

Threats to Democracy
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Historians of democracy are becoming alarmed at the possibility of the United States, the oldest continuous participatory government in the world, may be on the verge of losing this system.

We have had close calls in the past. The Civil War threatened to cut this nation in two, but the election of Abraham Lincoln saved us. Even during that dreadful conflict, we held an election in the Union north and Lincoln was reelected to his second term.

The slave-owning Southern states were less devoted to democracy. They did not want participatory government if that meant that their Black population could vote. Their lesser educated White population was deluded into thinking that they mattered because they were not Black. In reality, they did not matter at all, but were controlled by propaganda that the system gave them status.

The South lost the war, but revived the propaganda campaign and worked to once more deprive the emancipated Blacks from voting and serving in government. Reconstruction was aborted when Lincoln was assassinated and was replaced by Andrew Johnson, a man in every historian's list of our country's worst presidents.

The next danger to democracy was during the great depression of the 1930s. Many people were discouraged that their elected government (the 1920s Republicans) were incapable of saving the country from the Depression. Their political philosophy was to do nothing, hoping the economy would heal itself.

Propaganda campaigns flourished. Communists, winners of the Russian Revolution, set out to win followers globally. They claimed to be a just system that was classless, ruled by "the people." Their philosophy went worldwide with simmering rebellions everywhere. China was ripe for their campaign, and communist agents burrowed into many troubled countries.

Another new political system, Fascism, appealed to those looking for a "great leader" who would get things done. Their models were Mussolini and Hitler, and in Japan, Tojo. Fascism won many followers, particularly those who believed conspiracy theories and identified "enemies" to hate. Cults of cruelty have an appeal of their own to certain resentful populations.

Once more, the United States lucked out, electing a president who set about making beneficial changes, solving problems, and trying programs that benefitted those unemployed, hungry, poor and elderly. Our democracy survived.

Today, we have a problem of polarization not seen since the Civil War. The problem focuses on the recent presidential election, with a clear loser (Trump) refusing to concede, using a loud propaganda campaign based on the lie that the election was fraudulent. His ridiculous complaints would have no traction without the unexpected support of the Republican Party, which is indulging it.

Herein is the danger to democracy. This country depends upon a two-party system, centrist liberal and centrist conservative, both of whom trust elections and share a set of values and truths. They must agree on behavior, the behavior of honorable men and women who treat each other like competitors, not enemies.

The once respectable Republican Party has now become the Trump Cult party. Congressional and Senate Republicans are so afraid of the ignorant Trump "base" that they support the big lie that Trump really won the election if there hadn't been election fraud. They know better, as we can see from their earlier taped acknowledgments that the election was fair and that Joe Biden is our president.

The Republican party is in meltdown. The Democrats and Independents outnumber them two to one, therefore Republicans only hope to survive is to suppress majority votes. By Gerrymandering state voting districts and passing vote suppressing regulations, they hope to maintain their power. To make absolutely sure, they expect judges they elected to override election results they don't like.

Fascism always begins with election of a demagogue, a propaganda campaign of hatred and bigotry, and a population of disinterested and non-voters. We might survive this if the Republican Party melts down and is replaced by a new party devoted to the rules of democracy.

My hope lies with the former Republicans who speak the truth, unite to form the basis of a new party (the Lincoln Project), and an alert public that cares to protect our fragile democracy.

686 words

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