

The Differences Between Fascism And Trump(ism)



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Trump's policies were brutally neoliberal, racist, nativist, authoritarian, narcissistic — but fascist?

Donald Trump will go down in history as the president responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of Americans due to the criminal negligence in his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and for pushing the world closer to a precipice with his denialism of our climate crisis; yet, he may ultimately be best remembered for having decidedly transform American political culture with the theatricality of his proto-fascist politics.

Trump emerged on the political scene at a time of increasing contradictions in the American system of economic organization and distribution, with the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, and growing divisions within society at large over race, ethnicity, and culture. While he had no previous political experience, his instincts told him that the route to power in a highly divided society was to double down on those divisions—a tactic that had been employed quite successfully in the past by various extreme political figures all over the world, including the likes of Benito Mussolini in Italy and Adolph Hitler in Germany, respectively.

Indeed, Trump's stratagem of tapping into a huge reservoir of racism and nativism through the use of white identity politics and exploiting public discontent associated with America's economic decline through a standard repertoire of ultranationalist rants and transparent scapegoatism was key to his rise in power. Moreover, rather than aiming to unify a divided country while holding the nation's highest office, he continued to act more like the leader of a political party bent on cementing the ideological and cultural divisions in American society, all while implementing economic policies that would lead to further inequality and the expansion of the power of the plutocracy.

Trump's transformation of American political culture consisted in the unleashing of dangerous forces—arch-enemies of the open and diverse society—that posed an internal threat to liberal democracy. His refusal to accept the outcome of the 2020 election, and subsequent attempts by him and his allies to overturn the election, was indeed the culmination of four years of proto-fascist political rhetoric and authoritarian grandstanding.

Subsequently, Trump's politics has led many to conclude that the alleged billionaire entrepreneur is a fascist and that the United States was actually on the verge of becoming a fascist country during his four-year tenure in power. It is a belief that continues to hold sway over the minds of many progressives, especially since the GOP is officially now Trump's party and Republicans are fighting as dirty as they can to return to power, with or without Trump at the helm.

However, as I will argue below, and without any intention of downplaying the dangers that Trump and Trumpism represent for a dysfunctional democracy like the one that prevails in the United States, this is a belief based on a misunderstanding of fascism both as a movement and as a regime. Fascism has specific politico-economic properties, even though there are some subtle differences between Italian fascism, German Nazism, and Spanish Francoism, and is defined by a unique philosophical worldview regarding the relationship between state and individual. Fascism is an extreme right-wing authoritarian form of government, but not all authoritarian governments qualify as fascist, and the term in connection with Trump is quite misleading. In fact, hardly any expert on [fascism](#) thinks that what Trump practiced fits with the political ideology behind fascism.

The differences between fascism and Trump(ism) are quite striking. Trump and the political movement that he created do share certain traits with fascism, such as reliance on hate, fear, and conspiracy theories, along with the rejection of reason, to deepen social divisions and to create a sense of an imminent collapse as part of a strategy whose aim is to change the political environment by bringing about a change in the existing balance of social forces. But these are tactics that have been widely used by authoritarian leaders and extreme populist movements throughout the modern era of politics. Moreover, while the characterizations of Trump as an authoritarian figure with an utterly narcissistic personality or as a dangerous con artist who manipulates people to believe in lies and “alternative facts” are totally, unmistakably true, the orange maniac is not an ideologue by

any stretch of the imagination; instead, he will gladly say whatever he feels is necessary to please his base.

What is fascism?

First, fascism represents one form of “exceptional capitalist state,” as the Marxist political sociologist Nicos Poulantzas had argued, and reflects the breakdown of social order as a result of a severe capitalist crisis and the ensuing confrontation between different classes and ideological groups for political hegemony.

Fascism emerged in Europe during the interwar years (1919-1939) and was first established in Italy under Benito Mussolini (1922-1945) and then in Germany under Adolph Hitler (1933-1945). Italian fascism and German National Socialism represent “classical fascism” and rest on similar belief systems and regime properties, with one possible exception: the “biological” state did not figure as prominently in Italian fascism as it did under the Third Reich.

Fascism relies on paramilitary squads to spread terror and pursues relentless raids against socialists, communists, and other arch-enemies of fascism. This was typical of the role of Mussolini’s paramilitary squads, known as the “blackshirts,” whose activities covered all regions of the country, including the peninsula and the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, and constituted an integral component of the fascism’s march to power and the establishment of a dictatorship.

The Nazi rise to power followed a similar path. In 1921, Hitler formed the paramilitary organization Sturm Abteilung (SA), more commonly known as the “brownshirts.” The purpose of the “Sturm Unit” was none other than to intimidate political opponents. In 1925, Hitler established a sub-division of the SA, the Schutzstaffel (German for “Protective Echelon”), otherwise known as the SS, which served as Hitler’s personal bodyguards. The SS, Hitler’s “master race,” would eventually see its role and size expanded dramatically after 1929 when Heinrich Himmler was put in charge. By the start of World War II, the SS consisted of more than 250,000 members that had a hand on virtually all major Nazi activities, including running concentration camps.

Unless I am mistaken, there were no signs of “blackshirts” or “brownshirts” engaging in thuggish vigilantism before Trump’s rise to power.

Fascist political ideology is also unmistakably unique. Fascism strips away

individual rights and glorifies the state. The organic state is typified by the fascist regime, which assigns the state complete control over every aspect of national life. For Giovanni Gentile, the philosopher and political theorist of Italian fascism, “state and individual are one,” while “the authority of the state is not subject to negotiation, or compromise, or to divide its terrain with other moral or religious principles that might interfere in consciousness.”

Fascism bans political opposition, ends constitutional rule, enforces censorship, and imprisons political opponents.

Indeed, as Benito Mussolini’s own formulation of fascism has it, “Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State.”

It is worth quoting at length the fascist conception of the state, as articulated once again [by Mussolini himself](#):

Anti-individualistic, the Fascist conception of life stresses the importance of the State and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State, which stands for the conscience and the universal, will of man as a historic entity. It is opposed to classical liberalism which arose as a reaction to absolutism and exhausted its historical function when the State became the expression of the conscience and will of the people. Liberalism denied the State in the name of the individual; Fascism reasserts.

Totalitarianism and state terrorism are defining attributes of fascism. Trump’s administration, horrific as it was, exhibited no such features.

There are also striking differences between fascism and Trump(ism) when it comes to the economy.

Fascists do not oppose private property but believe in taming capitalism by forming a specific relationship between state and big business or monopoly capital, with the state having the upper hand. Mussolini identified the economics of fascism as “state capitalism.” Fascism also intervenes in the overall workings of the economy through coordinated actions of some central planning board to attain a set of “fixed objectives,” even if those actions tended at times to involve “dis-organic intervention,” as Mussolini himself had once complained. Fascism also controls the monetary system, sets prices, and promotes large government projects and all sorts of public works as part of the pursuit of its alleged “full-employment” economy. Hitler’s autobahn construction (though plans for the

autobahn date to the 1920s and construction had actually begun before Hitler came to power) was undertaken under that pretext. Nonetheless, it was rearmament that helped the Nazis achieve economic recovery in the 1930s.

Trump's economic policies, on the other hand, were brutally neoliberal in origin and scope. The war alone that his administration launched on regulations clearly testifies to Trump's commitment to free-market fundamentalism. As far as his opposition to "free trade" is concerned, it was initiated by his belief that other countries were bending the rules at the expense of the United States, not because he was in principle against the idea of "free trade."

Trump's policies sought to enhance even further the power of the plutocracy in the United States. And he accomplished this through the pursuit of extreme neoliberal policies, not through a corporatist model. On the other hand, to keep his fanatical base loyal, he employed a standard repertoire of proto-fascist rhetoric and challenged as far as he could the foundations of liberal democracy, which, according to his followers, had set rules that cater to the whims of the "detestable elite."

In this manner, Trump was not alone. Virtually all authoritarian political figures out there today (Orban in Hungary, Erdogan in Turkey, Bolsonaro in Brazil, to name just a few) use similar tactics, exploit the vulnerabilities in the political culture in which they operate and exhibit disdain for the rule of law. Do they all, with Trump together, belong to the fascist camp? Not unless the aim is to reduce fascism to a meaningless political ideology and forget the sickening atrocities committed by fascist regimes in the most murderous century in recorded history.

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[*Social Change*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).

Noam Chomsky: To Retain Power, Democrats Must Stop Abandoning The Working Class



Noam Chomsky

The U.S. political system is broken, many mainstream pundits declare. Their claim rests on the idea that Republicans and Democrats are more divided than ever and seem to be driven by different conceptions not only of government, but of reality itself. However, the problem with the U.S. political system is more profound than the fact that Democrats and Republicans operate in parallel universes. The issue is that the U.S. appears to function like a democracy, but, essentially, it constitutes a plutocracy, with both parties primarily looking after the same economic interests.

In this interview, Noam Chomsky, an esteemed public intellectual and one of the

world's most cited scholars in modern history, discusses the current shape of the Democratic Party and the challenges facing the progressive left in a country governed by a plutocracy.

C.J. Polychroniou: In [our last interview](#), you analyzed the political identity of today's Republican Party and dissected its strategy for returning to power. Here, I am interested in your thoughts on the current shape of the Democratic Party and, more specifically, on whether it is in the midst of loosening its embrace of neoliberalism to such an extent that an ideological metamorphosis may in fact be underway?

Noam Chomsky: The short answer is: Maybe. There is much uncertainty.

With all of the major differences, the current situation is somewhat reminiscent of the early 1930s, which I'm old enough to remember, if hazily. We may recall Antonio Gramsci's [famous observation](#) from Mussolini's prison in 1930, applicable to the state of the world at the time, whatever exactly he may have had in mind: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

Today, the foundations of the neoliberal doctrines that have had such a brutal effect on the population and the society are tottering, and might collapse. And there is no shortage of morbid symptoms.

In the years that followed Gramsci's comment, two paths emerged to deal with the deep crisis of the 1930s: social democracy, pioneered by the New Deal in the U.S., and fascism. We have not reached that state, but symptoms of both paths are apparent, in no small measure on party lines.

To assess the current state of the political system, it is useful to go back a little. In the 1970s, the highly class-conscious business community sharply escalated its efforts to dismantle New Deal social democracy and the "regimented capitalism" that prevailed through the postwar period — the fastest growth period of American state capitalism, egalitarian, with financial institutions under control so there were none of the crises that punctuate the neoliberal years and no "bailout economy" of the kind that has prevailed through these years, as Robert Pollin and Gerald Epstein [very effectively review](#).

The business attack begins in the late 1930s with experiments in what later

became a major industry of “scientific methods of strike-breaking.” It was on hold during the war and took off immediately afterwards, but it was relatively limited until the 1970s. The political parties pretty much followed suit; more accurately perhaps, the two factions of the business party that share government in the U.S. one-party state.

By the ‘70s, beginning with Nixon’s overtly racist “Southern strategy,” the Republicans began their journey off the political spectrum, culminating (so far) in the McConnell-Trump era of contempt for democracy as an impediment to holding uncontested power. Meanwhile, the Democrats abandoned the working class, handing working people over to their class enemy. The Democrats transitioned to a party of affluent professionals and Wall Street, becoming “cool” under Obama in a kind of replay of the infatuation of liberal intellectuals with the Camelot image contrived in the Kennedy years.

The last gasp of real Democratic concern for working people was the 1978 Humphrey-Hawkins full employment act. President Carter, who seemed to have had little interest in workers’ rights and needs, didn’t veto the bill, but watered it down so that it had no teeth. In the same year, UAW president Doug Fraser withdrew from Carter’s Labor-Management committee, condemning business leaders — belatedly — for having “[chosen to wage a one-sided class war](#) ... against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society.”

The one-sided class war took off in force under Ronald Reagan. Like his accomplice Margaret Thatcher in England, Reagan understood that the first step should be to eliminate the enemy’s means of defense by harsh attack on unions, opening the door for the corporate world to follow, with the Democrats largely indifferent or participating in their own ways — matters we’ve discussed before.

The tragi-comic effects are being played out in Washington right now. Biden attempted to pass badly needed support for working people who have suffered a terrible blow during the pandemic (while billionaires profited handsomely and the stock market boomed). He ran into a solid wall of implacable Republican opposition. A major issue was how to pay for it. Republicans indicated some willingness to agree to the relief efforts if the costs were borne by unemployed workers by reducing the pittance of compensation. But they imposed an unbreachable Red Line: not a penny from the very rich.

Nothing can touch Trump's major legislative achievement, the 2017 tax scam that enriches the super-rich and corporate sector at the expense of everyone else — the bill that Joseph Stiglitz termed the [U.S. Donor Relief Act of 2017](#), which “embodies all that is wrong with the Republican Party, and to some extent, the debased state of American democracy.”

Meanwhile, Republicans claim to be the party of the working class, thanks to their advocacy of lots of guns for everyone, Christian nationalism and white supremacy — our “traditional way of life.”

To Biden's credit, he has made moves to reverse the abandonment of working people by his party, but in the “debased state” of what remains of American democracy, it's a tough call.

The Democrats are meanwhile split between the management of the affluent professional/Wall Street-linked party, still holding most of the reins, and a large and energetic segment of the popular base that has been pressing for social democratic initiatives to deal with the ravages of the 40-year bipartisan neoliberal assault — and among some of the popular base, a lot more.

The internal conflict has been sharp for years, particularly as the highly successful Sanders campaign began to threaten absolute control by the Clinton-Obama party managers, who tried in every way to sabotage his candidacy. We see that playing out again right now in the [intense efforts to block](#) promising left candidates in Buffalo and the Cleveland area in northeast Ohio.

We should bear in mind the peculiarities of political discourse in the U.S. Elsewhere, “socialist” is about as controversial as “Democrat” is here, and policies described as “maybe good but too radical for Americans” are conventional. That's true, for example, of the two main programs that Bernie Sanders championed: universal health care and free higher education. The economics columnist and associate editor of the London *Financial Times*, Rana Foroohar, hardly exaggerated when she [wrote](#) that while Sanders is considered the spokesperson of the radical left here, “in terms of his policies, he's probably pretty close to your average German Christian Democrat,” the German conservative party in a generally conservative political system.

On issues, the split between the party managers and progressive sectors of the

voting base is pretty much across the board. It is not limited to the relics of social welfare but to a range of other crucial matters, among them, the most important issue that has ever arisen in human history, along with nuclear weapons: the destruction of the environment that sustains life, proceeding apace.

We might tarry a moment to think about this. The most recent general assessment of where we stand comes from a leaked draft of the forthcoming [IPCC study](#) on the state of the environment. According to the report of the study, it “concludes that climate change will fundamentally reshape life on Earth in the coming decades, even if humans can tame planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions. Species extinction, more widespread disease, unlivable heat, ecosystem collapse, cities menaced by rising seas — these and other devastating climate impacts are accelerating and bound to become painfully obvious before a child born today turns 30.... On current trends, we’re heading for three degrees Celsius at best.”

Thanks to activist efforts, notably of the Sunrise movement, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey have been able to introduce a congressional resolution on a Green New Deal that spells out quite carefully what can and must be done. Further popular pressures could move it towards proposed legislation. It is likely to meet an iron wall of resistance from the denialist party, which increasingly is dedicated to the principle enunciated in 1936 by Francisco Franco’s companion, the fascist general Millán Astray: “Abajo la inteligencia! Viva la muerte!”: “Down with intelligence! Viva death.”

As of now, the Democratic response would be mixed. The president refuses to support a Green New Deal, a prerequisite for decent survival. Many in Congress, too. That can change, and must. A lot will depend on the coming election.

While all of this is going on here, OPEC is meeting, and is riven by conflicts over how much to *increase* oil production, with the White House pressuring for increased production to lower prices and Saudi Arabia worrying that if prices rise it “[would accelerate the shift toward renewable energy](#)” — that is, toward saving human society from catastrophe, a triviality not mentioned in the news report, as usual.

Going back to the crisis of 90 years ago, as the neoliberal assault faces increasingly angry resistance, we see signs of something like the two paths taken then: a drift toward proto-fascism or creation of genuine social democracy. Each

tendency can of course proceed further, reawakening Rosa Luxemburg's warning "Socialism or Barbarism."

It is useful to recall that the primary intellectual forces behind the neoliberal assault have a long history of support for fascism. Just a few years before the assault was launched, they had conducted an experiment in neoliberal socio-economic management under the aegis of the Pinochet dictatorship, which prepared the ground by destroying labor and dispatching critics to hideous torture chambers or instant death. Under near-perfect experimental conditions, they managed to crash the economy in a few years, but no matter. On to greater heights: imposing the doctrine on the world.

In earlier years, their guru, Ludwig von Mises, was overjoyed by the triumph of fascism, which he claimed had "saved European civilization," exulting, "The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history." Mussolini's "achievement" was much like Pinochet's: destroying labor and independent thought so that "sound economics" could proceed unencumbered by sentimental concerns about human rights and justice.

In defense of von Mises, we may recall that he was far from alone in admiring Mussolini's achievements, though few sank to his depths of adulation. In his case, on principled grounds. All worth recalling when we consider the possible responses to the neoliberal disaster.

How do we explain the rise of the progressive left in the Democratic Party?

It's only necessary to review the effects of the 40-year neoliberal assault, as we have done elsewhere. It's hardly surprising that the victims — the large majority of the population — are rebelling, sometimes in ominous ways, sometimes in ways that can forge a path to a much better future.

Democrats may need to expand their base in order to keep the House in 2022. How do they do that, especially with the presence of so many different wings within the party?

The best way is by designing and implementing policies that will help people and benefit the country. Biden's programs so far move in that direction — not enough, but significantly. Such efforts would show that under decent leadership, impelled by popular pressure, reform can improve lives, alleviate distress, satisfy some

human needs. That would expand the Democratic base, just as social-democratic New Deal-style measures have done in the past.

The Republican leadership understands that very well. That is why they will fight tooth and nail against any measures to improve life, with strict party discipline. We have been witnessing this for years. One of many illustrations is the dedication to block the very limited improvement of the scandalous U.S. health care system in the Affordable Care Act — “Obamacare.” Another is the sheer cruelty of Republican governors who refuse federal aid to provide desperate people even with meager Medicaid assistance.

That’s one way to expand the base, which could have large effects if it can break through Republican opposition and the reluctance of the more right-wing sectors of the Democratic Party (termed “moderate” in media discourse). It could bring back to the Democratic fold the working-class voters who left in disgust with Obama’s betrayals, and further back, with the Democrats’ abandonment of working people since the reshaping of the party from the ‘70s.

There are other opportunities. Working people and communities that depend on the fossil fuel economy can be reached by taking seriously their concerns and working with them to develop transitional programs that will provide them with better jobs and better lives with renewable energy. That’s no idle dream. Such initiatives have had substantial success in coal-mining and oil-producing states, thanks in considerable measure to [Bob Pollin’s grassroots work](#).

There is no mystery about how to extend the base: pursue policies that serve peoples’ interests, not the preferences of the donor class.

I worry about reports about some immigrant neighborhoods showing [increased enthusiasm for the ideals and values expressed by the Republican Party](#) of Donald Trump. Do you have any insights?

The evidence that this is happening seems slim. There was a slight shift in the last election, but the results don’t seem to depart significantly from the historical norm. Latino communities varied. Where there had been serious Latino organizing, as in Arizona and Nevada, there was no drift to Trump. Where Mexican-American communities were ignored, as in South Texas, Trump broke records in Latino support. There seem to be several reasons. People resented being taken for granted by the Democratic Party (“You’re Latino, so you’re in our

pocket”). There was no effort to provide the constructive alternative to the Republican claim that global warming is a liberal hoax and the Democrats want to take your jobs away. The communities are often attracted by the Republican pretense of “defending religion” from secular attack. It’s necessary to explore these matters with some care.

Many Democrats wish to eliminate the filibuster — another Jim Crow relic — because with the wafer-thin majority that they hold it is impossible to pass into law landmark pieces of legislation. However, given today’s political climate, and with the possibility looming on the horizon that Trumpist Republicans will retake the House in 2022, aren’t there risks in abolishing the filibuster?

It’s a concern, and it would have some weight in a functioning democracy. But a long series of Republican attacks on the integrity of Congress, culminating in McConnell’s machinations, have seriously undermined the Senate’s claim to be part of a democratic polity. If Democrats were to resort to filibuster, McConnell, who is no fool, might well find ways to use illegal procedures to ram through acts that would establish more firmly the rule of the far right, whatever the population might prefer. We saw that illustrated recently in his shenanigans with the Garland-Gorsuch Supreme Court appointments, but it goes far back.

Political analyst Michael Tomasky [argued recently](#), quite seriously, that the Senate should be abolished, converted to something like the British House of Lords, with a peripheral role in governance. There has always been an argument for that, and with the evisceration of remaining shreds of democracy under Republican leadership, it is an idea whose time may have come, at least as a goal for the future.

When all is said and done, the U.S. does not have a functional democratic system, and it is probably best defined as a plutocracy. With that in mind, what do you consider to be the issues of paramount importance that progressives, both activists and lawmakers, must work on in order to bring about meaningful reform that would improve average people’s lives, as well as enhance the prospects of a democratic future?

For good reason, the gold standard in scholarship on the Constitutional Convention, by Michael Klarman, is entitled “The Framers’ Coup” — meaning, the coup against democracy by a distinguished group of wealthy, white, (mostly) slave

owners. There were a few dissidents — Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson (who did not take part in the Convention). But the rest were pretty much in agreement that democracy was a threat that had to be avoided. The Constitution was carefully designed to undercut the threat.

The call for plutocracy was not concealed. Madison's vision, largely enacted, was that the new government should "protect the minority of the opulent against the majority." Many devices were introduced to ensure this outcome. Primary power was placed in the (unelected) Senate, with long terms to insulate Senators from public pressure.

"The senate ought to come from and represent the wealth of the nation," Madison held, backed by his colleagues. These are the "more capable set of men," who sympathize with property owners and their rights. In simple words, "those who own the country ought to govern it," as explained by John Jay, First Justice of the Supreme Court. In short, plutocracy.

In Madison's defense, it should be recalled that his mentality was pre-capitalist. Scholarship recognizes that Madison "was — to depths that we today are barely able to imagine — an eighteenth century gentleman of honor," in the words of Lance Banning. It is the "enlightened Statesman" and "benevolent philosopher" who were to exercise power. They would be "men of intelligence, patriotism, property and independent circumstances," and "pure and noble" like the Romans of the imagination of the time; men "whose wisdom may best discern the true interests of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations." They would thus "refine" and "enlarge" the "public views," Banning continues, guarding the public interest against the "mischiefs" of democratic majorities.

The picture is richly confirmed in the fascinating debates of the Convention. It has ample resonance to the present, quite strikingly in the most respected liberal democratic theory.

Madison himself was soon disabused of these myths. In a 1791 letter to Jefferson, he deplored "the daring depravity of the times" as the "stockjobbers will become the pretorian band of the government — at once its tools and its tyrant; bribed by its largesses, and overawing it by clamors and combinations." Not a bad picture of America today. The contours have been sharpened by 40 years of bipartisan

neoliberalism, now challenged by the progressive base that Democratic Party managers are working to subdue.

With all its anti-democratic features, by 18th-century standards, the American constitutional system was a significant step toward freedom and democracy, enough so as to seriously frighten European statesmen who perceived the potential domino effect of subversive republicanism. The world has changed. The plutocracy remains in place, a terrain of struggle.

Over time, popular struggles have expanded the realm of freedom, justice and democratic participation, not without regression. There are many barriers that remain to be demolished in the political system and the general social order: bought elections, the “bailout economy,” structural racism and other attacks on basic rights, suppression of labor.

It is all too easy to extend the list and to spell out more radical goals that should be guidelines for the future, all overshadowed by the imminent threats to survival.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

Source: <https://truthout.org/noam-chomsky>

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Humanity Needs To Declare Independence From Fossil Fuels



CJ

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The Declaration of Independence, the work of a five-person committee appointed by the Continental Congress, but with Thomas Jefferson as the most vocal figure of the values of the Enlightenment on this side of this Atlantic being the primary author and upon the insistence of none other than John Adams himself, is one of the most important documents in the history of democracy and of political progress.

Built around Locke's political epistemology, the Declaration of Independence signaled to the world that the old political order based on the divine right of kings and political absolutism in general was illegitimate and that, subsequently, people have the right to overthrow a regime that fails to protect the "self-evident" rights of every individual, which are "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

The Declaration of Independence, the official birth certificate of the American nation and the most progressive document of its time in support of popular sovereignty, was officially approved by the Congress on July 4, 1776, but eventually it would end up becoming an inspiration to future generations both in the United States and around the world. For example, the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" issued by early feminists at the July 1848 Seneca Falls Convention was modelled after the Declaration of Independence. Ho Chi Ming's speech on September 2, 1945, proclaiming the Independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam, began with nearly an exact quote from the second paragraph of America's 1776 Declaration of Independence.

Today, the United States and the world at large need a new declaration of independence—a declaration of independence from fossil fuels.

The planet is on the verge of unmitigated disaster due to global warming. The Industrial Revolution, which began in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, brought about a series of major transformations in energy usage— first from wood to coal and then to oil and gas. And, to be sure, for more than a century, from the 1870s to the 1970s, to be exact, the world experienced unprecedented economic growth, although the relationship between economic growth and fossil fuel energy consumption is not straightforwardly linear for both developed and emerging economies.

However, for several decades now, we have also known of the effects of fossil fuels on the environment and climate change. The burning of fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gasses trap heat in Earth's atmosphere, causing global warming. The Earth's average global temperature has risen by 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit, according to NASA's Godard Institute. Some regions of the world, however, have already seen average temperatures rise by more than 2 degrees Fahrenheit because temperatures increase at different speeds, with land areas warming faster than coastal areas.

Global temperatures matter. Rising global temperatures have major effects on numerous fronts, ranging from air quality and rising sea levels to the frequency of environmental events such as forest fires, hurricanes, heat waves, floods, droughts, and so on. The climate crisis also impacts on human rights and becomes a driver of migration. And last but not least, there are economic costs associated with the climate crisis as rising temperatures affect a wide range of industries, from agriculture to tourism. It's estimated that the economic damage caused by natural disasters for the most recent decade (2000-2009) was approximately \$3 trillion—more than \$1 trillion increase from the previous decade.

Make no mistake about it. The world's most authoritative voice on the climate crisis, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (ICPP), has been warning us for several years now that the world is at serious risk, and that time is running out to save the planet. Yet, very little has been done so far to address our climate crisis, although we know what needs to be done.

What needs to be done is to move the world economy to net-zero emissions and 100 clean energy. This requires, starting immediately, to implement a radical plan for the phasing out of fossil fuels and the concomitant implementation of a green global infrastructure development plan. In this massive undertaking, the public sector needs to become the vanguard of the transition to clean and renewable energy, with the citizenry fully on its corner and against those greedy capitalists who continue to put profits ahead of people and the planet's future.

We have the technical know-how as well as the available economic resources to make the transition to a clean energy future. Details of this undertaking are spelled out, for instance, in the recent publication of [*Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*](#) (Verso 2020) by Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin.

Moreover, the transition to a clean energy future does not mean the end of economic growth. On the contrary, a Global Green New Deal, as University of Massachusetts-Amherst economics professor Robert Pollin has sketched out in the aforementioned book, will generate millions of new and good-paying jobs in both the developed and the developing countries. The economic benefits of a green new deal are quite significant, while the costs of not doing a green new deal are catastrophic.

In sum, the time has come for the people of the United States—and indeed of citizens all over the beautiful blue planet—to announce a new Declaration of Independence: a declaration of independence from fossil fuels. This is our only chance to move towards a sustainable future, our only chance to avoid the highly likely probability of a return to barbarism due to the collapse of organized social order brought about by mitigating global warming.

Degrowth Policies Cannot Avert Climate Crisis. We Need A Green New Deal



Robert Pollin

The Green New Deal is the boldest and most likely the most effective way to combat the climate emergency. According to its advocates, the Green New Deal will save the planet while boosting economic growth and generating in the process millions of new and well-paying jobs. However, a growing number of ecological economists contend that rescuing the environment necessitates “degrowth.”

To the extent that a sharp reduction in economic activity is a positive goal, “degrowth” requires overturning the current world order. But do we have the luxury to wait for a new world order while the catastrophic impacts of global warming are already upon us and getting worse with each passing decade?

World-renowned progressive economist *Robert Pollin*, distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, is one of the leading proponents of a global Green New Deal. In this interview, he addresses the degrowth vs. Green New Deal debate, looking at how economies can grow while still advancing a viable climate stabilization project as long as the growth process is absolutely decoupled from fossil fuel consumption.

C.J. Polychroniou: Since the idea of a Green New Deal entered into public

consciousness, the debate about climate emergency is becoming increasingly polarized between those advocating “green growth” and those arguing in support of “degrowth.” What exactly does “degrowth” mean, and is this at the end of the day an economic or an ideological debate?

Robert Pollin: Let me first say that I don't think that the debate on the climate emergency between advocates of degrowth versus the Green New Deal is becoming increasingly polarized, certainly not as a broad generalization. Rather, as an advocate of the Green New Deal and critic of degrowth, I would still say that there are large areas of agreement along with some significant differences. For example, I agree that uncontrolled economic growth produces serious environmental damage along with increases in the supply of goods and services that households, businesses and governments consume. I also agree that a significant share of what is produced and consumed in the current global capitalist economy is wasteful, especially much, if not most, of what high-income people throughout the world consume. It is also obvious that growth per se as an economic category makes no reference to the distribution of the costs and benefits of an expanding economy. I think it is good to keep in mind both the areas of agreement as well as the differences.

But what about definitions: What do we actually mean by the Green New Deal and degrowth?

Starting with the Green New Deal: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that for the global economy to move onto a viable climate stabilization path, global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) will have to fall by about 45 percent as of 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050. As such, by my definition, the core of the global Green New Deal is to advance a global project to hit these IPCC targets, and to accomplish this in a way that also expands decent job opportunities and raises mass living standards for working people and the poor throughout the world. The single most important project within the Green New Deal entails phasing out the consumption of oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy, since burning fossil fuels is responsible for about 70 - 75 percent of all global CO₂ emissions. We then have to build an entirely new global energy infrastructure, the centerpieces of which are high efficiency and clean renewable energy sources — primarily solar and wind power. The investments required to dramatically increase energy efficiency standards and to equally dramatically expand the global supply of clean energy sources will also be

a huge source of new job creation, in all regions of the world. These are the basics of the Green New Deal as I see it. It is that simple in concept, while also providing specific pathways for achieving its overarching goals.

Now on degrowth: Since I am not a supporter, it would be unfair for me to be the one explaining what it means. So here is how some of the leading degrowth proponents themselves describe the concept and movement. For example, in a 2015 edited volume titled, [*Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*](#), the volume's editors Giacomo D'Alisa, Federico Demaria and Giorgos Kallis write that, "The foundational theses of degrowth are that growth is uneconomic and unjust, that it is ecologically unsustainable and that it will never be enough." More recently, a 2021 paper by Riccardo Mastini, Giorgos Kallis and Jason Hickel, titled, "[A Green New Deal without Growth?](#)," write that "ecological economists have defined degrowth as an equitable downscaling of throughput, with a concomitant securing of wellbeing."

It is instructive here that, in this 2021 paper, Mastini, Kallis and Hickel do also acknowledge that degrowth has not advanced into developing a specific set of economic programs, writing that "degrowth is not a political platform, but rather an 'umbrella concept' that brings together a wide variety of ideas and social struggles." This acknowledgement reflects, in my view, a major ongoing weakness with the degrowth literature, which is that, in concerning itself primarily with very broad themes, it actually gives almost no detailed attention to developing an effective climate stabilization project, or any other specific ecological project. Indeed, this deficiency was reflected in a 2017 interview with the leading ecological economist Herman Daly himself, without question a major intellectual progenitor of the degrowth movement. Daly says in the interview that he is "favorably inclined" toward degrowth, but nevertheless demurs that he is "still waiting for them to get beyond the slogan and develop something a little more concrete."

This lack of specificity among degrowth proponents leads to further problems. For example, degrowth supporters, such as Mastini et al. in their 2021 paper, are clear that they support the transformation of the global energy system along the lines that I have described above, from our current fossil fuel-dominant system to one whose core features are high efficiency and clean renewable energy sources. Yet in fact, building out this new energy system will obviously entail massive

growth of the global clean energy system, just as it will equally entail the phasing out — or *degrowth*, if you prefer — of the global fossil fuel energy system. In my view, it is more useful to be specific about which sectors of the global economy will certainly need to grow — e.g., the clean energy system — while others, like fossil fuels, contract, as opposed to invoking sweeping generalities about degrowth. We can extend this point. For example, I am sure degrowth proponents would favor major expansions in access to public education, universal health care, high-quality affordable housing, regenerative agriculture and the share of the Earth's surface covered by forests.

In focusing on some critical specifics, I would also add that there is no way that a general project of degrowth can put the global economy onto a viable climate stabilization path. With the COVID-19 recession, the global economy just went through a powerful natural experiment to demonstrate this point. That is, during the pandemic in 2020, the global economy contracted by 3.5 percent, which the International Monetary Fund [described as](#) a “severe collapse ... that has had acute adverse impacts on women, youth, the poor, the informally employed and those who work in contact-intensive sectors.” In other words, the pandemic produced an intense period of global “degrowth.” This recession did also produce a decline in emissions, as entire sections of the global economy were forced into lockdown mode. But the emissions decline amounted to only [6.4 percent over 2020](#). Remember, the IPCC tells us that we need to cut emissions by 45 percent as of 2030 and be at zero emissions by 2050. If the COVID recession only yields a 6.4 percent emissions reduction despite the enormous levels of economic pain inflicted, clearly “degrowth” cannot come close, on its own, to delivering a 45-percent emissions cut by 2030, much less a zero emissions global economy by 2050.

Those who see the Green New Deal not only as the most effective strategy to tackle global warming but also as an engine growth, such as yourself, rely on the concept of “decoupling,” by which is meant the absolute decoupling of economic growth from carbon emissions. However, degrowth advocates seem to be arguing that there is no empirical evidence for absolute “decoupling,” and that it’s highly unlikely that it will ever happen. How do you respond to such claims?

Let's recognize, to begin with, that people are still going to need to consume energy to light, heat and cool buildings; to power cars, buses, trains and airplanes; and to operate computers and industrial machinery, among other uses.

As one critical example here, in low-income economies, delivering adequate supplies of affordable electricity becomes transformative for people's lives, enabling them, for example, to adequately light their homes at night rather than relying on kerosene lanterns. As such, it should be our goal to greatly expand access to electricity to low-income communities throughout the world, while we are also driving down CO2 emissions to zero. The solution is for energy consumption and economic activity more generally to be absolutely decoupled from the generation of CO2 emissions. That is, the consumption of fossil fuel energy will need to fall steadily and dramatically in absolute terms, even while people will still be able to consume energy resources to meet their various demands. The more modest goal of *relative decoupling* — through which fossil fuel energy consumption and CO2 emissions continue to increase, but at a slower rate than overall economic activity — is therefore not a solution. Economies can still continue to grow while still advancing a viable climate stabilization project as long as the growth process is absolutely decoupled from fossil fuel consumption.

Is absolute decoupling impossible to accomplish within the context of economic growth? To date, we have seen some modest evidence — and I do stress the evidence is *modest* — of absolute decoupling taking place. For example, between 2000 and 2014, [21 countries](#), including the U.S., Germany, the U.K., Spain and Sweden, all managed to absolutely decouple GDP growth from CO2 emissions — i.e., GDP in these countries expanded over this 14-year period while CO2 emissions fell. This is a positive development, but only a small step in the right direction.

The way to deliver a much more rapid pattern of absolute decoupling is, of course, to build out the global clean energy economy, and to do so quickly. This is a feasible project. By [my own estimates](#), it requires that the global economy spend approximately 2.5 percent of global GDP per year on investments in energy efficiency and clean renewable energy supplies, while the global economy grows at an average rate of about 3 percent per year between now and 2050. The [International Renewable Energy Agency](#) and [International Energy Agency](#) recently published studies that reached similar results for the global economy. Focused on the U.S. economy, the energy economists Jim Williams and Ryan Jones also reached a similar result, as part of the [Zero Carbon Action Plan](#) project.

From this and related evidence, I conclude that absolute decoupling is certainly a feasible, though also obviously a hugely challenging, project. But we can't just

talk about it, pro or con. We have to make the investments, at 2.5 percent of global GDP per year or thereabouts, every year until 2050, to build the global clean energy economy. If we do that, absolute decoupling will happen. If we don't make those investments, then of course, absolute decoupling becomes an impossibility.

Various ecologically minded activists are also arguing that the Green New Deal relies on the use of massive energy resources, including extensive use of the steel industry, in order to make the transition to a clean, renewable and net-zero emissions economy, and that what is really needed instead is a green revolution of the mind, whereby zero energy living is the ultimate goal. My question is this: Can the Green New Deal deliver 100 percent clean energy?

There are several industries in which energy is consumed intensively. They include steel, cement and paper, along with, obviously, all forms of transportation. But note that these industries are *energy* intensive. They are not necessarily *fossil fuel energy* intensive. If we succeed, through the Green New Deal, in increasing the efficiency at which these industries consume energy and we also deliver abundant supplies of clean renewable energy, then the problems of dealing with energy-intensive industries can be solved. It's true that there will be some specific areas which will present more difficult challenges. For example, some parts of steel production rely on furnaces that are operating at very high temperatures. Reaching these high temperatures are, to date, difficult to achieve through electricity as opposed to burning coal in a furnace. This problem will need to be solved over time. One likely solution could be to rely on laser technology through which the required high temperatures can be reached with electricity, with the electricity, in turn, being produced through renewable energy.

Another more difficult area is long-distance aviation. To date, we cannot rely on electric batteries to fly planes across the Atlantic Ocean, for example, as we can to drive cars from New York to California. One likely solution here will be to fuel the planes' engines with low-emissions liquid bioenergy, such as ethanol produced from agricultural wastes as the raw material. Battery storage capacities are also likely to be improving significantly with more people focusing on [solving exactly this problem](#). Let's remember that the costs of producing electricity from solar photovoltaic panels have fallen by over 80 percent within the past nine years, and the U.S. Energy Department itself [projects further major declines](#) in

just the next five years. Moreover, the International Renewable Agency [reported](#) just recently that, for the first time, 62 percent of all renewable energy sources produced energy at lower costs than the *cheapest sources* of fossil fuel energy.

All of this tells me that achieving absolute decoupling is a feasible project within the framework of a global Green New Deal. The Green New Deal, in turn, is, in my view, the only way through which climate stabilization can become fully consistent with expanding decent work opportunities, raising mass living standards and fighting poverty in all regions of the world.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/degrowth-policies-alone-cannot-avert-climate-crisis-we-need-a-green-new-deal/>

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American Democracy Will Remain A Mirage Without A Dramatic Overhaul Of The Political And Economic System



CJ

Polychroniou

The progressive forces fighting for a democratic future have a truly herculean task ahead of them.

It is no longer an unknown fact or a view propounded by a handful of radical historians and political scientists: the American political system has such severe structural flaws that it is potentially antithetical to democracy and surely detrimental to the promotion of the common good.

Consider the following stark realizations about the condition of American democracy as evidence of the changing times:

The United States has been rated for a number of consecutive years by the Economist Intelligence Union as a “flawed democracy.”

Scores of highly respected mainstream scholars have analyzed massive amounts of data showing that public opinion counts very little in US policymaking (see, for example, Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*; Princeton University Press, 2nd ed., 2016) to conclude that the American political system works essentially in a manner that actually subverts the will of the common people.

Others, like Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, have [argued](#) that, because of rules set in the political system, the American economy is rigged to favor the rich, a view that is obviously wholeheartedly endorsed by Kishore Mahbubani, Distinguished Fellow from Asia Research Institute, at the National University of Singapore, when he declares that the US functions like a democracy

but is actually a [plutocracy](#).

And Timothy K. Kuhner, Professor of Law at the University of Auckland, has gone even further by [arguing](#) most convincingly in *King's Law Journal* that the United States isn't only a plutocracy, but the only plutocracy in the world to be established by law.

To a large extent, of course, the structural flaws in the American political system have their origins in the many anti-democratic elements found in the Constitution. This is the [view](#) of eminent constitutional scholars such as Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean and Distinguished Professor of Law at Berkeley Law School, and Sanford Levinson, W. St. John Garwood and W. St. John Garwood, Jr. Centennial Chair in Law at the University of Texas Law School, and author of *Our Undemocratic Constitution* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Let's start with one of the basic principles of democracy which is "one person, one vote." It is not applicable to the case of American "democracy" where US presidents are chosen by electors, not by popular vote. Hence the "democratic" anomaly of a candidate elected to become the 45th president of the United States after having lost the popular vote by a bigger margin than any other US president. Indeed, Donald Trump was elected president by trailing Hillary Clinton by nearly three million votes. The same thing happened in 2000, when Al Gore won nearly half a million more votes than George W. Bush, but it was Bush who won the presidency by being declared winner in the state of Florida by less than 540 votes.

In any other modern democratic system, such electoral outcomes would be imaginable only if democracy was crushed by some kind of a military coup with the aim of installing in power the "preferred" candidate of the ruling class.

To be sure, there is nothing in the Constitution that grants American voters the right to choose their president. When American voters go to the polls to vote for a presidential candidate, what they are essentially doing is casting a vote for their preferred party's nominated slate of electors.

The electoral college system is democracy's ugliest anachronism. It was designed by the founding fathers in order to prevent the masses from choosing directly who will run the country, and it's simply shocking that it still exists more than two hundred years later.

The existence of the electoral college system also helps to explain why voter turnout for the presidential elections in the world's most outdated democratic model is consistently disturbingly low. More than 90 million eligible voters did not vote in the 2016 presidential election, in what was considered to be one of the most important elections in many generations because of the inflammatory and racist rhetoric of Donald Trump, and while there was a bigger turnout in 2020, the US is still incredibly low compared with other advanced democratic nations around the world when it comes to electoral participation, ranking 31st out of 35 developed countries in 2016, and 24th in 2020, respectively.

The existence of the two-party system (yet another "democratic" anomaly), and even the fact that elections are being held on a day when most people work, are also reasons for the low voter turnout in the US.

In addition, one could also argue that the reason why so many Americans are abstaining from voting, a cornerstone of democracy, is intrinsically related to the long-stemming pathologies of the American political culture, namely due to the manufacturing of a highly individualistic and consumer-driven society intended to promote conformism, ignorance and apathy about public affairs all while the rich and powerful control policymaking.

However, an even bigger "democratic" anomaly than the presence of the electoral college system revolves around US senate representation. A tiny state such as Wyoming, with barely 600,000 residents, has the same number of Senators on Capitol Hill as does California, with nearly 40 million residents. This translates, roughly, to Wyoming voters having 70 times more Senate representation than California voters. Moreover, since most of the smaller states have overwhelmingly white residents, it also means that whites have much larger representation in the Senate than Black and Hispanic Americans.

The undemocratic nature of Senate representation might not have been such a huge problem if its powers were similar to those of upper houses found in many other countries in the world, which tend to be overwhelmingly less than those of the lower houses. In the US, however, the Senate is far more powerful than the House of Representatives as it has virtually complete control over federal legislating and acts as the gatekeeper on treaties, cabinet approvals, and nominations to the Supreme Court.

Yet, perhaps an even bigger insult and injury to the body politic and the

promotion of the common good in the U.S. is the privatization of democracy through the role of money in campaigns and elections. Campaign finance laws in the U.S. always posed at least an indirect threat to democracy by allowing private money to play a very prominent role in the financing of elections, but the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United vs Federal Election Commission*, which shifted even further the influence of dark money on politics by reversing whatever campaign finance restrictions were still in place and essentially declaring that corporations were effectively citizens and thus could spend unlimited funds on elections, robbed America of whatever hopes and aspirations it may have had of attaining a somewhat well-functioning democratic political system.

Taking everything into account, it is clear that, even though the United States remains a free and open society, conditions which have allowed greater exposure and by extension more public awareness of the structural flaws in the country's political system, the progressive forces fighting for a democratic future have a truly herculean task ahead of them.

While changing the constitution, creating a multiparty system, and fighting the corrupting influence of money in politics are absolute necessities for democracy to function—just as surely as a Green New Deal is an absolute must to protect the environment and save the planet—the anti-democratic forces of this country are working even harder these days to destroy whatever is left of American democracy.

Republicans are bent on restricting voting rights as part of a concerted effort to change the rules in a way that they will impact on the demographic shifts favoring the Democrats. The campaign for restrictive voting legislation goes all the way back to the end of the 20th century, so what we are witnessing today is just a new wave of intensification to roll back decades of progress on voting rights.

The thoroughly anti-democratic and racist mindset of Republican Senators could not have been more glaringly revealed than with their recent use of a Jim Crow relic—the filibuster—to block the most extensive voting rights bill in a generation. Now, activists are concentrating on eliminating the filibuster, which, naturally, should have no place in a normal democracy.

Yet, eliminating the filibuster while everything else stays the same in connection with the workings of the American political system and its institutions carries certain undeniable risks given that the most reactionary and outright proto-fascist

forces in today's political universe are feverishly working on retaking power—first in the 2022 midterm elections, and then in 2024, in the presidential elections. As such, progressives should never lose sight of the importance of always maintaining a multi-level strategy for addressing and hopefully fixing the nation's outdated political system and rigged economy.

Indeed, the American political system needs a dramatic overhaul due to its many structural flaws. Without one, American democracy will remain a mirage.

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Chomsky: Republicans Are Willing To Destroy Democracy To Retake

Power



Noam Chomsky

Today's Republican Party is an extremist force that no longer qualifies as a mainstream political party and is surely not interested in participating in "normal" politics. In fact, today's GOP is so wrapped around extreme and irrational beliefs that even Europe's far-right parties and movements, including Marine Le Pen's National Rally, seem conventional in comparison.

The GOP's political identity has been dramatically shaped by former President Donald Trump, but these recent shifts would not have been possible if there weren't already an array of groups across U.S. society and culture (including white supremacists, right-wing Evangelical Christians and Second Amendment activists, to name just a few) that have long embraced extremist and "proto-fascist" views about the way the country should be governed and the values that it should hold. For them, Trump was and remains America's "great white hope." In this context, Trump's voting base — which continues to believe in the idea of a stolen election and to support Trump-led GOP efforts to stamp critical race theory out of schools and restrict voting rights — speaks volumes about the anti-democratic and threatening nature of today's GOP.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and activist Noam Chomsky explains what has happened to the Republican Party and why even more than democracy is at stake if the "proto-fascist" forces inspired by Trump return to power.

C.J. Polychroniou: Over the course of the past few decades, the Republican Party has gone through a series of ideological transformations — from traditional conservatism to reactionism and finally to what we may define as "proto-fascism"

where the irrational has become the driving force. How do we explain what has happened to the GOP?

Noam Chomsky: Your term "[neoliberal proto-fascism](#)" seems to me quite an accurate characterization of the current Republican organization — I'm hesitant to call them a "Party" because that might suggest that they have some interest in participating honestly in normal parliamentary politics. More fitting, I think, is the judgment of American Enterprise Institute political analysts Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein that the modern Republican Party has transformed to a "radical insurgency" with disdain for democratic participation. That was before the Trump-McConnell hammer blows of the past few years, which drove the conclusion home more forcefully.

The term "neoliberal proto-fascism" captures well both the features of the current party and the distinction from the fascism of the past. The commitment to the most brutal form of neoliberalism is apparent in the legislative record, crucially the subordination of the party to private capital, the inverse of classic fascism. But the fascist symptoms are there, including extreme racism, violence, worship of the leader (sent by God, according to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo), immersion in a world of "alternative facts" and a frenzy of irrationality. Also in other ways, such as the extraordinary efforts in Republican-run states to suppress teaching in schools that doesn't conform to their white supremacist doctrines. Legislation is being enacted to ban instruction in "critical race theory," the new demon, replacing Communism and Islamic terror as the plague of the modern age. "Critical race theory" is the scare-phrase used for the study of the systematic structural and cultural factors in the hideous 400-year history of slavery and enduring racist repression. Proper indoctrination in schools and universities must ban this heresy. What actually happened for 400 years and is very much alive today must be presented to students as a deviation from the real America, pure and innocent, much as in well-run totalitarian states.

What's missing from "proto-fascism" is the ideology: state control of the social order, including the business classes, and party control of the state with the maximal leader in charge. That could change. German industry and finance at first thought they could use the Nazis as their instrument in beating down labor and the left while remaining in charge. They learned otherwise. The current split between the more traditional corporate leadership and the Trump-led party is suggestive of something similar, but only remotely. We are far from the conditions

that led to Mussolini, Hitler, and their cohorts.

On the driving force of irrationality, the facts are inescapable and should be of deep concern. Though we can't credit Trump entirely with the achievement, he certainly has shown great skill in carrying out a challenging assignment: implementing policies for the benefit of his primary constituency of great wealth and corporate power while conning the victims into worshipping him as their savior. That's no mean achievement, and inducing an atmosphere of utter irrationality has been a primary instrument, a virtual prerequisite.

We should distinguish the voting base, now pretty much owned by Trump, from the political echelon (Congress) — and distinguish both from a more shadowy elite that really runs the Party, McConnell and associates.

[Attitudes among the voting base](#) are truly ominous. Put aside the fact that a large majority of Trump voters believe that the elections were stolen. A majority also believe that “The traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it” and 40 percent take a stronger stand: “if elected leaders will not protect America, the people must do it themselves, even if it requires violent actions.” Not surprising, perhaps, when [a quarter of Republicans](#) are reported to believe that “the government, media, and financial worlds in the US are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking operation.”

In the background are more realistic concerns about the disappearance of “the traditional American way of life”: a Christian and white supremacist world where Black people “know their place” and there are no infections from “deviants” who call for gay rights and other such obscenities. That traditional way of life indeed is disappearing.

There are also elements of realism in the various “great replacement” theories that seem to consume much of the Trump base. Putting aside absurdities about immigration and elite plotting, a simple look at distribution of births suffices to show that white domination is declining.

It's also worth remembering the deep roots of these concerns. Among the founders, there were two distinguished figures of the Enlightenment, one of whom hoped that the new country would be free of “blot or mixture,” red or black

(Jefferson), while the other felt that Germans and Swedes should perhaps be barred entry because they are too “swarthy” (Franklin). Myths of Anglo-Saxon origin were prevalent through the 19th century. All of this is apart from the virulent racism and its horrifying manifestations.

Concerns about satanic cults are dangerous enough, but other deeply irrational beliefs are far more consequential. One of the most threatening revelations of recent days was a scarcely noticed observation in [the latest report of a Yale University group](#) that monitors attitudes on climate change — the euphemism for the heating of the planet that will end organized human life on earth unless soon brought under control. The report found that “Over the past year, there has been a sharp decline in the percentages of both liberal/moderate Republicans and conservative Republicans who think developing sources of clean energy should be a priority for the president and Congress. The current numbers are all-time lows since we first asked the question in 2010.”

Meanwhile every day’s news provides information about new potential disasters — for example, the June 11 release of studies reporting [the accelerated collapse of a huge Antarctic glacier](#) that might raise sea levels by a foot and a half — along with reminders by the scientists reporting the warning that “The future is still open to change — if people do what is needed to change it.”

They won’t, as long as the reported attitudes prevail. Unless overcome, they might be a kiss of death if the current strategy of the Republican Party succeeds in putting the wreckers back in power. The strategy is plain enough: no matter what the harm to the country, and to their own voting base, ensure that the Biden administration can do nothing to remedy severe domestic problems, and ram through Jim Crow-style legislation to block voting of people of color and the poor, counting on the acquiescence of the reactionary judiciary that McConnell-Trump have succeeded in installing.

The party is not a lost cause. The Democrats have helped by failing to provide a constructive alternative that answers to the needs and just aspirations of many of those who have flocked to the Trump banner. That can change. Furthermore, attitudes are shifting among younger Republicans, [even among younger Evangelicals](#), a core part of the Republican base since the ‘70s.

Nothing is irremediable.

With regard to the political echelon, there is little to say. With fringe exceptions, they have abandoned any semblance of integrity. Current votes are a clear indication: Total Republican opposition to measures that they know are favored by their constituents in order to ensure that the Biden administration can achieve nothing.

The most abject capitulation of the political echelon was on global warming. In 2008, Republican presidential candidate John McCain had a limited climate plank in his program, and congressional Republicans were considering related legislation. The Koch energy conglomerate responded in force, and any spark of independence was extinguished. That much was evident in the last Republican primaries in 2016, pre-Trump: 100 percent denial that what is happening is happening, or worse, saying maybe it is but we're going to race toward disaster without apologizing (as said John Kasich, who was honored for his integrity by being invited to speak at the 2020 Democratic convention).

I can't raise any objections whatsoever to what you say, but I am a bit baffled by Biden's insistence in trying to reach out to Republicans on some of the major issues confronting the country. Isn't bipartisanship a pipe dream?

Not entirely. Democratic majority leader Chuck Schumer did manage a triumph of bipartisanship. Abandoning a prior commitment to legislation on global warming, Schumer teamed up with Republican Todd Young to conceal [a limited industrial policy program within a "hate China" bill](#) that appealed to shared jingoist sentiments. Republicans ensured that such significant components as funding for the National Science Foundation would be whittled down. Young celebrated the triumph by declaring that "when future generations of Americans cast their gaze towards new frontiers," they won't see "a red flag planted" there, but our own red, white, and blue. What better reason could there be to try to revive domestic manufacturing while trying to undermine the Chinese economy — at a moment when cooperation is a prerequisite for survival.

Meanwhile Biden's Department of Defense is reorienting resources and planning to war with China, a form of madness barely receiving attention, analyzed in detail in Issue #1 of the [Committee for a Sane U.S.-China Policy](#), June 11, 2021.

Trump has transformed the Republican Party into a cult of personality. Is this why Republican leaders blocked the creation of a commission to investigate the

January 6 attack on Capitol?

Trump has captured the voting base, but the political echelon faces a quandary. For a long time, the party elite has been a rich man's club, pandering to business power even more than the Democrats, even after the Democrats abandoned the working class in the '70s, becoming a party of Wall St. and affluent professionals.

The business world was willing to tolerate Trump's antics as long as he was loyally serving them — with some distaste, since he tarnished the image they project of "soulful corporations." But for major sectors, January 6 was too much.

The McConnell types who run the party are caught between a raging voting base in thrall to Trump and the masters of the economy whom they serve. A commission of inquiry, if at all honest, would have deepened this rift, which they have to find a way to paper over if the party, such as it is, is to survive. Best then to cancel it.

Lies, propaganda, and restricting voting rights have become the governing principles of today's GOP. To what extent will the new voting restrictions work to the advantage of the Republican Party, and how will they impact on the current political climate in general and the future of whatever is left of democracy in the United States in particular?

Trump's highly effective strategy of legitimizing "alternative facts" was based on an endless flood of lies, but a few true statements floated in the debris. One was his comment that Republicans can never win a fair election. That's a real problem for the rich man's club. It's hard to garner votes with the slogan "I want to rob you. Vote for me." That leaves only a few options. One is to prevent the "wrong people" from voting. Another is to shape the party program so that policy is concealed by appeals to "cultural issues." Both have been actively pursued. Trump gave the practices a particularly vulgar twist in his usual style, but he didn't invent them.

The current wave of Republican Jim Crow-style legislation is understandable: Trump's observation is accurate, and is likely to be more so in the future with demographic changes and the tendency of younger voters to favor social justice and human rights, among Republicans as well. The efforts have become more feasible after the Roberts Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in the Shelby decision in 2013, which "set the stage for a new era of white hegemony," [as Vann](#)

[Newkirk rightly observed.](#)

Displacement of policy by “cultural issues” traces back to Nixon’s southern strategy. With Democrats beginning to support mild civil rights legislation, Nixon and his advisers recognized that they could switch the southern vote to Republican by racist appeals, barely disguised.

Under Reagan there was little disguise; racist rhetoric and practices came naturally to him. Meanwhile the Republican Christian nationalist strategist Paul Weyrich easily convinced the political leadership that by abandoning their former “pro-choice” stands and pretending to oppose abortion, they could pick up the northern Catholic and newly politicized Evangelical vote. Gun-loving was soon added to the mix, by now reaching such weird absurdities as the recent [Benitez decision overturning California’s ban on assault rifles](#), which are, after all, hardly different from Swiss army knives [according to Benitez]. Trump added more to the mix. Like his fellow demagogues in Europe, he understood well that refugees can be used to whip up xenophobic passions and fears. His racist appeals also went beyond the norm.

Trump has exhibited a certain genius in tapping poisons that run not far below the surface of American society and culture. By such means, he managed to capture the Republican voting base. The party leadership is dedicated to the obstructionist strategy of sacrificing the interests of the country in order to regain power. That leaves the country with one functioning political party, itself torn between the neoliberal leadership and a younger social democratic voting base.

Your phrase “whatever is left of American democracy” is to the point. However progressive it might have been in the 18th century — and there is much to say about that — by today’s standards American democracy is deeply flawed in ways that were already becoming clear to the leading Framer, James Madison by 1791, when he wrote to Jefferson deploring “the daring depravity of the times,” as the “stockjobbers will become the pretorian band of the government — at once its tools and its tyrant; bribed by its largesses, and overawing it by clamors and combinations.”

That could well be a description of recent years, particularly as the neoliberal assault achieved its entirely predictable consequence of placing government even more at the command of concentrations of private power than before. The

“largesses” are too familiar to review. Ample research in mainstream political science has shown that the “clamors and combinations” have left the majority of voters unrepresented, as their own representatives heed the voices of the super-rich, wealthy donors and corporate lobbyists.

The most recent study, using sophisticated AI techniques, dispels “notions that anyone’s opinion about public policy outside of the top 10 percent of affluent Americans independently helps to explain policy.” [Thomas Ferguson](#), the leading academic scholar of the power of the “tools and tyrants” of government, concludes: “Knowing the policy area, the preferences of the top 10 percent, and the views of a handful of interest groups suffice to explain policy changes with impressive accuracy.”

But some vestiges of democracy remain, even after the neoliberal assault. Probably not for long if neoliberal “proto-fascism” extends its sway.

But the fate of democracy won’t actually matter much if the “proto-fascists” regain power. The environment that sustains life cannot long endure the wreckers of the Trump era of decline. Little else will matter if irreversible tipping points are passed.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/chomsky-republicans-are-willing-to-jeopardize-human-survival-to-retake-power/>

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Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).