

## **American Conservatives and Democratic Demise: How power-seeking in American politics has harmed democracy and driven it towards authoritarianism**

A society which is a free democratic-market system receives feedback within its public and private spontaneous orders, with competitive and cooperative relationships that interact within the system in these orders. The Soviet economy was set up as a hierarchy of nested dictatorships. In between these two include rent-seeking-driven economies.

An authoritarian government is non-responsive and so does not evolve as a democracy does. Complete authoritarianism of the type seen in planned economies and totalitarian systems are power-seeking, rather than rent-seeking or profit-seeking (See Nell, 2011). When democracies decay and authoritarianism is on the rise however, rent-seeking and power-seeking may compete, usually rent-seeking comes first and then power-seeking becomes the dominant force. Democracies in decay may move through rent-seeking toward power-seeking, and though the politicians begin to put power first, they may use the power in order to extract rents primarily, making rent-seeking also a powerful force during the transition. I will study this process here to better understand democratic decay and the rise of authoritarian systems.

### **Background and Context**

Sovietologists, primarily historians by academic field, long described shortages in socialist economies such as the Soviet Union as endemic to national economic planning (see e.g., Janos Kornai, 1980; Joseph Berliner, 1957; Nove, 1986), whereas mainstream and Austrian school economists at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union had a different theory (see e.g., Boettke, 1993; Anderson and Boettke, 1997; Shleifer and Vishny, 1992).

These economists questioned the Sovietologists' description of the Soviet Union as a planned economy and instead modelled the Soviet system as a rent-seeking economy. In their models, the system was not different in kind from a market system, although it was clearly more heavily regulated. They argue that shortages resulted from rent-seeking activity, which Soviet managers were able to engage in because of the structure of the system. According to this theory, the managers of Soviet enterprises could lobby ministers for lower prices (in order to induce shortages) or lower output. The shortages would in turn allow these managers to obtain side payments for the goods they produced. However, the rent-seeking models depend upon a decentralisation of supply and price choices that did not exist in the Soviet Union (see Nell, 2011 for a close study). This is not allowed in a planned economy, nor, I will argue, in other kinds of authoritarian states, if they are driven by power-seeking rather than rent-seeking.

As shown in Nell (2011), the Soviet economy was based upon power-seeking not rent-seeking. Power-seeking in this context should be distinguished from the power-seeking of the dictator as described for example by Wintrobe (1998). Here, power-seeking is a model of the driving force of the economy - indeed, the society as a whole. Agents in a power-seeking society ascend the hierarchy driven by the desire for a more powerful position. The incentive is power, resources, and prestige. Resources, of course, implies that rent-seeking may be part of the incentive - the drive to act - but it is not the primary driving force as it is in a rent-seeking economy. As in socialist planned economies, resources will be more important for some in any authoritarian society, while for others it will be prestige, protection from danger, or closer ties to the dictator (or authoritarian leader). This will also depend upon the power and cruelty of the dictator or leader, and the relationship between the two, including if the leader has something to 'hold over' the official. In a planned or command economy it is the ascension of the hierarchy that drives actors, whereas in other authoritarian states it may be less ascension and more a matter of treading water, retaining power, but this is still a power-seeking society.

Israel Kirzner (2000) describes competition as the 'driving force of the market'. Consumers and producers are sovereign in a market economy. Competition and entrepreneurial entry maintain that profit-seeking drive, and innovation also results, producing an efficient economy that responds to demand with appropriate supply. In a virtuous cycle, profit-seeking results in competition, which tends to drive down monopolistic profits and lead to new market entrants and innovation. In speaking of competition as "the driving force of the market" even where monopolies exist, Kirzner argues that "the only situation in which competition can be said to be absent is one where markets do not operate. Such a situation presumes, as in the centrally planned economy, the existence of institutional prohibitions on market exchanges" (Kirzner, 2000, p. 228). As I argue in Nell (2011):

Although competition must operate in any economy in which it is not banned, it may not be the sole driving force. The apparent dichotomy between plan and market may be supplemented by the mixed economy, which has rent-seeking as a second driving force. Nevertheless, this rent-seeking takes the form of lobbying for institutional constraints to prohibit market exchanges in the particular market in which those actors are competing, so the mixed economy is a blending of the same two forces. A pure third system can be theorized: the pure rent-seeking society.

In that paper, I make the case that the command economy did not allow for rent-seeking due to the constraints of the hierarchical command system, and the punishments for violating the roles each manager, minister, and planner were given. I then argue that when these broke down during Glasnost and Perestroika, the underlying incentives for a rent-seeking society were unleashed and Russia became much more like the theorized rent-seeking society. Can we see the reverse? What would it take for a democracy such as the United States to become a rent-seeking society? And is it headed there?

## **Rent-Seeking and Power-Seeking in America**

Certainly there has been a lot of rent-seeking throughout the history of the nation. However, it has tended to be kept in check by Kirzner's profit-seeking virtuous cycle, and the constraints on it via the institutions which prevent government officials from using their positions entirely to extract rents. In order for this balance, which has kept the United States mostly profit-driven, something would have to change. I argue here that this something is actually an increase in power-seeking. The drive toward rent-seeking remained similar for many decades, in fact similar to the level it had always been, until relatively recently<sup>1</sup>, at the same time in recent years some elected officials have given up on responding to voters and, along with rent-seeking, have been driven by power-seeking. I do not think that this is a coincidence. Of course elected officials always seek power, but a power-seeking society is one in which government officials (and in command economies all economic actors as well) are driven by power-seeking rather than seeking power in order to serve constituents, at least in part. As a result of this new focus among many politicians, the strength of the institutions which have protected the profit-seeking economy, and which constitute a democratic society, diminish. This opens the door for a purely rent-seeking economy of the type seen in post-Soviet Russia, and opens the door for authoritarian rule.

As rent-seeking has increased in recent years, concentrating the economy, which in turn makes rent-seeking easier (in a vicious cycle), this gives politicians something other than the voters to serve.<sup>2</sup> When elected officials and candidates for office focus primarily on wealthy interest groups, they begin to fashion their arguments to voters around justifications for doing the will of the interest groups. They seek power with less regard for serving the voters. This opens the door for mere power-seeking, rather than acting as servants for the people. If they become accustomed to lying to the voters, it also opens the door for the tactics used by demagogues and authoritarians, which are closely tied to power-seeking.

While profit-seeking produces material wealth, and often prestige in a market economy, and rent-seeking produces wealth in a rent-seeking economy, it is power-seeking that drives agents in an authoritarian economy, and as I argue here, arguably can turn a democracy into an authoritarian state. In Nell (2011), I argue that rent-seeking can centralise a free market economy, and here I argue that, perhaps with rent-seeking as one incentive, putting power-seeking even above rent-seeking, can transform that (somewhat centralised but still democratic) economic and political system into an authoritarian system.

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<sup>1</sup> "Something for Nothing? How Growing Rent-seeking is at the Heart of America's Economic Troubles", Lachlan Carey, Amn Nasir  
May 28, 2019, available at:  
<https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/something-nothing-how-growing-rent-seeking-heart-americas-economic-troubles>  
see also: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF00239349>

<sup>2</sup> "The latest literature suggests five potential reasons why we might see a greater degree of declining competition, increasing markups, and a rising profit share in the United States than Europe: 1) increased returns to scale and the rise of so-called 'superstar firms'; 2) the proliferation of ways in which companies can evade anti-trust legislation; 3) the relative increase in firms' bargaining power within labor markets; and finally, 4) the rise of 'shareholder capitalism'; and 5) heightened political rent-seeking and regulatory capture. ... Political rent-seeking and regulatory capture is an issue that cuts across each of these explanations."  
"Something for Nothing? How Growing Rent-seeking is at the Heart of America's Economic Troubles", Lachlan Carey, Amn Nasir, May 28, 2019, available at: <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/something-nothing-how-growing-rent-seeking-heart-americas-economic-troubles>

Nove (1986) describes the way that carrots and sticks are used to maintain hierarchy in an authoritarian state, in the case a planned economy (p. 325):

[Communist] party officials believe in discipline, obedience, and hierarchy, because these qualities plainly benefit them and their careers, as well as being (in their view) essential in the running of a vast country and its economy. Their major role in appointments ensures that the managerial strata feel primarily responsible to them.

Gorbachev fought against many of the movements to introduce major reforms. There is some popular confusion around this point, which is confounded by the limitations on freedom of the press during Gorbachev's tenure. Nevertheless, finally, it was impossible to stop their introduction. One interesting source is the 1989 five part series by Juris Podnieks originally titled "Hello, Can You Hear Us?" which includes an interview with future-president Boris Yeltsin. His position was extremely tenuous at that time; after calling for the elimination of special privileges for top Party members he was removed from his position as Moscow Party Secretary and from the Politburo. It was announced that he was 'not elected to the Supreme Soviet', and he lost his seat there, which he only recovered when, despite protest from Gorbachev, a liberal law professor gave up his own seat to Yeltsin (see also Parks, 1989). Gorbachev also ordered the army to suppress popular protests in the non-Russian Soviet states, as Yeltsin later did in Chechnya. Gorbachev had reduced coercion and punishments, in large part by lessening the power of the Communist Party over the economic system, and this led to greater demands for freedom and monetary rewards. This in turn put additional pressure on the system, leading it toward collapse. Although suppression and oppression were used in ways that seem severe to free democratic societies (suppression of protests etc), the vast majority of the punishments used in the command system were gone, leading the people to demand ever-more freedoms, and leading inevitably to collapse of the rigid hierarchies and controls of the system (as explained in Nell, 2011).

This feeling of obedience to the party, party leader, or dictator is an essential part of a completely power-seeking driven society, and arguably is also part of what creates such a society as part of a feedback cycle. Power is by nature hierarchical - unless it is shared equally, in which case it is not a driving force. The more unequal the power structure, the more people will seek power; and the more power-seeking drives the system, the more unequal the power sharing will be. Thus when power-seeking is a driving force those seeking power will give allegiance to the most powerful. In a free market democracy this would be a demagogue.

To this end, all can fall. Supporters and politicians will want to prove their obedience to the party leader, the demagogue. This works to the advantage of the party and the leader of course. They can lie and use disinformation, denying anything that makes them look bad, because supporters will want to prove their total obedience by accepting whatever they say - however outrageous, illogical, or provably false - so this may work as feedback pushing the party further in this direction, and the supporters further away from logic, truth, and fact. For the authoritarian leader or demagogue and his party, truth becomes the offender, free media the first enemy. So long as democratic institutions still exist and are free - not under

the control of the leader or party, but acting independently and based upon laws and norms, and evidence from courts, words and actions of the leader (e.g., pardons), common sense, history, facts, when the overwhelming nature of the obvious goes against the party line - as in Soviet Russia and as during the Big Lie of Trump's "stolen election" - the truth offends, and supporters will find and cling to any story, however outrageous, to dismiss the obvious and stand with their leader and party. Because they do it to show allegiance, it does not matter if their stories make sense, or even if they contradict each other. Most of the time supporters are not even listening for content - they are just waiting for a few dog whistles and the occasional honest line, which supports the caste system in some way, or violence, or about the demagogue being above the law - authoritarianism.

It is more a matter of faith and of expressing their allegiance to the 'tribe' and their values, or "vice-signalling" rather than virtue-signalling, then it is about logic or facts. "We will make liberals cry again" Don Jr liked to say on the campaign trail in 2020. And if the demagogue can do no wrong, then any lie that can be used to excuse away what would be a wrong is most welcomed. And while they accuse the other side of doing something wrong - be it corruption, hypocrisy, vice - the demagogue can do the same exact thing or a thing clearly one million times worse - or a million examples of the same thing - and it won't matter in the least to his supporters. They will find a way to call what the opponent did worse (it also does not matter if was completely fabricated or just exaggerated, in case it is tiny compared to what the demagogue did). The double standard is expected and part of the privilege that they are fighting for. A true supporter will ignore all the faults of the demagogue and expect never to be held accountable - rich white Christian men should be above the law and should never have to explain themselves or made to feel shame or look bad - so of course there is a double standard in which the "liberal" who supports equal rights instead of hierarchy should be held accountable for violating these democratic laws and norms - they believe in them, after all. But a conservative white man should be able to do whatever he wants!

Truth can be painful to hear especially from one who previously showed support for the party or leader, and so any mention of such truths must be seen as a crime to be punished. One must be excommunicated for the smallest admission of a fact that goes against the party line or the leader, because the whole house of cards could fall apart so easily and so completely. Conversely, continuing to lie despite obvious evidence proves how deeply you are committed to the party and the leader, and so is often rewarded.

"Fight" to "protect Americans" - or rather to protect a certain "way of life", or return to certain values - to the pre-civil rights era. And he can say very silly things like he is the first one to say "I love you" or "I will fight for you"

"If we cut our testing n half we would cut our cases in half"

and of course the metal cognitive test, "Person, Woman, Man, Camera, TV"

Refusing to accept a peaceful transfer of power & being very clear that he would only accept the election results if he wins - that is the living embodiment of Strongman authoritarian, that is "fighting for you", you the people who think they will be on top of the caste hierarchy and want the feeling of that power over others. The idea and feeling that comes with the "strength", the "fight", which means it may require cheating, pushing, lots of dirty tricks

that allow votes of minority groups to get thrown or exclude people from the election rolls - whatever it takes to win, which may a lot of these things, given how unpopular the policies they passed were and how little else they had to offer.

He does not want to have shame, others don't want to feel shame or feel bad, about their racism etc -- Trump allows them to deny it & turn back on people -- they want privilege & they don't want to fear covid, they don't want to fear being called out as racist... it is easier to be or stay a villain than become self-aware ... are they ready to throw out democracy for that>>>

If someone other than a conservative by definition it is a fraud because only the rich white conservative *can* win, by this ideology. His supporters want to hear this - this is what it means to them that he is a fighter. He tells the states where he is ahead they should stop the count, but i states where he losing he wants them to keep counting and even to "find" more votes, as asked them to do in Georgia. When they say things like "actually we won it, it's just about counting the votes fairly" - they mean that some people's votes should be worth more than others. It is only fair if he wins. He says it would be "a disgrace" if he lost to Biden, although I think that most our allies would say the opposite, that *Trump* is the disgrace. And arguably, despite how many American founders were supportive of the caste system, of slavery and limits on who could vote, I think the majority of founders actually did want to see an expansion of who would have rights, which is why they wrote the Constitution as they did, and the Bill of Rights to clarify that, and over time did keep spreading the rights to more and more of the population,

As a narcissist, he likely cannot feel shame but he does care about being respected<sup>3</sup>, and so when he fails to gain respect it hurts him and fights back with whatever pressure and crimes, and deflection

"if he doesn't come through for us" - about Pence. Must always be one hundred percent on board, or immediately be excommunicated, or in this case even executed.

"I think I treat people well, unless they don't treat me well, in which case you got to war" (Unprecedented film - may be from something else...)

"stop the steal" - don't let the people give up on our system of privilege.

"every valid vote" - every white conservative vote.

The voter restrictions, election restrictions aimed at minorities, put in place to "protect future election" show this – there have been bills that would actually protect the integrity of elections - Democrats introduced them but Republicans blocked them (using the Filibuster, known for being used to prevent civil rights advances, historically, yet again) Biden, any democrat (Democrat, and democrat) and liberal elected official is "illegitimate" – "our democracy, our president", the "our" being the privileged white – and he says he is

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Trump, as both a psychiatrist and a member of the Trump family - the daughter of Donald Trump's brother Fred Trump Jr. - who took his own life after the treatment his father gave him, disappointed at some of life choices especially being the namesake and so expected representative of the family, which Donald Trump values as a brand. Any deviation from the brand is punished by Donald as the

fighting for them, and will save their privilege, they position in the hierarchy, and they want it, with anger and a willingness to give everything for him and for that end. "This is our country, our house" says one protester (in Unprecedented), again meaning the conservatives, the white Christian "real" Americans.

The Georgia governor "doesn't know what the hell is happening" and the secretary of state has a head "like a rock" - because they cannot see that they should just steal the election for the white man; "they could stop it easily" - if they had the courage and smarts to just break the law and "fight" with whatever criminal tools they had - if they did not win, it's "rigged", its "fraud", because the only valid election is one in which the white conservatives win.....

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If a candidate for office seeks power by doing the will of the people, or at least promising to do so, this is simply a standard democratic activity. It can mix with rent-seeking (special interest groups may obtain favours as part of the candidates' platform), but the candidate will still offer potential voters policies that would improve their lives. The politician promises reforms or new bills that will help the people, they are voted in (or not) and then when the next election comes around they are (hopefully) held to account for whether they delivered on their promises, and if they didn't whether they at least tried to do so. But when a candidate or politician is driven by power-seeking alone (or power-seeking and rent-seeking) then they are not interested in doing (or even promising to do) anything tangible for the voters. Instead they pay allegiance to the powerful, and use tactics to win votes: using disinformation and conspiracy theories that spark fear and emotion, smearing their opponents, and tying themselves to the powerful demagogue. The actual needs and wishes of the voter are not in play - at least not in the usual sense.

""And looking back, you realize they would do anything to win.""<sup>4</sup>

A demagogue is essentially someone who is able to create a cult of personality around himself and usually uses populist rhetoric and emotion to rally a base of support for radical change. Trump followed a well-known authoritarian-demagogic path. Historians like Ruth

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<sup>4</sup> He looked away, shaking his head. I was about to ask why he hadn't questioned where the Knight newspapers or Jack Anderson had gotten their information, especially after all the documentation about Watergate and Nixon's "plumbers," ... "In 1968, George Wallace had garnered 10 million votes and we figured that, running again in 1972, he might pick up as many as 20 million votes," McGovern said. The segregationist Alabama governor had been campaigning with the slogan "Send Them a Message," and it was assumed that his votes would almost all come from Nixon's base, but on May 15, 1972, an assassination attempt left Wallace paralyzed from the waist down and he was forced to withdraw from the race. I was still wondering where McGovern was going with this when he came to a shocking supposition: "You know, Wallace went to his grave thinking Nixon's people were behind the shooting. I thought at the time, 'Well, George is a little gaga.' But now ... you have to wonder ..."

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/09/fresh-from-the-nixon-archives-more-dirty-tricks>

Ben-Ghiat could see it from the start. In January 2016, she wrote an article “Donald Trump's Cult of Personality”<sup>5</sup>, January 15, 2016

Cults of personality: the term might evoke dictators like Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Kim Jong-un today. Yet cults of personality can flourish in a variety of political contexts, as long as there is a charismatic leader and a coherent media strategy.

...Yet cults of personality go beyond private money and public influence. They are about an emotional tie that is forged between the leader and his followers. For this reason, they can be hard to grasp for those not making the connection.

This emotional tie is why logic so rarely works in discussions with Trump supporters and facts and evidence are of little use. Ben-Ghiat also captures something that many do not even understand today, but it is a perfect picture of the relationship between Trump and his supporters:

Here's the trick to cults of personality: the leader has to embody the people but also stand above them. He must appear ordinary, to allow people to relate to him. And yet he must also be seen as extraordinary, so that people will grant him permission to be the arbiter of their individual and national destiny.

For instance, they're not about likeability. Leaders with cults of personality are usually aggressive. They keep audiences on edge with their outbursts and unpredictability. They create a bond that goes beyond agreeing with ideas and policies: people simply want a part of this person.

Proper Trump supporters (not merely those who voted for him in 2016) cared little about policies, but instead they want him to “fight for them”, they see him as creating their destiny, which is an America that represents a “utopian” (to them) version of an old fashioned culturally 1950s nation, with a white Christian morality and personality.

Trump does not have the ability to muzzle the media, like Putin (although he does his best to intimidate journalists who oppose him). And he does not own television networks, like Berlusconi. And yet Trump he has been able to set agendas and influence the news cycle like no other Republican candidate - as he has also built up a large grassroots following.

Although Trump was unable to take over the media while in office, he had considerable control over the “news”, opinions and disinformation, of his own base and party. Had he succeeded in unlawfully retaining power - in addition to all his prior successful criminal behaviour as president - he may well have taken steps to control the media. He would already have revealed himself as an authoritarian, and each time he got away with breaking another law or norm he became more bold. Like every other Strongman or other autocrat, controlling the media would have to be an early step in cementing his power.

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<sup>5</sup> “Donald Trump's Cult of Personality,” Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Jan 15, 2016, Available at: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trumps-cult-of-per\\_b\\_8992650](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/donald-trumps-cult-of-per_b_8992650)

If this sounds outlandish or unrealistic, it may help to recognise that in the past democrats (small-d democrats and small-l liberals) have often underestimated the willingness of some American conservative politicians of the past century to set aside those same institutions<sup>6</sup> of democracy that conservatives claim to cherish above all else - the greatest experiment in governance and freedom<sup>7</sup>. Conservative think tanks have spilled countless bytes of digital ink - and before that miles of physical ink - describing the unique and important features of American democracy, such as the following description by the American Thinker:

Thus, by design, the machine was balanced on three main axes: separation of powers, checks and balances, and a limited government. ... In creating our democracy, the Founding Fathers were not perfect, nor did they pretend to be. ... With the aid of Providence, they took a leap of faith and devised this experimental machine we now know as the United States of America with the hope that each future generation of Americans would use this system of governance to help them advance the human condition. We are by no means perfect, but we must continue to build upon the foundation that our Founding Fathers laid for us over two hundred years ago and continue to move forward and adjust course as required.<sup>8</sup>

Donald Trump did the exact opposite: he turned his supporters against these venerated institutions, the checks and balances, the laws and norms which the founding fathers established; and he worked to undo the advances made toward a more perfect union and the improving of the human condition.

## **The Appeal of the Autocrat**

Why would such a party be popular? For one, whether aware of it or not, support may be due to wanting to retain one's place in the hierarchy. Even poor white men and women have certain advantages over black men and women - often without being conscious of this fact. They may feel resentment even about this idea, feeling that they have no advantages to speak of, with a low income or no income at all. And yet when asked outright whether they would like to be treated as blacks in their society are, they would not want it [cite 10 second video] Hence, it may be because they feel they have no advantages in society that they cling ever more to the one advantage that they recognise unconsciously. The

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<sup>6</sup> "Fresh From The Nixon Archives: More Dirty Tricks", Cari Beauchamp, September 10, 2009, available at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/09/fresh-from-the-nixon-archives-more-dirty-tricks>

<sup>7</sup> "The American experiment", Helle C. Dale, The Heritage Foundation, Jul 5, 2007. Available at: <https://www.heritage.org/political-process/commentary/the-american-experiment>

<sup>8</sup> "America: The great experiment in human governance", James Poplar, The American Thinker, April 9, 2021. available at: [https://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2021/04/america\\_the\\_great\\_experiment\\_in\\_human\\_governance.html](https://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2021/04/america_the_great_experiment_in_human_governance.html)

demagogue will always offer this kind of power, and supporters are power-seeking when they choose to back the demagogue.

When supporters give unequivocal support to a demagogue, no matter what he does, refuse to see evidence of wrong-doing, disbelieving it or dismissing it as unimportant, they are power-seeking: they give the demagogue unlimited power and hope that it returns to them a part of that power. If the demagogue accepts violence and crime, they will be able to be violent and criminal too - exerting this power over others. The people are driven by power-seeking too: a relative position of power above others, which they can achieve simply by supporting the power-seeking politicians. Supporters of Donald Trump who are aware of his acceptance of violence and criminality hope that by supporting him, so long as he retains power, they can engage in similar violence and criminality and get away with it. In the case of the Republican Party in the US, this is also represented by white supremacy, Christian Nationalism, or fascism. White Christian men are at the top of the caste. Whether supporters of the demagogue or the power-seeking party are fully cognizant that this is why they support this power-seeking movement, it is the primary driver of the movement. Even if many of them are fooled by the disinformation and conspiracy theories or enticed by rent-seeking (which at its extreme is also a form of power-seeking, e.g., a corporation given monopoly status and other preferential treatment becomes very powerful), the movement would get nowhere if the supporters were not also driven by power-seeking.

When there is a charismatic leader or demagogue, or a party with policies in place that give them immense power - as in the Soviet Union - this tends to drive others in their party to put aside the wishes of the voter and instead do as this leader desires, because they believe the leader and/or party will help them win, and winning is their primary interest, whether out of fear or material desire. In a democratic society in which a demagogue or authoritarian-leaning leader of one party, others in that party may follow that leader and disregard the policy wishes of their voters because they fear the leader or the party or simply because they never much cared about the voter (being more interested in interest group support) and now they have found a method by which they can ignore the policy wishes of voters. They may still appeal to the voter, but more on the basis of propping up the demagogue, or striking fear in the voters, rather than serving the true interests of those voters. Traditional policy becomes secondary or even ignored, while policies based upon fear of minorities or immigrants, along with other cultural interests and the wishes of the demagogue become more primary.

Whether the leader tells the truth, strains the truth, misleads the people, or even lies in a very obvious way, loyalty and obedience to the leader, including defending what the leader says and defending the leader even when he or she commits a crime, is an essential component of the incentive in such a society. This is a core part of a society based upon power-seeking.

Thus, in a democratic society, which often already has a strong component of rent-seeking which has started to centralise the society, a charismatic leader may rise. This leader will be willing to violate norms, perhaps even laws, and use the tools mentioned above that are not about serving the constituents or giving the voters what they want, but rather are used to excite them, drive them with fear, even incite them to violence. This can encourage those in

their party to similarly avoid serving voters and instead use the same tools (which are called Active Measures techniques or the Authoritarian Playbook<sup>9</sup>, and includes the 4 D's of Disinformation<sup>10</sup>) and serve the leader.

This creates a vicious cycle, in which the elected members (and candidates) of the leader's party, the politicians already tied to the leader by party political affiliation, have many incentives to defend that leader and do his bidding, even when it goes against their values, their ideology, or even their best judgement. This is partly for financial reasons, as the leader and the party raise money and share it amongst the party, and such a leader will share the bounty most with those who defend him and do his bidding. It may also be due to fear of losing support from the supporters of the demagogue or party, fear of violence if the supporters or party has become extremist and violent, or for other reasons such as blackmail relating to crimes already committed for the leader or of which the leader has knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Then as the politicians of the party and eventually government officials working for the authoritarian leader begin to lie for him, break norms for him, defend him despite the potential criminality, immorality, or indefensibility of his actions, and even commit crimes for him, they back themselves into a corner. It becomes harder and harder for them to separate themselves from him as they fear retribution, fear the reaction of his supporters, feel they cannot defend their past support for him, and so forth. As this progresses, the democratic norms and response to voters diminishes. The true support by voters - especially support based on full knowledge of facts and not tricked by lies - diminishes. This reinforces the need to use lies and tricks, including damage to democracy such as voter suppression and even cheating, because otherwise the leader (and his government) and these party politicians cannot win otherwise. Thus it becomes a vicious circle which damages democracy and democratic norms and laws, and paves the road to an authoritarian society.

One of the most dangerous aspects of this is the willingness to use violence. This may be driven by a desperation, just as lies and conspiracy theories are used because telling the truth will not lead to victory, desperation may lead an extremist party to violence, not because their ideology fuels a desperate desire to fulfil a purpose (though some extremists may indeed be driven by ideology - as I believe the Bolsheviks were at least at the start), but it can also be driven by the knowledge that only violence by supporters might scare certain politicians into defending them and working with them, and may scare citizens into sitting out an election or not running for office against them. This is a tactic used by authoritarians

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<sup>9</sup> See my Medium article on how Trump used these tools: <https://medium.com/is-the-trump-administration-using-the-active/is-the-trump-administration-using-active-measures-techniques-bb181236196>  
Yuri Bezmenov first told Americans about this in interviews like this: <https://youtu.be/IQPsKvG6WMI>  
And much more information here: <https://protectdemocracy.org/the-authoritarian-playbook/>

<sup>10</sup> A great primer is here: [https://youtu.be/izzTEWP6\\_OA](https://youtu.be/izzTEWP6_OA)

<sup>11</sup> Although complete speculation at this point, some have suggested that Trump may have retained some of the (classified and unclassified) documents at Mar-a-Lago, which should have been returned to the National Archives (NIRA) in order to use them for blackmail, in addition to other financial gain and/or other reasons. Only history may tell us.

around the world, and arguably many of them use it more as a tool in their power-seeking rather than a tool to achieve heart-felt ideological ends.

## **Power-Seeking and the GOP in the Trump Era**

A society which is a free democratic-market system with government support – a clear set of rules, and some level of public services, redistribution, regulation, from minimal to a maximum which still leaves a large healthy market – is a complex adaptive system, an evolutionary and dynamic system. It receives feedback within its public and private spontaneous orders, competitive and cooperative relationships that interact within the system. For the private sector and market to thrive the public sector cannot grow too large, there is a tipping point which I explore in my 2011 paper on rent-seeking and the transition between power-driven central planned systems and profit-driven free market spontaneous order societies

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For the private sector and market to thrive the public sector cannot grow too large. There is a tipping point which I explore in my 2011 paper on rent-seeking and the transition between power-driven central planned systems and profit-driven free market spontaneous order societies, with rent-seeking as the transition between the two.

A market-democratic system is an evolutionary and dynamic system: it receives feedback both in the market order where customers provide demand feedback and suppliers respond to it and in the democratic sphere where voters provide feedback to politicians who work to earn their vote and govern in order to retain popularity in the next election. In a representative democracy, the public sector responds to the people's desires and demands indirectly, but much more than an unelected or authoritarian government does. Once a government has done away with democracy it can retain power without any accountability and need not change even if there is a complete lack of support.

Power-seeking politicians, particularly those who recognise that they only represent a minority of the population or of voters, that the policies they prefer or that their voters or base prefer are only supported by a minority of the voters or people, therefore choose authoritarian tactics and ultimately an authoritarian government so that they do not need to appeal to a majority. Thus, they care only to seize and retain power, and put aside all the desires of democratic politicians such as expanding their voter base and appealing to voters in style and substance. However, in order to attain power, they may excite their smaller base, even incite them to violence. Deepening the divisions in society and especially

between their base and the opposition's base is useful to grow the power of this relatively small group of voters.

Since their platform, if they have one and it can be called a platform, is so unpopular that they must rely completely upon things other than policy. The few people who may actually like the policy platform, without the aid of propaganda and lies that completely misrepresent it (see for example Senator Rick Scott's misrepresentation of the changes to Medicare in the Inflation Reduction Act) are economic libertarians, at least those that border on anarchocapitalism or full minarchism. GOP calling Dems socialist – what?? – socialism ; accusing the other side of what you are doing ; even if sometimes true, like corruption, often they are much worse on the issue & is always deflection, whataboutism as it used to be known, but now they are openly authoritarian & much more truly socialist than any major party ever was in the past in the US... but fascist kind of socialism, not socially liberal.... etc

It's just a Media Circus –as is now extremely obvious to anyone not full in its thrall - making an entertaining circus all over the news is great for misdirection, repetition of lies over and over until they stick, the 4 D's of disinformation & firehost (hosting the firehose!) of falsehoods, keeping the base angry, creating battles and wars with the other side, drumming up false grievances and hatred of the other side, immigrants, whatever group – conspiracy – to entertain and make them feel superior or make them angry, emotional, what's needed for the vote (or for fascist bootcamp)... propaganda in the new digital age

Cynicism plus conspiracy mindedness raised to the power of loss of economic standing and security (poverty via loss of manufacturing jobs, loss of suburban home ownership, loss of single earner household – which makes for an easier and less stressful – this kind of loss then translates into a desire to go back to the 1950s when that was the norm: women stayed home, etc...)

The small base of extremist voters, if they get incited to violence or at least wound up so that they vote and spread the word, provide the votes and thus power, while interest groups (like the NRA) provide direct cash; they become more violent and extreme as well, and so can both help incite the voters (provide shared interest, link the interest to the candidate) and also directly fund the ads (provide funds in exchange for favors once elected). The fact that the majority of the candidate's voters disagree with the policies of the interest group and even perhaps dislike the extremism of the candidate and the group no longer matters to the candidate – or the interest group, which is so deep into the rent-seeking and personal self-interest of the corrupted and failing, it is already crumbling – because all she needs now is to squeak through within the rules of the authoritarian, which will include loyalty to the WBD (would-be dictator), and dishonesty, corruption, black-mailable behavior (what would fit KGB's agent criteria – compromise-able), so that ongoing loyalty is ensured. A tirade of accusations and insults about the democratic opposition is of course preferable, but so long as the candidate is preoccupied with criminally corrupt behavior and fully loyal to the WBD and whatever lies he is spreading, the

They actually want to make it worse – they want to create divisions and chaos, so their unpopular policies are a benefit./ They want to launch culture wars, battles for blood, machismo and guns – creating chaos that leads to violence is the point for key right wing cultural leaders like Steve Bannon (the violence Is The Point)

They vote against all decent policies – then take credit for it if it helps them in their own race, while denouncing it when useful on a national stage like Fox News. They impose as much misery as possible and blame Biden (or whichever Democrat they are running against) The Republicans have been fighting an information war (“InfoWars” is a right wing media outlet, and Bannon and others have long called it this), but indeed they wage a war *on* information, a war *on truth*, a war *on facts*:. Their methodology is textbook Active Measures - the 4 D’s of Disinformation, and often it is as simple as to flood the zone with lies, so that the truth is hard to find, a needle in a haystack. This is especially easy in an internet and social media age in which one can choose where to obtain news and can convince themselves that a random YouTuber or channel espousing opinions they like is to be trusted more than a longstanding news source with specialists and experts. Many have decided (especially after Trump encouraged it) that one cannot trust them - cannot trust knowledgeable and reliable reporters and journalists, who have credentials that differentiate them from a random YouTuber whose opinion you like. This is precisely the point of flooding the zone with excrement - part of the playbook that Steve Bannon has admitted to [cite]

Authoritarians exploit the weaknesses of free societies, whether their own or a democracy abroad – racial strife, conspiracies, make sure the citizens are at war with each other; try to halt democracy & cannot come to consensus – groundwork before the war, long-term goal.

Rent-seeking decentralizes a planned economy but centralizes a free market one (Nell, 2011), and so when we look at the way the US economy and polity have changed in the past few decades, what do we see? What effect does financialisation and the focus purely on profit rather than good corporate governance (recent book [“Jack Welsh broke capitalism” + Milton Friedman, from stakeholder capitalism to shareholder based capitalism – undermines](#) middle class and leads to Trump, video on commonwealth club) have in this time period? How much more have politicians used their positions for rent-seeking (see wealth of senators earned if office as one data point)? And what evidence of power seeking now exists (Trump etc – no platform, response to interest groups not voters and willingness to cheat to retain power), can we say there has been a move from democracy to rent-seeking and now toward power-seeking? Has this coincided with a centralization? => [yes, cited elsewhere, recent decades do show this & supreme court, via GOP & Federalist Society has supported it \(cross-over with libertarianism paper\)](#)

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The movement toward a wider base for the democracy may lead those who previously benefited to give up their democracy to retain their dominance. If this has happened then the government has been in democratic decay while in some respects the country has been expanding its democratic base. But it has not necessarily expanded much since the 1960s, it just became more multiethnic.

Incentives to power-seeking and rent-seeking, history from 1980s, then to 2008, then tea party, racial and economic grievance, extremism – leaders sought to capitalize on enthusiasm of movements & grievance, and it cycled out of control: feedback cycle between base & politician and between politician and someone more extreme on his right; especially due to gerrymandering, this drove many in the party, dragging party further to the right such that it began to affect Senators too – who as always were already in the minority due to rural/urban divide & could be so due to filibuster. Thus all the incentives pushed the party, setting it up not to be about what the people (or half the people) wanted but rather what the most rightwing and driven part of the base wanted.

And rent-seeking would be the corporate donors – who did drive the party narrative at least through the start of the Tea Party movement, which was a lot about lower taxes, but then power-seeking took over when it became more about cheating, using the hard core of the base to drive narratives, emotional and untrue (untrue is a way of cheating, so is unfair gerrymandering, holding back appointments of justices, and outright stealing elections like Trump tried to do). The Republican Party re-used their 2016 platform in 2020, and have essentially given up on having a coherent platform. They are driven by power-seeking alone, and thus are willing to go along with whatever policy suggested by Trump or which keeps corporate donors on their side, while aiding their voters in their own power-seeking: their desire for supremacy and privilege at the top of a race, religion, and sex based hierarchy, and the power to use violence against those they see as beneath them and those who are against such a hierarchy. The idea of “owning the libs” and the idea that they, as white conservatives, should be above the law and have preferential treatment, is the only real ideology left in the party and it is an ideology of power-seeking.

As most people admit, including Steve Schmidt (cite PBS video, emailed to self), the gerrymandering has led to politicians picking their voters instead of voters picking their politicians, and this is especially true on the right. And again because they are less popular and all the incentives lead this way, the right has doubled down on this. This is a major part of the feedback cycle, allowing the power-seeking and extremism to increase.

If it were not for the combination of an in-built advantage of rural over urban voter power in the Senate<sup>12</sup>, made even more extreme by the “filibuster” (cites on numbers & history), gerrymandering, and voter suppression, the Republican Party would likely not have won

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<sup>12</sup> “By 2040, according to a University of Virginia analysis of Census population projections, about half of the country will live in just eight states — which means 16 senators for one half of America and 84 for the other half.” Found at: “How Republicans Gerrymandered the Senate: In search of political power, they simply created new states in the unpopulated areas of the American West.” by Nancy LeTourneau, May 8, 2019, which provides an interesting history of how Republicans - back when they were the party of Lincoln and in many ways were the party of expanding rights - created new states in order to increase their power (something which certainly feels egregious today):

<https://washingtonmonthly.com/2019/05/08/how-republicans-gerrymandered-the-senate/>

See the major reasons why the Republican Party of today, and moreover whites who want to retain greater power through that party, have far more say in democracy than Democrats per capita:

<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/1/30/20997046/constitution-electoral-college-senate-popular-vote-trump>

control of the Senate or the presidency in decades and might not have even controlled the House - without changing some of their deeply unpopular policies.

## **The Psychology of Right Wing White Supremacist Ideology**

If there is an ideology in the Republican Party today, it is white supremacy, and the permission to advance it out loud and proud, and to back it up with violence and the willingness to use it to achieve its political ends, which involve radical conservatism that limits the rights of all but white men, and includes the propagation of conspiracy theories, lies, and an education system teaching Christianity and whitewashed history - which is essentially a form of neo-Nazism. This may sound like an outrageous claim but the evidence is there. Why are so many Republican voters willing or wanting to go along with this 'agenda', and prefer it to policies that help their own pocketbook and poll as having large majority support? Part of the answer may be in the changing mix of race demographics (with the majority white status diminishing) but perhaps more is about the changing expectations around masculinity and the demand that men offer women more than they had to in the past (which may explain black Trump voters a bit). This Trumpist ideology of white Christian supremacy tied with a violent masculinity has roots in the Frontier Mentality - cowboys and swagger - as seen with Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. And it has strong roots with gun culture and the National Rifle Association (NRA) may be rent-seeking<sup>13</sup>, but the rest of the dynamic is all about power-seeking. The Republican base want to feel power, the gun gives them that. They want to have more power than others in society, to hold a position at the top of a power hierarchy, the gun allows them to intimidate, to force that issue. The gun is a tool for power-seeking, for the Republican base. The Republican Party politician wants to hold onto power or gain power, despite being less popular with the people and perhaps despite losing an election. So they want supporters who can intimidate for them, help them cheat. Supporters who own guns, supporters who love the feeling of power the gun gives them, supporters willing to use it to intimidate others, who want to use it to force others to see them as superior, are perfect for them.

it's been replaced. and Republican (and a few Democratic) lawmakers refuse to even consider the merest whiff of gun legislation because of the voters who have been scared stiff by the constant refrain that Democrats "want to take your gun away" - to which the Republican is supposed to reply: "you can pry it from my cold dead hands" - this is a perfect way to make a potential policy (or lack thereof) a core part of one's identity.

It is true that Republican politicians may receive donations from gun manufacturers too (making rent-seeking a portion of their drive), but at this point, the identity the base feels and the needs of militias who would seize power for a political party at the point of a gun is the dominant piece, and of course that is core power-seeking

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<sup>13</sup> Despite attempting bankruptcy to avoid legal issues relating allegedly to deep corruption (in the form of skimming tens of millions off donations for yachts and mansions), either the NRA still has very strong influence over lawmakers or it already did the job. The NRA itself may no longer matter, but between the gun nuts and the gun manufacturers, there is plenty of incentive for Republican politicians to wave their guns around and continue to argue that the only remedy for gun violence is more guns in more hands.

With or without the NRA the lawmakers can make their arguments about “a good guy with a gun”, but it is constantly being proven false and is absurd to try to arm teachers even as children - and teachers - die at school at the hands of kids, mere hours after being labelled an adult able to purchase a weapon of war legally. It is impossible to see a policy aimed at helping people, but rather the dead each give a profit to one of a few who own the gun lobby - or are paid by them.

When both parties get paid off the people get cynical. When the base loves the guns one might forget who is getting paid off and who is actually willing to change. Right now it is the Republican base who is pro-gun and they are arming up for violence - terrorism. The Republican politicians are okay with this! And it coincides nicely with their pay-offs by the gun industry. It was incredible that any gun policy actually passed - but it was so tiny, it really was barely able to scratch at any surface at all. But this means two things: one, harder to say that they are here to take your guns and you better be careful and two, it proves to the not-so-nutty that it is possible to get something done on guns - their cynicism may be chipped away just a little by this.

But likely NRA members do not care if the NRA is corrupt, they just want to feel what the gun makes them feel - when they carry it or use it, and even when they just show off NRA merch. The point is that it provides an identity and a sense of belonging (like any cult or extremist group), one rooted in the past, so that they do not have to fear the future, because nothing will change. This provides a sense of relief and safety, while at the same time telling them that they are in charge, they are the superior sex, they are the cool ones, they can find a lover and a wife - they just need to find a conservative woman. And she will cook for them, wash their clothes, treat them like a child - and in turn he will treat her like a bimbo and a slave. Tomorrow is the past. Bring a gun.

Many Republican state legislatures have passed legislation, and many more have introduced bills (but faced a majority of Democrats who successfully blocked the bills) that downplay slavery and racism in the United States, which is a way to indoctrinate the next generation to think that the reason for inequality and relative poverty among minorities is that they are inferior. Violence and extremism are aspects of a neo-fascism, or at least, as President Biden recently called it, a partial fascism. Replacing policy platforms with an “own the libs” mentality (cite book - “Troll Nation” ) is an example of power-seeking and also in line with this neo- partial-fascism. “The Cruelty is the Point” (article and book I think), and discussed more and more -not just the internet and social media, not just the extremists within the GOP, but now just the GOP as a whole wanting to be cruel, white supremacist, and trolling and Trump (“Troll Nation” discusses this).

Americans know innately that there is racial injustice in America and they know which way it goes - despite pretending otherwise. They used to be more quiet about it but the right was always against “affirmative action” and claimed that it makes it so difficult to be a white man, which would be laugh-out-loud funny if it were not so dark. It is clear that white Americans know when you think to actually ask them outright whether they would like to be treated as black people are treated. [cite the video] Meanwhile in many communities black men are disproportionately pulled over, arrested, charged bail, sentenced, imprisoned, and often lose their livelihoods due to minor offences such as for not paying the tickets that they

face at these higher rates. In the worst cases they are shot by police and the police, usually white, are not charged. This kind of system feels like a purposeful attack on black communities.<sup>14</sup>

Special treatment is expected by those with this ideology, and losing that special treatment is their worst fear or retaining it the thing they care more about than anything else. Certain things that are considered microaggressions against minorities can also be seen as special treatment given to white people, or “white privilege”. For example, one example of a “microaggression” described by the American Psychological Association, involved a pair of colleagues, one Asian-American, the other African-American, seated at the front of a plane. A group of white men boarded the plane some time after them and sat across from them. When it was decided that some passengers should move to the back to better weight-balance, it was the minority women who were asked to move.<sup>15</sup> When the black and Asian colleagues are asked to move to the back of the plane, the white men may feel that it is only right that the minority women were chosen, and be resentful if that were to change.

There is also a powerful feedback cycle - a vicious cycle most of us would say, but of course that is based on values: those who supported Trump in order to cling to their white privilege would see the feedback cycle that maintains and increases that privilege as a virtuous cycle, presumably. The police and even other parts of the justice system, such as certain courts and certain laws, historically but even recently, have helped to reinforce and increase this white privilege, and so increase its value in such a way that some are willing to kill or die for it - just as they did during the Civil War. Incidentally, some are calling for “civil war” again, in those terms. During slavery and for a century after, a white man killing a black man and a white man raping a black woman, were not considered crimes or prosecuted as such in many jurisdictions in the United States, especially in the southern states. A black person killing a white person would trigger an immediate death penalty in the same jurisdictions. The police and the culture agreed to the distinction: African Americans were treated more like wolves than like people.

Wealth can buy someone a good lawyer, so justice is still not, and cannot be, equal without fundamental reform including something to address that aspect. So, we are not *truly* equal before the law. And of course there is not just a multiplying effect but, with compound interest and investment returns, an accelerating, accumulating, even exponential increase in the value of the privilege once monetary - include societal privileges that come with wealth, and opportunities and exemptions from harm that come with having wealth. Inheritance of wealth offers each new generation of privilege something that can never be achieved even when someone climbs from nothing to great heights - they can only hope to give that to their own children. And so often this has been stripped away from African Americans, by resentful white men, to ensure they never gain this advantaged-at-birth status - for

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<sup>14</sup> This video describes the system, and some recent reforms, in Ferguson MO and elsewhere:  
<https://youtu.be/HIKu6Whdilo>

<sup>15</sup> “Unmasking ‘racial micro aggressions’,” *Tori DeAngelis*, February 2009, Vol 40, No. 2. Available at:  
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/microaggression>

example, the Tulsa Massacre - and so all the more reason those aggrieved by the losses of white supremacist privilege do not want this history taught to their children, as it might lead those kids to agree that change is needed to ensure equity.

If there are enough instances of “greater respect” given a person over their lifetime a few things happen. First, one gets used to it and would react badly if it were to change, as if something significant were taken away from them (and deserved or not, something would have been). Second, this treatment will inevitably lead to “better luck” in things like job interviews, bank loans, court judgments and incidents with law enforcement, and other events which will affect earnings and wealth. Third, wealth accumulates - compound interest, the ability to invest, etc - while poverty traps, prison has a revolving door, and a single mistake in America can often ruin one’s life (e.g., if one cannot afford bail). Inheritance and family are a major factor, and the right wing view is to enhance that (e.g., by eliminating estate tax, with private schools, etc) not decrease it.

## The Role of Right Wing Media in America

Historians, journalists, and academics who have travelled to, or studied closely, authoritarians around the world and throughout history, could immediately see in Donald Trump in the makings of a despot or strongman. Writers like Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Anne Applebaum wrote articles<sup>16</sup> as far back as during Trump’s 2016 campaign. The book *The Despot’s Apprentice*, published in 2017, details closely how Trump was using the authoritarian playbook and lists the many tools and ways of despots; Trump had already exhibited examples of many, but looking back from 2022 we can see examples of him doing or attempting nearly every one out loud and in public, and surely would have enacted the worst of the list as well had he managed to cling to power as he attempted to do (or even if he fairly won again) in 2020.<sup>17</sup> Yet, not only did right wing media fully support each of his lies and tactics, they have embraced the lies and tactics of white supremacy and other Strongmen and despots from around the world.

The word and the idea ‘diversity’ has been described as a left-wing propaganda tool on Fox News. Tucker Carlson asks why we should care about diversity, in a dismissive manner, as if clearly there is no reason. Yet, the reasons for supporting diversity are so important and so all-American. The right wing media machine mocks it, calls it indoctrination if discussed in schools, and wants the end of diversity training in corporate settings. The value of diversity

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<sup>16</sup> “Trump is following the authoritarian playbook,”

By Ruth Ben-Ghiat, January 17, 2017

<https://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/16/opinions/trump-following-authoritarian-playbook-ben-ghiat/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> In the modern era many authoritarians are first elected fairly and begin by mostly staying on the legal side of the line, just breaking norms, and it can take several years or multiple elections before they fully embrace the role of despot or strongman. Putin is one example - he at least hid his worst proto-fascist tendencies from the masses at the start - and Viktor Orban is just a few years behind.

is shown in the modern fables of the many *Star Trek* series and *The Orville*<sup>18</sup> – it is our differences that make us valuable: for example in many episodes the ship and crew would have been lost if not for one crewmember or a few crew who were different, even if these differences might be seen as disadvantages normally. Having a diversity of abilities and viewpoints is essential to a strong democracy (and is core to the values of the Federation in *Star Trek*). Our differences (creating diversity) is another way of saying our *individuality* – and respecting individuality is key to freedom. This is why the Borg (of *Star Trek*) and communism are so bad, from the perspective of American democracy.

The Fox News opinion host Tucker Carlson, who was once considered a libertarian, has become one of the strongest supporters for Donald Trump and according to some has even leap-frogged Trump and set new extremist standards, which Trump then gave his support to. He has also acted as an enforcer - for example, when Congressional Republican Ted Cruz described (accurately, as the bipartisan committee labelled it) the January 6th attack on Congress as a domestic terrorist attack, Carlson brought him on his show and attacked him, forcing him to retract his statement (if he wanted Carlson's viewers to support him). This is the act of an enforcer for the cult of the authoritarian leader, as historian and expert on strongman leaders Ruth Ben-Ghiat explains.<sup>19</sup>

Confirmation bias, when coupled with a premise or predication (whatever it is, however absurd) can be strong enough to keep a person convinced despite evidence to the contrary. This is how conspiracy theories are believed. Particularly if the source is trusted and preferred, this can work on a broader populace than would believe outright conspiracy theories - one is giving allegiance to her tribe by believing what the source says. Cults work in this manner. The show *The Orville* provides a memorable example in the episode *All The World's A Birthday Cake*. In a first contact situation, the Orville is getting along well with an apparently free society. The people have never before been contacted and although most of their beliefs seem to be common they turn out to hold one unusual belief, which is astrology. They throw the commander and another officer into an internment camp for life, based purely upon the month in which they were born. According to the belief system, their birth month makes one inherently 'prone to violence' (describing it in the way one - an Austrian perhaps or Hobbesian - might describe human nature). He tells them that they must remain there for life, just as do all those on the planet born in that month.

When confronted with logic and asked if he really believed in it, the First Prefect claimed that: "We see living proof every single day." This would be a result of confirmation bias and perhaps also a vicious cycle in which being treated terribly and the expectations themselves lead to more of the expected violence, and it is probably highlighted more often by the

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<sup>18</sup> I believe that classic episodic *Star Trek*, which ended with the series *Enterprise*, but was essentially picked up again with the show *The Orville*, gives us modern fables or cultural myths, in the sense that each episode can focus on something important to the culture or society and teach a lesson. The simplicity of the story structure, in which each character and line tends toward the lesson, helps to convey the lesson in a way that episodes of modern *Star Trek* series and other modern fiction are unable or uninterested in doing.

<sup>19</sup> <https://youtu.be/s93pOaQom9g>

(Ruth BenGhiat)

media as well. Racial pseudo-science was also reinforced in a self-perpetuating feedback cycle of oppression and then blame of the oppressed - in which blacks were (and to some extent are, especially by white supremacists) seen as stupid, lazy or criminal. Because of this they cannot get hired or do well as entrepreneurs, they may be targeted and end up in prison, and then pseudo-scientists would point to the resulting statistics as evidence proving that blacks are lazy, criminal, or stupid.

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Read more at: <https://tvshowtranscripts.ourboard.org/viewtopic.php?f=1358&t=53452>

Wakanda - richly rewarded, leaders.

**Power seeking by officials, just as in command economies and in authoritarian states like strongman states, tyrannies like fascist states, even within democratic societies** power-seeking by officials can exist - petty tyrants exist because people love to seize whatever power they can - and we see it here as the oppressed minority or lower rung in a caste-based hierarchy, similar to the power-seeking of police and of militia or brownshirts wielded by fascists - the tyrant is power-seeking when he , "Inspection! Everyone on your feet. Check 'em all. You know... you have my pity. Your wife has mine. It's not your fault you're Giliac trash. But self-truth is always cleansing. Say it. Say what? "I'm Giliac trash.""

Read more at: <https://tvshowtranscripts.ourboard.org/viewtopic.php?f=1358&t=53452>

They cannot release them, even though they are aliens, because releasing a 'giliac' would scare the people: "there would be a national uproar, people would tear down these walls" if they let them out. The "First Prefect", clearly the world's leader, appears to believe it, but either way he enforces it. This belief system produces a caste society or at the very least a distinct underclass or oppressed people. They are born as something which they cannot change or escape and for it they are imprisoned, perhaps also exploited (a rent-seeking portion if they are put to labour of some kind), but it clearly provides an enemy and someone for which the others in the society can look down upon, blame, feel superior to. And confirmation bias is key to the widespread belief, by leaders or officials, by the public, even by the oppressed themselves.<sup>20</sup>

"There is no way out"

"Escape is always possible"

"No one's ever tried."

"What? ..."

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<sup>20</sup> "Ukania: We were all born under the sign of Giliac. Our tendencies are inherently violent. Criminal. We're here for the good of society. To protect them from us." In response to the comment from the Orville officer that they "do not appear to be violent" they reply that "Murderous instincts reside within every Giliac. Either deeply buried or on the surface." This explains away whatever behaviour they display, so long as rational thought and statistics are not given due attention, which they won't so long as the people believe." And they do, the oppressed themselves add; "The stars don't lie."

Read more at: <https://tvshowtranscripts.ourboard.org/viewtopic.php?f=1358&t=53452>

“Why would they?”

“Because it’s a prison”

“We’re here for the good of society”

Guns are for feeling macho.

“For self-defense, guns are worse than useless. If you own a gun, you’re many more times likely to be shot by that gun than you are to use it in self defense. One study in Philadelphia showed that carrying a gun means you are 4.5 times more likely to be shot during an assault than someone who isn’t carrying a gun. For every instance in which a gun is used successfully in selfdefense in the U.S., there are 7 assaults or murders, 11 suicide attempts, and 4 accidents in the home—all involving a gun.”

White argues that “owning the libs” is the primary reason behind all of the policy positions of both Trump and his base, which had already moved in that direction before Trump but the feedback cycle accelerated during his presidency and unfortunately since.

### **White Supremacy in the Trump Base: Power-seeking citizens**

One reason for this is that the Republican Party base is extremist because they believe that cultural change - the move to a more inclusive society, political correctness or “woke” ideas, and essentially the reduction of advantages to formerly advantaged groups such as white men - has been a bad thing; the other reason is that they cannot hold or attain power without using extremist tactics; and these two interact, creating a vicious cycle of extremism. It is not only the extreme base who hold the white power-seeking view about cultural change, but to a lesser degree is widely felt among the Republican Party voters “Disagreements about who is truly American are part of a broader cleavage in American culture. 70% of Republicans believe that America’s culture and way of life have changed for the worse since the 1950s, while 63% of Democrats believe that they have changed for the better.”<sup>21</sup>

This in turn helps the white folk feel superior, have someone to look down upon (which, being relative, allows them to both be poor and *feel* wealthy, be oppressed and feel like - and be - an oppressor). This also works out very well for those who get to be both absolutely and relatively better off than the poor whites - which includes the politicians and elite who prefer this hierarchy - you don’t need to give the poor white voters anything and they will still *feel* better off than without the hierarchy, which produces a *more* oppressed group. Furthermore, that group can be a scapegoat when necessary, for example for why crime is not under control.

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<sup>21</sup> “Is democracy failing and putting our economic system at risk?”, William A. Galston and Elaine Kamarck Tuesday, January 4, 2022. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/is-democracy-failing-and-putting-our-economic-system-at-risk/>

The hierarchy is not only about race and income class, it is also about sex. With greater equality between the sexes comes fear regarding what it means to be a man and how to attract a woman. In the past, women had much less choice - they could not survive alone and so quickly picked and settled down with a man, so it was easier to be accepted without offering much. Today's culture is much more complex, with everyone having so many rights, and the loss of that power over women, and over minorities, scares a lot of young white men.

Picking up a gun makes these men feel powerful, being given a villain makes them feel that bad things are not their fault, 'owning the libs' or blaming the 'other side' also helps them feel accepted in a society that is rapidly changing. The connection between being conservative and the desire to retain the hierarchy and privilege that existed in the past should not be a surprise. That cultural change has led some to violence should also not be a surprise. Violence is often used to protect power and privilege and this is the uniquely American version of it.

### **Extremism and Fascism in a Power-seeking Party**

Even very well-intentioned politicians do things and take positions just to gain or keep power -- so that they can then do the good they want to do. Of course when that balance falls too far toward just the power then they become the hated politicians who only care about their own power and do no good, do only harm. It has to be a balancing act and too many politicians are on the wrong side of it. In a December 2016 Guardian article, Isabel Best quotes professor of history at Columbia Mark Mazower. Although speaking primarily of Europe in this quote, Mazower writes of the move toward power-seeking among modern politicians, while warning about Donald Trump: "They're very suspicious of vision and as a result what fills their brains is party calculation -- which of course always occupies politicians but in the past coexisted with bigger things." Isabel Best quotes Mazower among others and cited many ways in which Trump was acting like a despot before his administration even began. Best cites a few ways in which Trump differed from prior fascists, but in the time since he has closed that gap considerably.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For example, citing Ulrich regarding those who support Trump, it is assumed that it does not include wealthy who would be equivalent to aristocracy ("not just the economically threatened lower middle classes which Trump targeted, but also the upper middle classes. Hitler had many supporters in the German aristocracy."), however we now know that many top Trump supporters are of that class. "Trump was also democratically elected," Best writes - which was true in 2016, but in 2020 he attempted to remain in power through undemocratic means. And "there's the fact that Trump does not lead a party 'which is unconditionally committed to him'," which is very clearly no longer the case. Again quoting Ulrich: "A further obvious difference is that Trump doesn't have a private militia, as Hitler did with the SA," and although technically still true, Trump recruited private so-called militias, and they did act violently in his name and to achieve his ends. "Finally, the American constitution is based on a system of checks and balances. It remains to be seen how far Congress will really limit Trump or if, as is feared, he can override it," Ulrich is quoted - and the Republicans in Congress made clear that they would not limit Trump. So, as with many modern despots, he was initially democratically elected and it took longer for him to consolidate dictatorial powers, but he took many steps along the road and would have continued if not for a few courageous individuals in his own party, the voters at large, and the rule of law, which is slowly grinding away toward a measure of justice. Still, the

Mazower writes about the need, in particular to ensure that Trump would not become a dangerous despot, to learn from the lessons of Hitler and the German politicians and the people who allowed both his rise to power and his subsequent concentration of power until they had lost control and were unable to resist his authoritarian rule. "I think one of the mistakes this time around would be not to think that the people who voted for Trump were serious. They may have been serious for different reasons, but it would be a big mistake not to try and figure out what their reasons were."

In an interview for Frontline, Republican Adam Kinzinger, a Donald Trump critic, has said that if you "invest yourself in becoming a leader in somewhat of a cultish moment for a party, you have to suspend any kind of morality", arguing that in such a case, you are not attaining power to do good, but you are just doing "whatever you have to do to attain power."<sup>23</sup> At the end of the interview, Kinzinger says if this moment goes wrong we are going to be fighting a politics "that is just about power and not about principle" and that "you look at a lot of failed democracies or struggling democracies and that's what you see."<sup>24</sup>

For those who want to stay in the good graces of an authoritarian leader leading a power-seeking party there is no room for dissent. Just after January 6th, having had to hide, run, and cower in fear for hours on that day, Democrats and Republicans denounced the attack in stark terms. Even as some Republican members still voted to object to the results, even after the attack, many Republicans, including Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, did speak about the attack and about Trump's role in inciting it, on the day and in the days and weeks following (McConnell said that Trump was "morally and practically responsible" for it<sup>25</sup>, but acquitted him in the impeachment trial anyway<sup>26</sup>). McConnell even called it terrorism, as did Senator Ted Cruz, but both of them recanted their statements or changed their stance soon after.<sup>27</sup>

There was also a bipartisan Committee on Homeland Security which recognized the attack as extremism and domestic terrorism and as motivated by the desire to keep Trump in

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voters must come through again: if the Republican Party in its current form wins back the House of Representatives and a number of local races, democracy could perish and America could become authoritarian nearly overnight, with or without Trump.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/01/comparing-fascism-donald-trump-historians-trumpism>

<sup>23</sup> Frontline PBS, Adam Kinzinger interview, <https://youtu.be/Me8JNADr318> (min ~ 17)

<sup>24</sup> (Frontline, min ~ 43)

<sup>25</sup> <https://news.yahoo.com/sen-mitch-mcconnell-rips-trump-231000421.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/02/13/trump-impeachment-trial-day-5-468985>

<sup>27</sup> McConnell: <https://www.thebulwark.com/mitch-mcconnell-saw-the-insurrection-clearly-and-then-decided-he-liked-it/>

Ted Cruz did so on Tucker Carlson's show, in a way that many saw as practically begging for forgiveness: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/01/06/ted-cruz-jan-6-terrorist-tucker-carlson-526725>

office despite losing the election fairly. The committee heard from FBI Director Wray, appointed by then-president Trump, about domestic extremism and terrorism, including in testimony given shortly after January 6th, in which there was broad agreement about the source of the danger, not only among the expert witnesses but also agreement across the political aisle. Within a couple of months that changed, they refused to allow an independent commission or even agree to a normal bipartisan committee on the January 6th attack. McConnell pulled his members, and only two Republicans stayed on the committee. The more outspoken one, Liz Cheney, faced a harsh primary challenge because many Trump supporters supported her challenger - simply because the challenger was willing to support Trump and his lies. Ultimately she lost.<sup>28</sup>

The feedback cycle makes it worse and worse - the less popular the GOP are, the more they have to cheat: suppress votes, gerrymander (or conduct redistricting), lie and use propaganda and echo chamber thinking, pander to wealthy donors and to an extremist base while misleading the mainstream of the party, and use fear and partisan divides to get the mainstream of the party to vote for the party even while their interests are not served. The fact that the voters' interests are not served can be proven by the non-partisan polls on issues, which show that most Democratic Party policies have support well above 50% (many have 70% or higher support<sup>29</sup>), while by 2020, it was no longer even clear what the Republicans stood for except for their willingness to bow to Trump, stopping the Democrats from passing their bills (even refusing Medicare subsidies for their state), fear-mongering about "woke" issues like pronouns, supporting restrictions on abortion (to extremes that most voters are against), and providing tax cuts and other benefits to the wealthy and corporations - which has little support among voters.<sup>30</sup>

Their extremist views are not held by even close to half of the American people, or the voters, although certainly some voters prefer authoritarian candidates, are White Nationalist or Christian Nationalist, or simply like the idea of a Strongman<sup>31</sup>. These voters, like those they support, are also power-seeking - they want to hang on to the power of their historical supremacy in a hierarchy, in which white men were at the top. If the majority of

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/state-primaries-today-result-alaska-wyoming-b2146551.html>

<sup>29</sup> For example, on climate change: <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/06/23/two-thirds-of-americans-think-government-should-do-more-on-climate/>  
And on progressive policies such as a higher minimum wage, paid maternity leave, free college education, etc: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/27/majority-of-americans-support-progressive-policies-such-as-paid-maternity-leave-free-college.html>

<sup>30</sup> Every single Republican voted against the Inflation Reduction Act, which allowed the government to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies (very popular with voters), investment in fighting climate change (also very popular, and it provides tax credits which people tend to like - including larger credits for purchasing American electric vehicles), keeping Medicare and ACA premiums down (again, popular), and paying for it by forcing the wealthiest individuals and corporations to pay some taxes (again, popular). <https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/plug-in-electric-drive-vehicle-credit-section-30d>

<sup>31</sup> Cites on white nationalism etc.  
On Strongmen and criminality as a bonus to voters: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/13/why-do-voters-back-corrupt-and-dishonest-politicians-pub-66432>

the people did agree with that choice, they would support someone like Trump who would dismantle all the governmental protections that have helped make the country more equal, which would be destructive to democracy and usher in an authoritarian society.

When American democracy was founded it may have been less authoritarian than the system in many other countries, but it would look authoritarian to us today - with only wealthy property-owning white men having any vote, Senators not being directly elected, and blacks, women, and native Americans having few or no rights. Some Republicans, including Doug Mastriano, have openly admitted to wanting to return to many aspects of that time period (probably only the technology of today is to their liking), including repealing the direct election of Senators, which has been supported by some Republicans and some right wing media.<sup>32</sup> The gerrymandering and the feedback cycle in which increasingly extreme right wing representatives are elected to the House, both the State level House and the national House of Representatives, would have the power to control the Senate and the executive branch if the 17th Amendment was repealed. It is also clear since the 2020 attempt that Republicans would also be willing to use such a power to bypass the will of the voters and ensure their candidate always wins - not different in terms of structure from the Soviet system. A one-party state could easily emerge, allowing only those chosen by the party hierarchy ever to win.<sup>33</sup>

If there is enough power-seeking by white voters, willing to give up on democracy in order to maintain their white privilege and power; if they accept more and more authoritarian candidates and allow them to cement their power by dissembling democratic institutions, soon the democracy will be gone and it will be an authoritarian state.

Many Americans, especially white conservative Americans have accepted authoritarianism in the church -- whether a cult-style church, a church with a demagogue on stage - a televangelist kind of preacher, and often what they preach is a fundamentalism equating to conservative white nationalism, or Christian Nationalism.

Many of those calling for Christian Nationalism are openly authoritarian, proudly admit that they see a hierarchy with white Christian men at the top, white women subservient to them, and non-Christian and minority peoples below them. They also pepper their speeches with conspiracy theories, violent rhetoric and other aspects of fascism; they make heavy use of anti-semitic conspiracy theories and some (see below) are now even openly banning Jewish members of their "movement", and then promising in such a way that one is left even more concerned, that this does not mean that Jews would not be deported or foreably converted (one might add "yet" and wonder if next time the promise will be they will avoid using gas chambers and ovens).

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Mike Lee is quoted here as supportive as is the author of the article and presumably the New American itself: <https://thenewamerican.com/repeal-direct-election-of-senators/>

<sup>33</sup> Back in 2016, Ruth Ben-Ghiat wrote that "Trump is not a Fascist. He does not aim to establish a one-party state. Yet he has created a one-man-led political movement that does not map onto traditional U.S. party structures or behave in traditional ways. This is how Fascism began as well." At the time it would have seemed outlandish to argue that Trump was working toward creating a one-party state, but the complete obedience that he requires of his party, combined with the takeover of elections (which is already being attempted) would ensure that only that party can ever win, thus it would usher in a one-party state.

MSNBC host Rachel Maddow has shown the historical roots of this kind of ideology. It is essentially a rebranding of the Christian Nationalism of Gerald L.K. Smith who touted anti-semitic, fascist ideals of race purity while running for US President in, of all years, 1944. His "America First" platform was launched during the height of fascism and Nazi death cult, the height of violent (and pseudo-scientific) white supremacist thinking, and action. His run was a failure but he still had a chance to spread his disinformation and hate, and raise a lot of money.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), among others has openly called for Christian Nationalism: "We need to be the party of nationalism and I'm a Christian, and, I say it proudly: We should be Christian nationalists." Other Republicans are brazenly touting "Christian nationalism" to become America's state religion, which is both anti-semitic and racist, Rachel Maddow warned. "What's less known about Christian nationalism is that the movement is also racist, Maddow pointed out. She shared several quotes by Gerald L.K. Smith, a preacher, politician and Nazi sympathizer who ran against Franklin Delano Roosevelt for president in 1944 on the America First ticket and founded what he coined as "Christian Nationalism."<sup>34</sup> Today, Republicans are taking on that fascist history and interweaving it into the modern right wing media ideology. It is a brand that apparently Trump affiliated GOP want to make their own: "Doug Mastriano consultant and Gab CEO Andrew Torba has a message for right-wing Jewish commentators including Ben Shapiro and Dave Rubin: You're not welcome in our movement unless you "repent" and renounce your Jewish faith."

The power-seeking in the Republican Party is not only among the elected officials and candidates, it is also among their base and their voters at large. Thankfully democracy can be saved because most Americans do not hold these extreme views and perhaps have no power to cling to or to attain via those methods. But this has made the Republican Party that much more extreme in their methods, because only through extreme tactics can they hope to attain or hold power.

Kansas showed what that red state population thought of their proposed extreme constitutional ban on abortion (despite dirty tricks by Republicans, including very confusing wording on the ballot), and in many states if the voters were given the same kind of referendum they would likely vote the same way.<sup>35</sup> The Republican talking point is often about "states' rights" - even as states like Kansas show that they care about these rights, historically, and still in many red states and states with Republican state legislatures, the rights would be and are being taken away from women (especially abortion and bodily

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<sup>34</sup> <https://uk.sports.yahoo.com/news/rachel-maddow-rips-republicans-promotion-091117696.html>  
<https://twitter.com/NextNewsNetwork/status/1551204108471861248>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/03/kansas-abortion-vote-state-constitution>  
and <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/upshot/kansas-abortion-vote-analysis.html>

autonomy;<sup>36</sup> also minorities, especially the right to vote<sup>37</sup>, despite polls showing that the voters, and even more so the people, do not want that.

Since the January 6th insurrection we have continued to see the GOP embrace extremism, including defenders of both the Big Lie and the January 6th criminals, and Hungarian dictator Viktor Orban. Orban and a play-acting January 6th criminal were the headline acts at the recent Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) - an actual January 6th defendant (Brandon Straka) who avoided jail time by helping the federal government by turning in other criminals, was in a cage at CPAC as a kind of performance art piece.<sup>38</sup> They label them political prisoners and the performance art included strange chants and prayers, while Straka cried and "the real tales of January 6th political prisoners" are available on headphones, as if they were victims of the Holocaust, rather than criminals who attacked democracy. Similarly, the right wing chant to "hang Mike Pence" for doing his constitutional duty, or prosecute Anthony Fauci for doing his job - to try to save the population from a pandemic.

It is also important to remember that the same kind of idolising and rallying around a criminal failed coup, as CPAC and Republicans are doing for January 6th insurrectionists, resembles the kind of propaganda that the Nazi Party gave to the Beer Hall Putsch (failed coup) criminals, which was based on Mussolini's coup. Although it failed, it was used as a rallying call, painting it as heroic, and rallying the people to overthrow the government. They know this - Trump idolises dictators from Putin to Hitler to the Kims in North Korea - and as president demanded of his generals the loyalty that he thought Hitler's generals gave him (not realising that some of them tried to assassinate him), and wanted a military parade with tanks as you see in authoritarian countries like the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, North Korea, and others<sup>39</sup>. Trump's love of dictators is also why they had Viktor Orban as keynote

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<sup>36</sup> Particularly as many of these bills have no exceptions even for rape, incest, even ten year old girls. Some abortion bans are so extreme that women and girls are turned away from the emergency room even if they are at serious health risk and even if the baby is unviable. Some even give rights to rapists or their families. There are young girls who were victims being forced to carry the rapists' babies to term, and even protect the rights of the rapists' family, while the victim and her family suffer. These kinds of bans existed before 1973's constitutional protection, and women were at the mercy of men - they had no rights of bodily autonomy - and their mortality rates and health were much worse. [cite]  
<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/07/10-year-old-girl-rape-ohio-abortion-incest-life-exceptions.html>  
and:  
<https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-abortion-laws-give-rapists-more-rights-than-pregnant-women-2022-5?r=US&IR=T>

<sup>37</sup> Extremist Republicans are also against protections dealing with hate crime and hate speech, and intimidation and violence intended to stop them making use of their voting rights. When police treat them violently they support the police, but when white, right wing criminals are held to account the police become the enemy. They treat Black Lives Matter protesters as terrorists while defending the January 6th attackers, who fit the definition of terrorist.

<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.motherjones.com/mojo-wire/2022/08/cpac-jan-6-prayers-marjorie-taylor-greene-art-video/> and <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11085929/Capitol-attack-convict-Brandon-Straka-weeps-cage-January-6-silent-disco-performance-art.html> and <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/marjorie-taylor-greene-prayed-over-002028236.html>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/08/15/inside-the-war-between-trump-and-his-generals>

speaker at CPAC<sup>40</sup>, and before that Tucker Carlson went to Hungary to create a “documentary” about him<sup>41</sup>. The spectacle of such a parade is also in line with Trump and the modern Republican Party’s desire to affect a love for military but no willingness to actually support them - they voted against a bill to provide medical care for medical costs related to exposure to “burn pits”, and Trump did not even want military veterans in his (proposed) military parade. (Recall that he also denounced Senator and presidential candidate John McCain for being a political prisoner in Vietnam<sup>42</sup>).

The entire conference was filled with easily provable lies, about both Trump’s supposed achievements (like building a wall) and Biden’s supposed failures (such as the jobs numbers). In what might, like many things today, seem like a joke or a fake, the CPAC conference actually had a banner reading “We Are All Domestic Terrorists”<sup>43</sup>. I am sure that if you ask the conference organisers why they would have such a banner they would say that it is ironic, because they are all accused of it by “the radical left”, or something like this - again, saying that the January 6th insurrectionists are somehow political prisoners, and Trump is constantly facing a “witch hunt” by the evil Democrats - but, along with the disinformation they are serving, this banner is clearly a way to desensitise the right wing base to domestic terrorism, right wing extremism, and violence in general. There has always been a faction of violent right wing extremists in America, including the Ku Klux Klan, and various Nazis and neo-Nazis.<sup>44</sup> The fact that this kind of extremism has a foothold in one of the political parties - again - is deeply disturbing.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/08/04/viktor-orban-cpac-00049935>  
and: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/04/viktor-orban-cpac-speech>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/02/01/tucker-carlson-hungary-orban-00004149>

<sup>42</sup> Washington Post, “Trump slams McCain for being ‘captured’ in Vietnam; other Republicans quickly condemn him”, By Philip Rucker, July 18, 2015  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/07/18/trump-slams-mccain-for-being-captured-in-vietnam/>  
see also History.com, “John McCain Was Defiant as a POW and, Often, in Politics”, Sarah Pruitt updated: Aug 27, 2018, Original: Aug 25, 2018, available at: <https://www.history.com/news/john-mccain-senate-arizona-vietnam>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/cpac-banner-domestic-terrorists/>  
Justification here: <https://www.chron.com/politics/article/CPAC-Dallas-we-are-all-domestic-terrorists-banner-17359959.php>  
More here (the description of the panel claims that Biden considers angry parents terrorists):  
<https://www.truthorfiction.com/cpac-we-are-all-domestic-terrorists-digital-banner/>

<sup>44</sup> “Under Kuhn's direction, the Bund gained members and began building a public presence. Two camps, Camp Siegfried in Long Island and Camp Nordland in New Jersey, began operating. In 1937 an article in the New York Times noted that 10,000 German Americans attended a Camp Nordland picnic at which American flags were displayed beside flags of the Nazi swastika.

The most memorable event staged by the German American Bund was a huge rally at Madison Square Garden, one of New York’s major venues. On February 20, 1939, about 20,000 Bund supporters packed the huge arena as thousands of protesters gathered outside.

The rally, which was promoted as a celebration of the birthday of George Washington—who was depicted on a huge banner hung between swastika banners—featured Kuhn giving an anti-Semitic speech. Banners hanging from the balconies proclaimed “Stop Jewish Domination of Christian America.”... [Kuhn] was prosecuted,

The most recent Republican Party leaders, elected officials and those campaigning for office are all competing to show the most deference to Trump - despite his many legal woes - and competing to show they are more extreme and right wing than their opponents in their primaries. The Republican Party does not even have a platform anymore, they are pro-Trump extremists seeking to attain or retain positions of power - that is all. Their 2020 platform was a copy of their 2016 platform: arguably, they did not write a new one because their true values are no longer what they once were - their new value is merely to pander to Trump and do what he asks of them.<sup>45</sup> Granted, many Republicans do still make promises to their voters and take credit for bills that pass, but most of the time they vote against those bills<sup>46</sup>, just to “own the libs” and to do what Trump (for his donors, and for his “own the lib” credibility) wants, and what the Trump base, informed by right wing media and Trump, want them to do.

The extremists in the base were shunned for decades, but have now been accepted to a large extent within “conservative” right wing circles, media, and the Republican Party itself. This has led to an increase in domestic terrorist attacks by these right wing extremists. The bipartisan committee discussed the problem shortly after Biden took office, and were keenly aware that Trump did not discourage extremist violence by these groups but in fact encouraged it:

As Members of this committee are keenly aware, this act of terrorism was not an isolated incident. During the 116th Congress, the committee held 11 hearings that looked at various domestic terrorism threats. Over a year ago, FBI Director Wray sat before us and warned that domestic terrorism cases were at an all-time high, with racially- motivated violent extremists posing the greatest threat.

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convicted in late 1939, and sent to prison [for embezzling from the organisation].” Before that, the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings of 1939 showed clear evidence of German American Bund ties to the Nazi government.

Thankfully, the organisation dissolved once Kuhn was out of the picture. “German American Bund, American Nazis of the 1930s: Nazis Openly Held Rallies and Promoted Hitler's Ideology in America”, Robert McNamara, Updated on June 03, 2019.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/german-american-bund-4684500>

See also: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-american-bund>

and <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2017/06/american-nazis-in-the-1930s/the-german-american-bund/529185/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2020/8/24/21399396/republican-convention-platform-2020-2016>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/us/politics/republicans-platform.html>

Ballotpedia quotes some of the other potential reasons that they re-used their 2016 platform, but also noted that Trump released his priorities, and one might wonder if that is their true platform and they were simply waiting for it. [https://ballotpedia.org/The\\_Republican\\_Party\\_Platform,\\_2020](https://ballotpedia.org/The_Republican_Party_Platform,_2020)

<sup>46</sup> For example, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/republicans-blasted-for-taking-credit-for-infrastructure-spending-after-voting-no-203043364.html>

<https://www.vox.com/2021/3/15/22331722/american-rescue-plan-salazar-wicker>

and <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/biden-republicans-list-rescue-plan-b1855380.html>

(More recently, they are taking credit for bills which may have been bipartisan but individual GOP Senators who voted against them are still taking credit. They may do so again with the Inflation Reduction Act).

Then in July 2020, we received testimony from domestic terrorism expert J.J. MacNab that cautioned, and I quote, “that the upcoming election will spark one or more violent events if the President loses his re-election bid . . . [his supporters] want him to continue and they have talked about Civil War now for years if he does not.”

Last September Director Wray testified again before us saying that racially-motivated violent extremists make up the largest portion of domestic terrorist cases that his agents are investigating. Then in October, just 4 months before the attack on the Capitol, the Department of Homeland Security's threat assessment identified racially-motivated violent extremists--specifically White Supremacist extremists--as “the most persistent and lethal threat in the homeland.”

Today, we will begin to shed light on why these warnings were not heeded. The irrefutable fact is that the threat of right-wing and more specifically, White Nationalist terrorism has been growing for years. The previous administration failed to address this threat appropriately, and on January 6 we saw the result right here at the U.S. Capitol.

I witnessed the events unfold first-hand from my view in the House Gallery, where we had gathered to observe the counting of the electoral votes as required by the Constitution.

I am hopeful that the Biden administration will work to do a better job of confronting this threat, which has been allowed to fester and even encouraged in recent years. Already, DHS has taken action as the Department issued a rare warning last week about the heightened threat from domestic terrorism.

The FBI assessment back in 2017 had clear warnings about the danger of white supremacist extremism and terrorism,<sup>47</sup> but it was to Trump’s advantage to ignore the warnings and even to call for them to “stand back and stand by”, which the Proud Boys then put on t-shirts and proudly wore, feeling legitimised by the president.<sup>48</sup> It was this same FBI director, appointed by Trump when he was president, who signed off on the search warrant for

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<sup>47</sup> “In 2017, [Domestic Violent Extremists] remained a persistent source of violence, with Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists advocating for the superiority of the white race and AntiGovernment or Anti-Authority Violent Extremists – primarily Anarchist Violent Extremists, Militia Violent Extremists, and Sovereign Citizen Violent Extremists – presenting the greatest threats of violence. RMVEs were the primary sources of lethal and significant violence, with lone offenders conducting lethal attacks against targets of opportunity, using non-complex tactics and accessible weapons. The FBI and DHS assessed broad drivers of domestic violent extremism, including perceptions of or responses to government activity, and social, political, and economic conditions, continued to feed a consistent level of domestic violent extremism, although trends within individual extremist movements remained dynamic.

DVE violence in 2017 consisted primarily of attacks or threatening behavior against accessible targets or individuals, using weapons acquired with relative ease, including firearms and bladed weapons, or unsophisticated tactics such as physical assaults. Law enforcement and racial minorities were the prevalent DVE targets in 2017, with race providing a principal focus for RMVEs espousing the superiority of the white race, and law enforcement and government continuing to represent key targets of interest for AGAAVEs, specifically MVEs and SCVEs. Numerous violent encounters also took place between perceived ideological opponents.

<sup>48</sup> “Downright shameful’: Proud Boys wear ‘stand back and stand by’ t-shirts after Donald Trump’s remarks Far-right group boosted by president refusing to condemn them”, Graeme Massie, 30 September 2020, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-election/proud-boys-trump-debate-t-shirts-supremacism-b724688.html>

Trump's Maralago property in August 2022. Trump then used this search as a new way to incite his extremists to strike back with violence: many see his statement about lowering the temperature as a mafia-like warning that if they do not back off they will face violence - and they already have.<sup>49</sup> Those around Trump not only feel they deserve special treatment, they are also quite willing to destroy democracy to safeguard it, and even put the country's national security at severe risk.<sup>50</sup> For a moment there was bipartisan support to address this extremism:

It also is our job, here at the Committee on Homeland Security, to better understand what motivates these extremists and ultimately how to stop them. Radicalization of all sorts that leads to any violence should be unacceptable across the board.

With that in mind I want to encourage all of my colleagues to rise above partisan politics and work together to examine these issues and find solutions. ... Similar to the 9/11 Commission, which helped create the Homeland Security Enterprise we have today, this important, bipartisan commission would provide Congress with real answers to our questions and solutions to close critical homeland security gaps. This legislation, referred solely to our committee, has the support of a dozen Republican Members of the committee, and I urge my Majority colleagues to join us and move this bill through Congress.

...at various times throughout our history we have witnessed virulent strains of political ideologies and violent political ideologies that run through the American bloodstream.

But time and again these radical movements have been rooted out or minimized in our system.

Well, what should concern us now, in 2021, is that the current manifestation of these movements is so insidious, because while in the past they existed on the fringes of society, they are becoming rapidly part of the cultural mainstream. These movements are fueled and fed by misinformation and lies that, if not addressed, will only continue to exacerbate our underlying social divisions and threatening to tear at the delicate fabric of our democratic culture.

...we must regain the narrative. A byproduct of radical violent movements entering the mainstream is that they distort real and meaningful debate. Right-wing extremism and left-wing extremism are not mainstream viewpoints. QAnon, Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, anarchists, and Antifa do not espouse mainstream perspectives, nor should they be treated and validated as such.

... While the District of Columbia hosts hundreds of First Amendment events per year and respects the rights of all Americans to exercise this Constitutional guarantee, even when we disagree with those viewpoints, we will not tolerate

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-warns-terrible-things-will-happen-if-country-temperature-not-cooled-2022-8?r=US&IR=T>  
<https://time.com/6205232/fbi-search-trump-mar-a-lago-violence/>  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/mar-lago-search-users-trump-forums-agitate-civil-war-jan-6-rioter-rcna42148>

<sup>50</sup> See also: <https://www.justsecurity.org/82723/trump-associates-stated-plan-to-publicly-release-declassified-documents/>

violence in our city and we will call such acts what they are in accordance with the law--crimes and terrorism.<sup>51</sup>

Although “anarchists and Antifa” are included in this speech, they are clearly not the threats that the FBI, Homeland Security, or any anti-terrorism institution are most concerned about. The evidence is clear about what the real threat in America is today, and it is white supremacist extremism, now seeping deeply into the culture in one party, which accepts violence and owns all the guns. They believe deeply that it is their right to use them to protect their privilege and if necessary overthrow their government.

Because the FBI is now holding Donald Trump accountable for some of his crimes, the Republican Party is now calling for “defunding the FBI” and the Department of Justice<sup>52</sup> (after a few months at most earlier complaining that Democrats wanted to “defund the police”, which was actually not a mainstream Democratic Party policy preference). It is clear that for them the law is supposed to only apply to poor and minority regular folk, not rich white men. Once the law applies at all to them, they want to tear it all down.

### **Justice and Deterrence: Removing the Power**

To prevent the existing Republican Party and any future party members - of that party or any other - from violating rules, norms, and laws, they must be held accountable by courts and subjected to the rule of law as any other citizen would. This kind of accountability must be faced by those from the very top down though all those involved. Usually, the Department of Justice will start at the bottom and work their way up. As they go through the former president’s associates - Vice President Pence's chief of staff etc - they should get cooperation and some will want to save themselves. We can, as with any conspiracy case such as a mafia case, offer something in return for the kind of cooperation that can ensure those above them, whose plans they helped put into practice, such as Donald Trump can be found guilty of any provable crimes. If not, then he or those in his circle or who have similar sensibilities and interests, along with willingness to commit crimes, would do all of it again. Having learned necessary lessons to achieve their ends, they would be more likely to succeed. Anyone hoping to become dictator or close ally of a dictator would be willing to take risks, and only strong legislation and serious punishment is capable of preventing it.

If America is to prevent a slide into authoritarianism, institutions must be strengthened, new or stricter laws, greater punishment through the justice department after thorough

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<sup>51</sup> Congress.gov, Examining The Domestic Terrorism Threat In The Wake Of The Attack On The U.S. Capitol, 117th Congress (2021-2022) <https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/house-event/LC65965/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22capitol+attack%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=7>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/gop-lawmakers-adopt-defund-rallying-095913808.html> and <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/aug/9/republicans-call-defunding-fbi-cleaning-house-doj/>

investigations, those found guilty should never be able to run for office again (and those still in office immediately removed from office) for defying their oath; they should also lose any money and other privileges gained while in office if obtained under false pretences (e.g., raising money to “fight voter fraud”, which was raised based upon fictions and not used for such purposes). There should also be prison time for any whose crimes have been sufficiently proven in court.

Many regular folks - white or black, male or female - spend time in prison in America for minor and non-violent crimes. Whether it is use of drugs or petty theft, a bureaucratic mistake or a false witness statement, for example pretending to live in a different district in order to attend (or send a child to) a school or to obtain benefits, etc. Yet, what prison time might be given to powerful wealthy men who help another white powerful man to attempt a violent insurrection to keep himself in office - against the wishes of the people? This latter crime, unlike the former examples, is not some offence that by itself cannot be felt by the government or the people, nor hurt any individual. This latter crime could be the end of democratic system, the Constitution and rule of law, that America is so proudly built upon and continues to improve and protect. That crime, gone unpunished, could be the demise of democracy and the rise of authoritarianism in America. It could become like Putin's Russia or like Orban's Hungary, with an end to free speech and thought, with violence and faked elections always stolen by a single party. The only way to prevent this may be through the judicial system, while it remains independent.

Trump's supporters are angry to see him face even the possibility of any justice for any of his crimes. It is part of the expected preferential treatment, the white supremacist caste system, that these “white collar crimes” should not be punished, at least not for those who uphold this “conservative” support for white supremacy. “Left wing radicals” as they call them now, or “ni\*\*er-lovers” as they were once called, can be held to account. But “good, white, conservatives” should never have to face the justice system, and so many are riled up to use violence or call for the “defunding” of the institutions which now may hold them accountable for their criminal activities.

It is imperative most involved serve at least some time in prison for that deadly attempted coup. If they cooperate thoroughly they will likely have a sentence which is then reduced and they are offered 'good behaviour' and the rest -- lenience they likely never were willing to offer to any petty non-violent criminal, like drug offenders, particularly if poor and black. This is part of the white privilege they are so desperate to protect: someone who was dark skinned but (having managed not to be murdered by a cop over a traffic light - the modern-day lynching) often gets a prison sentence lasting years for a nothing, e.g., a drug offence that is not even an offence anymore in many states because of legalisation or decriminalisation (essentially, modern-day slavery).

Meanwhile, those criminally responsible for helping attempt a coup - a set of crimes which may include charges of seditious conspiracy, espionage, even treason - may end up getting just 5 years or 1 year or less, and all probably spent in home confinement (or let out on probation) in a mansion. Yet even this small piece of justice would send the supporters into a violent rage; someone already tried to bomb the FBI for doing their work. The ringleader daily downplays and whitewashes what he did, while promising that if ever in office again

he would pardon all those who helped him in his attempt to end America's democracy. Once again: power-seeking citizens look up to the most powerful and hope to gain a piece of that power by supporting him.

If we want to save democracy we must take this threat seriously, recognise the danger of power-seeking, and reinforce democratic institutions that respect equity, diversity, and power-sharing. We must not romanticise the past, and we must remember that the ideals of democracies like America are about improving constantly, becoming a more perfect union. We must learn from the past, and try to care for each other not hate each other, and put aside the power we can have in a hierarchy and instead look to the better life we can have in a more equitable system.

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