

## **How Democracies Die. Understanding the Insurrection of January 6, 2021**

### **The Text of a podcast by Ron Stockton in Stocktonafterclass, January, 2022.**

This podcast is being released on the first anniversary of the January 6 Insurrection, the attempt by pro-Trump elements to overturn the 2020 presidential election. Armed insurrectionists, some hoping to kill Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Mike Pence, engaged in several hours of hand-to-hand combat with capitol police and other security forces trying to defend the capital, and the constitution. Five people died as a result of that assault, and 140 officers were wounded. The assault had been inspired by an hour-long, inflammatory speech by President Trump. Trump told the crowd that if they did not save their country they wouldn't have a country to save. They were urged by Trump and other speakers (Donald Junior, Rudi Giuliani) to march down to the capital and "stop the steal."

What is really shocking, a year after the event, is the large number of Republicans who believe President Trump actually won that election, and believe that President Biden is not legitimately in office. It reminds me of the parallel numbers who believed that President Obama was a Muslim, or was born in Kenya and was not legitimately in the Presidency.

Just for the record some recent polls show that 62% of Republicans believe there was widespread fraud in the election (including I assume that 130% of eligible voters in Detroit voted, as President Trump said, even though the actual turnout was closer to 55%). And 58% of Republicans say the Biden election was NOT legitimate. And while majorities of Republicans condemn the insurrection, 56% say it was motivated by "defending freedom."

I think our political system is in bad shape and our country is at risk. There are several reasons for this but a few stand out. Let me list those for you.

- The tax system has been rewritten in a way that has shifted vast fortunes upward while putting enormous pressure on the working and middle classes. For good reason, they are angry.
- Technology has created a new elite, has displaced whole classes of people, created and empowered others, and has accelerated wealth inequalities.
- We are having a big demographic shift with racial and ethnic groups rising or falling proportionally.
- The large number of immigrants, especially from Latin America, has produced a dangerous reaction. My earlier podcast on The Replacement Wars discussed this.
- Our political system, how we nominate and elect candidates, has been warped and corrupted.
- Everyone seems angry at everyone else. As someone said, we have become a nation of sore losers and sore winners.
- Finally, something is seriously wrong with the Republican party that would nominate someone like Donald Trump but something is also wrong with the American political system that would allow us actually to elect someone such as Donald Trump.

I want to discuss those realities with you.

I think to understand what happened we have to step back and look at these developments in comparative perspective. There is an interesting book that came out in 2018 that does exactly that. It is called *How*

*Democracies Die*. It was written by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, two noted political scientists. It was a best seller and is widely assigned in political science classes.

The book focuses on situations where authoritarian personalities win the top position through election and then use their office to undermine democracy. In Europe these are called illiberal democrats.

The authors note that during the Cold War, democracies were typically destroyed by military coups: Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Thailand, Turkey, and Uruguay are examples.

They use a very interesting analytical device, one that I have used myself. They analyze historic cases that we all recognize, and extract from them key variables that constitute a scientific “model” to help explain and predict.

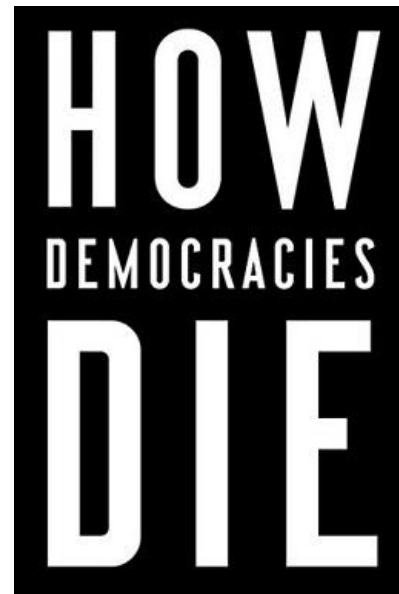
The cases they use are familiar: Hitler, Mussolini, Juan Peron, Hugo Chavez, and more recently Fujimori of Peru, Viktor Orban of Hungary, and Vladimir Putin of Russia. All of these autocrats were elected.

Those figures are distant from our country in space and often in time. Discussing them is not threatening to our identity. And yet certain familiar patterns emerge. Let me list some of those patterns.

- First, they did not win popular majorities but won enough votes to be credible. They are elected autocrats.
- Second, there were powerful elements who opposed them but hoped to use them to get what they wanted. Established figures see their power slipping away and believe they can use this person to restore their influence.
- They thought that once the autocrat was in office, they could control him. As the German power broker von Papen said of Hitler, “We’ve engaged him for ourselves. Within two months we will have him pushed so far in a corner he’ll squeal.” Dream on, Franz.
- Third, people who could have blocked the autocrat did not do so. Often they were weak or sympathetic, the Italian king and German President von Hindenberg for example.
- Fourth, these autocrats claimed to speak for the people. The “true” people, often defined in exclusive terms, maybe even racial ethnic terms.
- Fifth, they claim to want a *true* democracy to replace the flawed or fake democracy that currently exists. As a Chavez supporter said, “Democracy is infected and Chavez is the antibiotic.”
- They claimed they would restore the nation, the true nation, not the weak and self-serving entity that the corrupt ruling elites claim to represent.

Then once in office they begin to change the rules of the game. Not for the better.

- They attack and take over the courts.
- They change the laws so they can lock up or silence their opponents.



- They give themselves vast executive powers, replacing a rule of law with a rule of personality.
- They attack and weaken the press and the right of individuals to dissent or criticize.
- They arrest or assault their critics.
- They play upon a sense of national victimhood and economic grievance.

Juan Linz, a famous political scientist, who grew up in the 1930s says of that age that there are “warning signs” that a political leader is an emerging autocrat. They reject in words or actions the rules of the game. They deny the legitimacy of their opponents. They tolerate or encourage violence. They are willing to curtail opponents and the media. Their argument is that the current system of so-called democracy is not a true democracy. It has been hijacked or corrupted or rigged. And they can fix it to better represent the people. And they see politics not in terms of the normal competition over policies but as an existential conflict over race and culture and power.

Oh, wait. Did I tell you Juan Linz was writing about the 1930s? The scary part is that this sounds very familiar to us today.

There are known techniques for staving off or undermining authoritarians who threaten democracies. Much of this protection has to do with what are called Gatekeepers, i.e., making sure that such people are denied access to mainstream institutions. I remember when the German Consul General visited my campus around 2015. At the time Donald Trump was a marginal but high-profile figure and someone asked how Germany would handle such a person. The consul said, “our parties control their own nomination process so someone like this could never get the nomination of any of our parties. He would have to form his own party. Today we have a AfD, an extremist party. No one from that party could ever be admitted to one of our other parties. Of course, if the voters support them, that would be a different matter, but that would be their only means of rising.”

I have two thoughts on those observations. First, the AfD *did* get far more votes than the Consul General could ever have anticipated. They got 12% in the 2017 election. Second, in 2020 they had enough votes in Thuringia to block any major party from electing a governor so a coalition was necessary. The local leader of the Christian Democrats unwisely formed a coalition with them to win that top position. Chancellor Merkel was in Brazil at the time. She violated the custom of never discussing German politics while overseas. She went to the cameras to renounce her own state party leader. That coalition fell apart and her party aligned with one of their opponents to elect a governor who was not affiliated with an extremist party. That is how the gatekeeper system works. Block out extremists even if you lose an election or a top position. Something similar happened in Austria a few years ago when an ethnic chauvinist named Haider was on the verge of becoming Chancellor. The other parties formed a common front to block him, even if they had to sacrifice their own influence for a season.

So what are the characteristics of gatekeeping? There are five. Keep extremists off of your party ballots; Root out extremists from within your ranks; Avoid alliances with extremist factions; Isolate extremist rather than legitimize them; and don't hesitate to form a united front with other parties to stop extremists and to bloc them from access to key positions.

Let's turn to our own constitution, which gives us much pride, for good reasons. But the constitution is so vague in places that it can be reinterpreted to serve malevolent interests. Real democracy does not exist in a document. Likewise, it does not exist in the political beliefs of the public. Every society has within it enough political extremists that there is much room for disruption and damage. It is hard to

argue that American culture would never allow injustice when we can look at our history or even around us today and see many cases where we definitely allow that which many of us hate.

Those founders who wrote our constitution were very concerned about destructive elements, which they called “factions.” Alexander Hamilton in *Federalist Ten* defined three major causes of faction. He used the terms of the day but today we would call those destructive forces religious or ideological extremism, class struggle or economic inequalities, and the danger of loyalties to demagogues who mobilize these other factions for their own ambition.

Hamilton wrote in the *Federalist Papers* that simply allowing “the people” to choose the President would not produce a good outcome. Political extremists are far too clever to be constrained by popular sentiments. As he put it, “History will teach us that of those men who have overturned the liberties of Republics, the great number have begun their career by paying obsequious court to the people; commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants.” Hamilton wanted to separate the presidency from the danger of demagogues or extremism. He said that “the immediate election (of the President) should be made by men most capable of analyzing the qualities adapted to the station, and acting under the circumstances favorable to deliberation, and to a judicious combination of all the reasons and inducements which were proper to govern them.” In other words, we need gatekeepers to protect us from popular passions and the demagogues who play upon them.

Our early leaders created two institutions to protect us. The electoral college and the party convention. The electoral college was designed to deflect destructive public passion. The people chose the state legislature and then the state legislature chose the electors. Those electors were originally empowered to select any person at all that they considered well qualified.

The second Gatekeeping function was the party convention in which key leaders got together and chose candidates. This was entirely too elitist for American sentiments, or for American politics. By gum, we wanted to make decisions for ourselves.

This led us to the caucus system of the early 1800s. This is close to how things work even today in places such as Germany and Britain. The party members chose representatives who go to a party gathering where they choose someone to be their candidate. No system is perfect but this blocks out extremists who want to bypass the system. Andrew Jackson liked this much more than the other system which had handed the Presidency to his rival John Quincy Adams.

This system provided some checks on extremist elements but by the time of the Lincoln-Douglas debates (1858) even the local leaders began to see its flaws. State legislatures had previously chosen Senators but those debates saw local issues and legislative influence pushed aside in favor of national issues and national candidates. That was not what members of the state legislatures wanted. In time, the choice of electors was handed over to the voters through popular election. Hamilton would have been horrified.

The rise of primary elections was perhaps a central issue in marginalizing gatekeepers. Levitsky and Ziblatt discuss the 1920 election as an example of good and bad outcomes. This was the famous case where the Republicans could not decide upon a candidate so the party leaders got together in a “smoke filled room” in the Blackstone Hotel and decided to choose Warren Harding as their nominee. The Republican voters were strongly in favor of Henry Ford, who had emerged as their first choice in the famous *Colliers* Poll that received feedback from 250,000 voters. Ford was a notorious anti-Semite but he was very handsome and was the greatest industrialist of all time. The people liked him, but those who understood how governance and politics operate knew that leading a corporation in which you own ALL

the stock and which bears your name is not qualification to run a country. The leaders chose someone within their ranks. The fact that Harding turned out to be a bad choice is a different issue.

Decades later, in 1972, George McGovern led a rebellious element within the Democratic party against what they saw as party hacks. They arranged that in the future delegates to Democratic conventions would be chosen by primaries. This seemed like a good idea at the time but it had traps within it. There is a low turnout in primaries, often only 20%. This means that people with strong views, often ideologues or extremist factions, can carry the day with a candidate who has little appeal outside of that element. Single issue groups focusing upon abortion, gun rights, gay marriage, or specialized foreign policy issues can drive the choice. The broader issues of what we might call the public interest get driven out.

I have always felt that the person who is everyone's second choice is probably the best nominee. That is someone who could unite the party and marginalize those wing nuts, as they are called. But a primary is driven by a struggle between first choices.

Fortunately, a campaign requires a broad base of support beyond the voters on primary day. Political Scientists talk of the "Invisible Primary." This refers to the vast network of donors, interest groups, activists, elected officials, and expert advisors who sign up for a campaign. Often what WE see on the surface conceals so much more. An extremist candidate simply cannot mobilize that network. When someone like Herman Cain declares for the Republican nomination, we can look at what we see on a debate platform and say, "I like Herman. He would be a good president," but others look at him and see that his expertise as a pizza salesman is not enough for him to make the grade. After a few debates in which he keeps repeating the same slogans over and over, his support fades.

So then we ask ourselves, what about those candidates who come out of nowhere? Who are these people and why would anyone consider them serious candidates? Well, there haven't been many of them, at least until recent times. From 1972 to 1992 there were only eight outsiders, people who had never held major office. Five of those were Democrats and three Republicans. But starting in 1996 there was an explosion of them. From 1996-2016 there were eighteen. Sometimes, the debate stage was so crowded that they had to break the debates into two separate events. Of those 18 candidates 13 were Republicans. That included the financier Malcolm Forbes, the televangelist Pat Robertson, and Pat Buchanan, the public pundit. These people can drive passions but could they run a country?

In 2016 the Republican Invisible Primary has a candidate of Choice: Jeb Bush. He was a moderate conservative, former governor of a big state, son and brother of former presidents. Their DEAD LAST candidate was Donald Trump: uniquely inexperienced, extremist, a demagogue, a renouncer of immigrants and Muslims, a friend of dictators, especially Vladimir Putin, a crude and vulgar person with no respect for the norms of society or of political decorum. He was their nightmare. And yet they ended up with him.

That season, the Republicans had 20 candidates on stage during their debates. How could this happen? Why has the invisible primary failed to filter out marginal or inexperienced or non-credible or even kooky candidates? There are several reasons, and they explain why our political system is malfunctioning.

First, outside money has gone out of control. When the Supreme Court struck down limits on donations in the Citizens United case, they opened the gates to something terrible, in the name of free expression. When someone says to a candidate, "I will fund you up to one hundred million if you will support my favorite cause," as Sheldon Adelson said to News Gingrich, it is a new ball game. Even when the whole Gingrich staff quit, Gingrich kept on going. How did he do that? Well, he had the funding. And in 2012

the Koch brothers gave \$400 million to the Republican campaign. The Democrats have some big tipplers but nothing like the Republicans have.

Second, the massive tax cuts during the Reagan and George W and Trump years shifted massive amounts of money to those who already had massive amounts of money. When a super donor (defined as offering \$500,000 or more) can make demands, those demands will distort the political system.

Third, there is now an alternative media that can appeal to a splinter audience and can feed them what they want. Think of Fox News, talk shows, ideological right wing broadcasts, and personalities such as Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Mike Levin, Michael Savage, Breitbart, and Patriot Radio. They are not conservative but something off the radar. They can support candidates that are otherwise not viable and give them high visibility. And you have a media star such as Donald Trump who is a master at manipulating the media. The cable networks could not get enough of him. Research shows that Trump got approximately \$2 billion in free coverage during the primaries.

Fourth, marginal candidates can set up their own fund raising structures that bypass the party and the traditional donors. Ben Carson had spent decades speaking at Home Schooling events so when he declared, he had a base of support. Mike Huckabee was active in Baptist politics so he had a base of support. Rick Santorum held down the pre-Vatican II Catholic vote; John Huntsman had a Mormon base. And on the Democratic side, Barack Obama emerged as the most awesome private fund raiser in history. He figured out that all someone had to do was click on a number and hit *send*. It was painless. And within months he had three million donors. It was unprecedented.

When Trump was nominated a few prominent Republicans declined to endorse him. John McCain, Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, Ben Sasse, Jeb Bush, and Mitt Romney were examples. But they were quiet about it and did not challenge him openly. Moreover, once he was nominated, the party united behind him, even though he made few gestures of reaching out to them (other than making Mike Pence his Vice President). As one prominent cynic said, "All we need is someone smart enough to sign his name on a piece of legislation. We will take care of the rest." That sounds so much like von Papen.

During the 2016 campaign Trump's true nature emerged. He had risen to power on a racist lie, that Barack Obama was not a natural born citizen and therefore not eligible to be President, but now he went full bore. He referred to 'Crooked Hillary' and encouraged chants of "lock her up" and promised to have a full investigation that would see her behind bars. This is what dictators do, lock up their rivals. He encouraged and tolerated violence during the campaign, promising to pay the legal expenses of anyone who beat up hecklers; He promised to amend the laws of libel to prevent critics from criticizing him; he referred to the 'fake media' and promised to challenge the licenses of the *Washington Post* and other media outlets. He insulted private citizens, such as a Gold Star mother. He attacked reporters who asked questions he did not like; (Katy Tur and Megan Kelly come to mind). He attacked a "so-called judge" who questioned him, prosecutors who investigated him for fraud, and once in power fired FBI Director Comey to block Comey's investigation of possible misconduct and collusion with Russia.

Trump was challenging the norms and the guardrails that keep our political system focused. And the referees who make sure the system works and everyone plays by the rules. And yet Trump promised to bring them under control. And the Republican establishment did not challenge him.

But we the public are also part of the problem. We insist that primaries give "the people" the final voice, and we resist including experienced elected officials in the nomination process as 'super delegates' who would be 15% of Democratic delegates. I wonder, why in the world would we NOT want such

experienced people as governors and senators and representatives and long-time party leaders in the room when the future of the country is being debated?

We know how changing the rules of the game can change outcomes and allow elites to entrench themselves into power. We know how, during Reconstruction when African Americans were allowed to vote, the political system changed in a more progressive direction. But then we saw the implementation of institutional checks on Black voting: poll taxes, literacy tests, good character tests, and brutal intimidation. Black turnout in the South dropped from 61% to 2% in 32 years. And racist whites had again entrenched themselves in power.

Today we see something similar. Electoral districts are gerrymandered so that Black and other Democratic voters are being concentrated to dilute their power. The number of polling places are being cut back in minority areas. Early voting is being cut back. And photo IDs such as driver's licenses are being required to vote. Even more ominously, neutral election monitors are being disempowered with responsibility being shifted to partisan state legislatures, which appear to claim the right to reverse election outcomes and choose their own electors if they discover alleged voter fraud. Are these actions even legal? Well, that's the point. They are legal but they are violating all the unwritten traditions necessary for a democratic system to work. And they are shifting power. Remember that 16% of whites have no driver's license but 37% of African Americans do not. Even replace previously neutral election monitors with partisan state legislators, which sometimes claim to have the right to choose electors if they allege election fraud. As the joke goes, the law does not discriminate on the basis of wealth. The rich and the poor are both prohibited from sleeping under bridges.

There are two individuals who have made a major contribution to our political malfunction. Newt Gingrich and Mitch McConnell.

By 1994 the Democrats had controlled the House of Representatives for 40 years. Newt Gingrich decided to change that. He felt that politics should be treated as war, and that the goal should be to destroy your opponents. As he told a meeting of young Republicans, "You're fighting a war. It is a war for power... This party does not need another generation of cautious, prudent, careful, bland, irrelevant quasi-leaders... what we need are people willing to stand up in a slug-fest... What's the primary purpose of a political leader? To build a majority."

He told his followers to stop using Boy Scout words. They should use inflammatory words such as pathetic, sick, bizarre, boring, anti-flag, anti-family, traitors. Previously politics had been governed by certain democratic norms. You would tolerate views with which you disagreed. You would exercise restraint once in power and not do everything it was possible to do; you would show professional courtesy by avoiding personal or embarrassing attacks; you would honor the rules of reciprocity, meaning you would treat your opponents as you would like to be treated, and would allow them to have their traditional prerogatives; and you would show restraint in how you used your power.

But Gingrich and McConnell had a different approach. They decided that anything a Democratic president proposed, they would oppose, even positions they themselves supported. When Obama decided to take the health care program that Mitt Romney had passed as governor of Massachusetts and to rebrand it as the Affordable Care Act, the Republicans opposed it to a person, even though it closely resembled a proposal they themselves had introduced. And when the Gang of Eight (four Democrats, four Republicans) worked out an immigration policy that even George W. Bush supported, they opposed it because the Democrats favored it. And when Congress faced a routine motion to raise the debt limit (which had passed 78 times between 1960 and 2011, 49 times under Republican presidents and 29 under Democrats) they decided to block it, even if that meant shutting down the government and wrecking

America's financial credibility. Why? Because Bill Clinton was President and they wanted to oppose and embarrass him. And ultimately, Gingrich decided to impeach Bill Clinton for cheating on his wife and trying to cover it up. This was far from what the Founders had meant by "high crimes and misdemeanors" but Gingrich pressed on, even when his party took a hit in the midterm elections, in a year when they had expected to pick up seats, and even when it was obvious there was no support for this in the Senate where the trial would be. But Gingrich pushed on. Why? just because he could. And attacking is what you do in war. Obviously, the political environment was seriously poisoned. As Saint Paul in once said, "not everything that is possible is prudent." (And in case you don't know, I have a podcast on impeachment in case you are interested).

One example of abuse of power was when Mitch McConnell decided to use the Filibuster as a means of sabotaging anything a Democratic President proposed. This custom, which is not written into the constitution, allows any Senator to speak as long as they wish, without time limit. It's original purpose was to allow a senator to raise an issue of importance to that Senator. From 1880 to 1917 it was used 30 times. From 1917 to 1959 it was used approximately once per congressional term. Under McConnell, it became a routine way of preventing the body from voting on a bill. From 2007-2012 it was used 385 times. And the Senate changed the effective rules. No longer would Senators have to speak. Now they could just use the word Filibuster, and everything on that bill stopped. It was like the *Librium veto* of the old Polish Senate when every Senator had a veto and nothing ever got done. That veto is often credited with the collapse of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

McConnell also decided to kill the Supreme Court appointment of Merrick Garland. He simply said, we will not allow a vote on that nomination. This had never been done in the history of the Senate. From 1880-1980 only three presidents had nominees rejected, Cleveland, Hoover and Nixon. A few nominees had been withdrawn in the face of opposition but never rejected. Antonin Scalia, perhaps the most ideologically radical justice in the history of the court, was approved by a vote of 98-0. From 1866 to 2016 no President had ever been blocked from filling a seat. But then McConnell decided to steal a seat. It was unprecedented. He did it just because he could. This was norm breaking of an unprecedented nature.

The Republicans under Gingrich and others also began to use the investigation process for destructive reasons. Their many dubious investigations were not to advance the public welfare but to damage careers and reputations, and to keep the environment stirred up. The Whitewater investigation went on for seven years with three Special Prosecutors and found nothing (until the committee was given permission to investigate Monica Lewinski). Hearings on the Clinton Christmas Card list went on for 140 hours, and the Benghazi investigation, in which the Secretary of State Clinton had allegedly not used military forces promptly (even though the Secretary of Defense was the one with military control) went on for over three years with five different House committees involved. These investigations found nothing but as Kevin McCarthy, a house leader, said of the Benghazi committee, "Everybody thought Hillary was unbeatable. But we put together a committee and what are her poll ratings? They are falling." And indeed they did. Hillary dropped from the most popular woman in America to someone whose honesty and even legality were questioned by a large number of people.

Today the phony investigations are into alleged voter fraud. (There have been three in Wisconsin alone, not to mention scores of legal cases, all of which have been rejected by the courts). And now the goal is not to drive down the poll ratings of an opponent but to discredit the democratic electoral process itself. The goal appears to be to entrench permanent minority rule.



This approach, of exercising and mobilizing any institutional prerogative that is available, and reinterpreting any clause to mean anything you wanted it to mean, reached its culmination on January 6, 2020. The constitution specified that the Vice President would count the electoral ballots and declare a winner. What Trump decided was that the Vice President could declare certain electors to be out of order and send them back to the states where the legislature could choose correct, honest electors that represented the will of the people. This would be done in states Biden had carried but where Republicans controlled the state legislature: Michigan, Georgia, Wisconsin, Arizona. Such an action would allegedly be constitutional (God save us) because the state legislature was charged with forwarding votes to the Senate and had the power to decide which votes to forward based on their assessment of the will of the voters. Such an action would either flip the election to Trump or would throw the election into the House of Representatives where Republicans held the margin.

Donald Trump, the supreme demagogue and authoritarian, had declared well ahead of the presidential election that the only way he could lose was if the other side cheated. This was the so-called Big Lie, definitely setting the stage for a constitutional coup.

I think the Republicans are in a terrible bind because of the way the country is changing. In 1950 when I was a boy, 10% of the population was nonwhite. Today 38% of the population is non-white, including African Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans. In 1950 80% of the voters were married white Christians, divided equally between Democrats and Republicans. By the 2000s they were 40% of the electorate, and were mostly Republicans. The nonwhite vote for Democrats rose from 7% in the 1950s to 44% in 2012. Meanwhile, the Republicans are overwhelmingly an all-white party, by perhaps 90%. Increasingly, the Democrats have become a more diverse party, the Republicans more homogeneous. And the Republican base is shrinking as a percentage of the population. They are forced to appeal to that white Christian base, which often leads them into extremist positions that alienate other voters. Or to cheat.

Let me finish by summarizing an article in the Toronto *Globe and Mail* by noted Canadian scholar Thomas Homer-Dixon. We think so much of our own concerns we forget that Canada is just across our border. Dixon writes of a nightmare scenario of living next to a superpower in chaos. As he puts it, “We mustn’t dismiss these possibilities just because they seem ludicrous or too horrible to imagine. In 2014, the suggestion that Donald Trump would become president would have struck nearly everyone as absurd. But today we live in a world where the absurd regularly becomes real and the horrible commonplace.

“A host of acolytes and wannabes such as Fox [News]’s Tucker Carlson and Georgia representative Marjorie Taylor Greene have transformed the Republican party into a near-fascist personality cult that’s a perfect instrument for wrecking democracy”.

“Republican-held state legislatures could refuse to accept a Democratic win and Trump, restored to power would have only two objectives, vindication and vengeance. By 2025, American democracy could collapse, causing extreme domestic political instability, including widespread civil violence. Soon the country could be governed by a rightwing dictatorship.”

“A terrible storm is coming from the south, and Canada is woefully unprepared. But now we must focus on the urgent problem of what to do about the likely unraveling of democracy in the United States. We need to start by fully recognising the magnitude of the danger. If Mr Trump is re-elected, even under the more optimistic scenarios, the economic and political risks to our country will be innumerable.”

“Under the less-optimistic scenarios, the risks to our country in their cumulative effect could easily be existential, far greater than any in our federation’s history. What happens, for instance, if high-profile political refugees fleeing persecution arrive in our country and the US regime demands them back. Do we comply?”

Moreover, he says Trump “may be just a warm-up act. Returning to office, he’ll be the wrecking ball that demolishes democracy but the process will produce a political and social shambles. Through targeted harassment and dismissal, he’ll be able to thin the ranks of his opponents within the state, the bureaucrats, officials and technocrats who oversee the non-partisan functioning of core institutions and abide by the rule of law. Then the stage will be set for a more managerially competent ruler, after Mr Trump, to bring order to the chaos he’s created.”

I am very sorry to say I think this Canadian professor may be correct. Trump is disruptive and dangerous but he is inept and ineffective in getting what he wants. He smashes and bashes but often fails. But there are others who are not much different from him who are more organizationally effective and would constitute a much greater danger. I am thinking of Josh Hawley or Tom Cotton or maybe even Jim Jordan. And even if a less extremist Republican were elected, that person would be beholden to the extremist wing that produced a victory.

The Republicans are now a “white” party. They will always be vulnerable to penetration by white nationalists, Islamophobes, anti-immigrants, and racists. Their strategy is not to expand their base, which is hard, but to mobilize their base. And how do you mobilize a white base? White people are no worse than any other ethnic group, but other groups have to engage a broader population and to behave in a way that wins them over. The Democrats are still a party that has policy goals. As such they are willing to negotiate. Even the Progressive Caucus, the left wing of the party, are remarkably open to negotiation. But there are elements of the Republican party, such as the Freedom Caucus, who believe that if you get 80% of what you want you have betrayed the cause. Such a mindset leads in a destructive direction.

I have always said that the country needs an authentic conservative party, but at the current time we do not have one.

I hope I am wrong but I think we are in great danger.

Glitch: Note that Madison wrote Federalist Ten, not Hamilton. Sorry.