

The Republican Party's Delusional Attachment To Trump Sets The Stage For The Acceleration Of Neoliberal Proto-Fascism



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Liz Cheney's removal from House GOP leadership over her rejection of Trump's election lies and Republican senators' blocking of a bipartisan proposal to create an independent panel that would investigate the Capitol siege reveal in stark terms at least two things: (a) that Republicans have built a cult of personality around Trump, and (b) that they are now at the mercy of the proto-fascist mob that their Dear Leader energized and nurtured during his four-year tenure in the White House.

Either way, the fact of the matter is that, for purposes of political expediency, the GOP has opted to become a dark political force, relying almost entirely on lies and deception—while at the same time waging a coordinated onslaught on voting rights—as its governing techniques. As such, it represents a real threat to the stability of the republic.

Following Trump's defeat, the strategic objective of the Republican Party is not simply to engage in obstructionism, but to continue dividing the nation and radicalizing the American public against the democratic system. This is the only way that the Republican Party can hope to stay in the game in the political, economic, social, and cultural landscape that defines 21st century America.

Always the party of Big Business and the rich, the Republican Party has oscillated from conservatism to reactionism pretty much throughout the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first centuries, but today's GOP has gone so far

toward abandoning basic democratic norms that it now belongs firmly in the political universe of parties and movements that [make up the far-right](#). In fact, it is considered to be more extreme than Le Pen's National Rally, according to findings based on data collected from the [Manifesto Project](#).

The political identity of today's GOP reflects a decades-long transformation. It begins to take form sometimes during the early 2010s, a decade that historian Andrew Bacevich characterized as an era of "venomous division." Driven primarily by fear of losing power in an increasingly diverse United States, the GOP made a dramatic shift towards extremism as a way of mobilizing white working-class voters, who experienced income stagnation and felt deep economic insecurity thanks to 40 years of brutal neoliberal capitalist policies, and scaring the hell out of the petty bourgeoisie with visions of chaos and disorder brought about by radical forces bent on destroying America and its traditional values and way of life.

Indeed, well before Trump threw his hat in the ring for Presidency, a 2013 [survey](#) of local party leaders found that, in contrast to Democrats who preferred more extreme candidates to more moderate candidates by a 2-to-1 margin, Republicans did so by 10-to-1.

Of course, it is Trump himself who solidifies the shift towards extremism. Fully cognizant of the mood both inside the Republican Party and the country as a whole, especially with a large segment of disenchanted and angry white voters seeing equal opportunity as a zero-sum game for them, Trump embarks on the complete transformation of the GOP into an extremist political party by lurching towards reactionary nationalism and diving deeply into nativism with his MAGA campaign slogan and inflammatory rhetoric about immigrants, Muslims, and African-Americans, respectively.

Trump also breaks with elite bipartisan consensus on a broad range of other issues, including trade and foreign policy, in order to secure his image as a unique figure in American politics, while falsehoods and outright lies become indispensable weapons on his performative proto-fascist march towards power.

To be sure, this was a bid for power with a strong resemblance to the political strategy that authoritarian parties have long adopted in many parts of the world, including that of the Nazi Party between 1919-1933. An unmistakable sign of

Trump's "performative proto-fascism" was also his dalliance with armed militias—undoubtedly as grave a threat to democracy as were Hitler's brown shirts.

Trump's tenure in office ended on the same note as his rise to power—namely, with another act of "performative proto-fascism." His rejection of the 2020 election as "the big lie" was intended to cement in the minds of his fanatical base the idea of a "deep state" conspiracy and, subsequently, undermine democratic procedures. A movement built on lies, deception, and sheer propaganda can only be maintained by the very same tactics that energized it. There is no other way around it.

The reason that Republicans have opted to continue down the path charted by Trump is because this is now the only way to maintain the support of the proto-fascist base. Without that support, the GOP will have to reinvent its political identity—no small task for a party that has made a remarkable transition from conservatism to reactionism and finally to neoliberal proto-fascism—or cease to exist.

However, the paradox that Republicans face in the post-Trump era is that they cannot sustain a movement built around the cult of personality without the presence of a charismatic leader in its midst. In this sense, the Republicans can continue with Trumpist shenanigans as long as Trump is still around and politically active, but sooner or later they would have to look for an appropriate replacement—and perhaps an authentic fascist—otherwise the proto-fascist base may gradually begin to wither away.

What the future holds for the American republic is impossible to predict. However, what is abundantly clear right now is that with its delusional attachment to Trump, the GOP is methodically dragging the country into the abyss of instability, chaos, and proto-fascism.

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