curious to examine as many cases as possible. Claiming that *all* such cases instead of a sufficiently large number must be examined is an instance of the fallacy of perfectionism, as well as a simplified and bifurcated all-or-nothing approach, which would make most scientific enterprise, which usually relies on sampling, impossible.

Oftentimes, liberal information warriors frame their opponent's views negatively and distort them, leave out key contextual information and make copious use of innuendo, while intentionally leaving the obvious damning and twisted conclusions unspoken to create an aura of objectivity and a means of *"rationalizing,"* which entails presenting certain reasons as a cover for one's true, less respectable motives. The tactic of representing the views of an opponent in a false way to make it easier to attack them, called *"straw man,"* is deemed inadmissible by the standards of sound reasoning. As an example of manipulative contextual framing and the use of misleading suggestions as a surrogate for valid reasoning, Donald Trump's perfectly reasonable stance that he would accept the results of the 2024 US presidential vote if it resulted from a *"fair and legal and good election"* was portrayed as a pretext for refusing to concede defeat irrespective of the quality of the election.

As a result of the fact-checking process, liberal influencers routinely claiming that someone alleging election fraud succumbed to denialism and made his statement *"without evidence."* It should be noted that the word *"denial"* implies that a truth has been rejected. Without further evidence provided for the allegedly true version, such a word is a sign of a defective argument. The allegations are also often called *"baseless," "unfounded"* and *"debunked."* In this [context](), derogatory terms such a *"rumor," "misleading allegations"* and *"lies"* are frequently used. For example, the expression *"without evidence"* is repeated like a veritable mantra when liberal informational warriors comment on claims that the 2020 US presidential election was stolen. As evidence, they stress that court cases alleging election fraud have been dismissed. However, in so doing they commit the fallacy of omitting key facts that can be used as counter evidence, leaving the audience with the impression that all key facts have been presented. By failing to mention the opponent's strongest points, they engage in lopsided thinking and violate the rebuttal principle, which entails marshalling the strongest counter arguments in a fictious cross-examination and refuting them – a favorite practice perfected by the leading medieval Scholastic thinker Thomas Aquinas. As regards this rejection of looking at things from an opponent's perspective and the concomitant preference for an echo chamber populated by like-minded people instead, we are reminded of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's dictum published in his book *Morgenröte* (Dawn of Day) that *"the surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently."*

In our case, liberal influencers in the US usually do not mention that in many cases, after certain types of election fraud have been committed, it is impossible subsequently to detect it. In this regard, the widespread use of postal voting is a particular cause for concern, since it opens the floodgates for fraud, whereby fake ballot papers are produced, distributed and tampered. This is not a far-fetched claim.

The German constitutional court rule that the 2021 federal parliament election needed to be partially repeated in Berlin because of voting irregularities such as election officers *photocopying* ballot paper. Worse, the multiple transgressions were deemed by the judges to be just the *"tip of the iceberg."* In the German case, the photocopies were used for in-person voting, but one can easily imagine producing and distributing such fake ballots for mail-in voting, too. Furthermore, in the case of postal voting, in many cases it is easier to rig votes than at the ballot box. For example, nurses might be able to easily change the ballots of a helpless patient in the hospital or discard them altogether. In such cases, recounting the votes in the context of a legal trial will not reveal the fraud. In addition, in the case of postal voting, undue influence can be exerted on voters. Obviously, when husband and wife are sitting at the kitchen table and the wife is coerced by the husband to vote in a certain way against her will, the result of the vote cannot be considered to be fair.

As another example of ostensibly scientific objectivity, liberal information warriors tend to frequently refer to surveys as evidence. Yet they often do not mention their respective sample size and the sampling procedure (which, if unscientific, might render the results invalid), the type of questions asked (the framing of questions can help to elicit desired responses) and confidence intervals for all the statistics presented. Furthermore, the liberal influencers often use extreme and vivid examples, which are outliers and marginal cases, in an attempt to prove their points.

An example is a fake post on X by someone who calls himself a Canadian and claims that he wants to take part in the US election (which is illegal), holding a ballot from Florida (about a day's drive from Canada) in his hands. Incidentally, when analyzing such fakes, one must always consider the possibility that they have been planted by the very group who

subsequently attack them – similar to the tactic of placing a violent provocateur into a crowd of demonstrators to subsequently discredit the protest due to the ensuing violence.

Even if the liberal influencers acknowledge that the vivid cases of election fraud are true, they try to neutralize their effect by claiming that these so-called *"incidents"* are isolated, common in all elections and blown out of proportion by extremists trying to *"punch holes"* with anecdotes - the typical trivializing *"bad apple strategy."* This line or reasoning usually resonates very well, especially when one considers that there were 150 million voters in the 2020 US presidential election, compared to which those *"isolated"* cases appear to be marginal. However, this type of framing involves the use of a wrong comparative anchor, since presidential elections in America tend to be decided in a few swing states where voting behavior is frequently changing. Especially in the 2024 election where pre-election polls essentially showed a tie, the number of votes that would tip the balance was projected to be even smaller than usual, and some commentators believed that only about 50,000 votes would make the difference. In this context, using 150 million as a comparative frame is a gross distortion, while the potential reference to less competitive previous elections would constitute a false analogy. Furthermore, when relying on samples that are too small and unrepresentative and on outliers, the liberal influencers who challenge election fraud claims commit the fallacy of making hasty generalizations, jumping to conclusions that are not warranted given the scarce evidence.

The double standards applied by US liberals become glaringly obvious when one considers their uncritical coverage of favored election critics in certain other countries, who, due to the protective umbrella provided by the *"leader of the free world,"* often do not even try at least to appear to be scientific when challenging election results. In the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia, a former member state of the Soviet Union, President Salome Zurabishvili claimed that the election results were the outcome of a *"'Russian special operation'"* and that the election had been rigged. When asked for proof of Russian interference, she made the following callous statement: *"We don't have hard evidence, but the obvious links that the ruling party maintains with Moscow have been confirmed by numerous reports."* When an official investigation into the allegation of election fraud was launched and the prosecutor summoned her, she outrightly refused to give testimony. Polish President Andrzej Duda commented on alleged Russian interference in Georgia as follows: *"There is no clear evidence of this, but, let's say, in some sense (pro-Russian forces were involved)."* Unlike the situation in the US where election fraud allegations were dismissed due to alleged lack of evidence (even though such evidence was offered), in Georgia, key actors even did not find it necessary to offer any evidence for their claims, but nevertheless were not criticized by the US liberal mainstream media for their unscientific approach.

4. Vividly paint the consequences of extreme allegations

Clever liberal information warriors go one step further, though. After having presented their pseudo-scientific analyses, they jump to the conclusion that claims of election fraud, broadcast in an *"ecosystem of distrust,"* will fuel extremist riots by domestic terrorists (elsewhere such alleged riots are labeled as legitimate protests and the *"birth pangs"* of democracy), undermine trust in democracy and eventually utterly destroy the American political system, which is portrayed as the most stable system of government in the world.

Logicians call this type of manipulation the domino fallacy or slippery slope. The idea is that one event inevitably will unleash a chain of subsequent events or that taking one step will cause one to glide down a slope. The consequences can be compared to the results portrayed in the famous domino effect described by Benjamin Franklin, who mused that for want of but a single horse-shoe nail, an entire kingdom was lost.

Among other things, this tactic has been used successfully in the psychological warfare against Russia in the hybrid conflict in Ukraine to justify extensive military support (euphemistically called *"security aid"*) for the Kiev-based government by self-appointed Western allies especially after the start of Russia's special military operation. In particular, the Western war hawks argued that the action taken by Russia is just the thin edge of the wedge and, if left unchecked, it will subsequently attack other countries, too, such as the Baltic states, resulting in a world war conducted with nuclear weapons that will eventually destroy the planet. The same propaganda trick was used to great effect in the US to justify the Vietnam war.

The domino fallacy is inadmissible in a debate, though, since according to the definition of this tactic, it draws far-fetched conclusions based on imagined causal links, even though the individual causal steps are different and therefore would need to be analyzed separately to reach a valid conclusion. In the above case, for example, there is a significant difference between launching a military operation against a country that is not part of a military block as compared to a member of NATO. Even if such an attack were to happen, it would not automatically lead to the destruction of the earth.

The conclusion that allegations of election fraud in the US can endanger the entire political system needs to be rejected, since the individual causal steps are different, but not analyzed separately. Moreover, the argument risks being reductionist, attributing an outcome to a single factor, while relying on an original cause that appears to be too far removed from the final predicted outcome in the causal chain of events. In contrast, a better argument would be to assert that an active society trying to uncover election fraud will actually *strengthen* a democratic system, since it helps to eliminate bad behavior. Or would the liberal information warrior suggest that is better not to uncover election fraud?

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The vivid portrayal of the alleged dire consequences of revealing voting irregularities also relies on another fallacy, that is, the appeal to emotions, especially fear. The aim of this tactic is to *"play to the gallery,"* clouding the uncritical audience's slipshod thinking by pushing its buttons to trigger powerful passions, for example. Since such appeals *"ad populum"* (to the people) do not rely on valid reasoning, this fallacy again is inadmissible in a debate. Applied to our case, the fear of a breakdown of the US political system and ensuing chaos is bound to be a highly unsettling prospect for many law-abiding American citizens. Fear associated with predicted dire consequences is further stoked by emotionally laden metaphors such a *"whirlwind,"* *"flood"* and *"deluge"* of disinformation, since all these natural phenomena tend to wreak havoc on communities. Furthermore, reference to the Capitol protests on January 6, 2021, and election officials receiving death threats from Trump supporters are bound to instill the audience with even greater fear.

Again, the comparison with the behavior of US information warrior in certain other countries is enlightening. There, opposition groups are routinely encouraged to challenge election results and topple the government with no mentioning

of the dire consequences that are bound to ensue. In a comparable context, the removal of the government in Kiev after the Maidan unrest predictably accelerated a collision course with Russia.

5. Seal the protective shield

What do the liberal information warriors do when, after climbing the four rungs of the information power ladder, rebuttals with new evidence are made by their opponents, forcing the propagandists to admit that the fresh election fraud allegations are convincing on a *prima facie* level or worse, that election fraud has actually happened and proven beyond doubt? There is no reason for the influencers to worry – after all, sophists, since ancient times, have mastered the art of rhetorically transforming a black cat into a white feline.

Friedrich Nietzsche is quoted as saying that *"those who disagree with me when I say that mankind is corrupt prove that they are already corrupted."* The crowning practice of the sophistic trade and *"nuclear option,"* a veritable panacea for victory in debates with uncritical opponents unschooled in the art of eristic dialectics, is the use of self-sealing arguments. Those are claims that are impossible to refute, since every attempt at rebuttal is taken as *"evidence"* for the truth of the original claim. Apart from the quote at the beginning of this paragraph, a good illustration is the usual reasoning used by conspiracy theorists. For example, if you claim that an undefined deep state controls a country, any disconfirming evidence can be framed as an attempt by its shady actors to secure their survival and success.

Applied to our case, at the basic level, a liberal influencer can portray Republicans who point to election fraud as unsophisticated and dumb and then interpret any of their subsequent rebuttals of his attacks as further signs of their limited cognitive faculties. Moreover, the information warriors can build on their initial framing of Republicans as conspiracy theorists and classify fresh evidence of election fraud as further proof of their being warped in conspiracy theories. One of the most powerful uses of sealing arguments is even more sophisticated, though.

When election fraud has actually been proven beyond doubt, you have to move to a higher, systemic level. More specifically, the liberal influencers can claim that the detection of fraud actually confirms the *soundness* of the electoral process, since it effectively picked up a manipulation case. In Orwellian Newspeak, which promotes Doublethink (whereby two contradictory statements are deemed to be both true, even though this is logically impossible), fraud is honesty and integrity in the same way that war is peace, freedom is slavery and ignorance is strength.

Obviously, the argument related to the soundness of the process is defective, since it is unknown how many fraud cases have *not* been detected. Especially in view of the *"tip of the iceberg"* theory used by the German constitutional court in the case of the 2021 federal parliamentary elections in the country of the poets and thinkers, there might be significantly more fraud cases, which at the given point of time are still invisible.

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Moreover, the information warriors who use this self-sealing line of reasoning risk committing the fallacy of the continuum, ignoring the fact that small changes in one direction can eventually lead to the crossing of a tipping point after which qualitative transformation occurs. It is difficult to determine exactly when precisely it its correct to assert that

a man has a beard as opposed to not having one, but after adding enough single hairs, each of which seems to be insignificant, people will finally concur that there is a beard.

Applied to our case, we might say that if there is a sufficient number of confirmed election fraud cases, each of which might appear to be insignificant if considered in isolation, eventually an inflection point will be reached. At this critical juncture, one has to conclude that the entire electoral organism is sick, among other things, because it failed to prevent mass-scale manipulation, possibly due to inherent structural design faults. At the very least, even if the system were essentially sound, a sufficient number of cases would prompt a court to declare an election invalid and order a fresh election as happened in Berlin.

The line of reasoning related to the integrity of the electoral system can also be seen as an example of the fallacy of begging the question or circularity, since it could be restated in the form of the following *"vicious"* argument: The election system is fair. How do we know? Because cases of manipulation are detected correctly. How do we know *all* such cases are detected correctly? Because the election system is fair.

Let us once again compare the above situation with the conduct of US experts in psychological warfare in other countries, where they aim for so-called regime change. There, all attempts made to dispel doubts about the validity of an election based on sound evidence are used as further evidence of the purported manipulative nature of a rogue regime that according to the story line is increasingly *"authoritarian"* and *"repressive."*

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To conclude, the most effective way of making a magician powerless is to uncover and divulge his tricks. My Five-Rung Information Power Ladder can serve as a consciousness-raising checklist to systematically reveal wrong claims aiming at sealing an election, which might be stolen, and to devise powerful strategies to counter such manipulative interventions. If the new paradigm is used systematically together with other tools promoting critical thinking, we might finally reach a stage of enlightened democracy. Then, when looking at the end results, we may exclaim with Shakespeare that all is well that ends well, even – to deliberately use the fallacy of equivocation – if somebody persistently tried to poison the well!