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Trumpism is American fascism

Michael Gerson

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It is revealing how a political movement that claims to be dedicated to the recovery of national greatness has so readily and completely abandoned many defining national ideals. Donald Trump's promise of American strength has involved the betrayal of American identity.

One of the most important strands of our founding ideology is civic republicanism. In this tradition, the common good is not automatically produced by a clash of competing interests. A just society must be consciously constructed by citizens possessing certain virtues. A democracy in particular depends on people who take responsibility for their communities, show an active concern for the welfare of their neighbors, demand integrity from public officials, defend the rule of law, and respect the rights and dignity of others. Without these moral commitments, a majority is merely a mob.

What type of citizen has Trump — and his supportive partisan media — produced? Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) still holds her job in Congress because she is representative of ascendant MAGA radicalism. Those who reflect her overt [racism](#), her unhinged [conspiracy thinking](#) and her [endorsement](#) of violence against public figures are now treated as a serious political constituency within the Republican Party. Trump has come down firmly on Greene's side. One [participant](#) in the Jan. 6 attack sent a video to her children saying: "We broke into the Capitol. . . . We got inside, we did our part. We were looking for Nancy [Pelosi] to shoot her in the friggin' brain, but we didn't find her." The detail that gets to me? She sent this to her children. She was living in a mental world where vile, shameful things are a parent's boast. And she saw her actions as the expression of a public duty — an example of doing her part.

A resolution to expel Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) from Congress was drafted on Jan. 28, following her recently unveiled endorsements of political violence. (The Washington Post)

Call this civic barbarism. Instead of promoting the values of responsible citizenship, Trump and his media enablers are elevating and blessing the very worst among us. They

are making many Americans less suited for self-government and more dangerous to their neighbors. And they are doing so for the reason some of the Founders most feared: To lead the mob against true democracy.

How can anyone view the trashing of our founding tradition as evidence of patriotism? Because some have adopted a very different political philosophy than the Founders held. This approach to government promises the recovery of a mythical past. It feeds a sense of White victimhood. It emphasizes emotion over reason. It denigrates experts and expertise. It slanders outsiders and blames them for social and economic ills. It warns of global plots by Jews and shadowy elites. It accepts [the lies](#) of a leader as a deeper form of political truth. It revels in anger and dehumanization. It praises law and order while reserving the right to disobey the law and overturn the political order through violence.

This is a reality that I have resisted naming. The 45th president and a significant portion of his supporters have embraced American fascism. And Trump's buffoonery does not disprove the point. Though he probably cannot name the political theory he has embraced, his own recklessness, vanity and authoritarian instincts have led him down fascist grooves. He displays an intuitive affinity for leaders such as Russia's Vladimir Putin, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hungary's Viktor Orbán. And Trump would have subverted the legitimate result of the 2020 presidential election if he could have, which would have broken a constitutional continuity that has endured over two centuries.

I don't think Trump came particularly close to success. This time. But the influence of his treacherous ideology is still being spread by unprincipled people seeking influence and profit. American fascism needs to be aggressively marginalized.

This won't happen if responsible Republicans decline to engage the debate or leave the field entirely. Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah), Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) and Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) need reinforcements. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) needs relentless ridicule for his weakness.

The task of marginalization will also be more difficult if those on the left try to lump all conservatives into Trump's camp — arguing that fascism is somehow the natural destination of Barry Goldwater's nomination or Ronald Reagan's presidency. This is utter rubbish. I was involved, for example, in the running ideological conflict between [Rep. Jack Kemp](#) (R-N.Y.), whom I worked for, and [Pat Buchanan](#), who previewed Trumpism. Kemp was the more authentically conservative voice. And there is a massive

moral gap between the politics of George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, John McCain and Mitt Romney on one side, and Trump's civic barbarism.

Much about the United States' political future will depend on shaping a compelling, responsible American conservatism as an alternative to the Trump temptation. This may or may not happen within the GOP. But for American democracy to fully function, civic republicanism will eventually need a home on the political right.