

#1381 The Conservative Fever Swamp is Reaching Critical Mass

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast in which we shall learn about how, although the deeply racist and conspiratorial wing of the Republican Party has been around for decades, it wasn't always the dominant strain. Today, it clearly is, and in an age of hyperpolarization and with enthusiastic stoking from Trump, that branch of the party is perfectly primed to splinter from our shared reality completely in a spectacular and violent way.

Clips today come from the *Ezra Klein Show*, *the Atlantic*, *Gaslit Nation*, *the Professional Left podcast*, *the David Pakman Show*, and the *Muckrake Political Podcast*.

A devastating indictment of the Republican Party - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 10-10-20

STUART STEVENS: [00:00:44] I think that, you know, back to Eisenhower, he got almost 40% of the African-American vote. That drops off to 7% with Goldwater in '64 and it never comes back. So what does that mean? It means that the Republican party is predominantly a party that is appealing to white people.

Now, there was a period there where we admitted that was a failure and we aspired to do something else. We don't do that anymore. And I think that difference is actually important.

But the lack of diversity in the party I think is at the root of this. So I use an example, say you take a 35-year-old Republican school teacher and a 65-year-old Republican hedge fund manager. They probably have pretty similar ideas on taxes. Probably they're both white and they probably believe in tax cuts. So you take the same in the Democratic party. First, the odds are much greater that that 35-year-old teacher will be non-white. Statistically the odds are still great that the 65-year-old hedge fund manager will be white, but they're going to have very different views on taxes, I think.

And I think that there's obviously complicated in the Democratic party and creates tensions, but I think that there's a strength to that. So that lack of diversity in the Republican party is enabled like with Grover Norquist to come in and force the party, or bully the party into this doctrine of tax cuts, that is not based in reality. I mean, if you go back to '94, right? Okay. You weren't born yet, but Bill Clinton raised taxes. And in that election, the first election after the '92 elections, we made a million ads, I made a million ads saying that these Clinton tax increases were going to lead to economic Armageddon.

We are wrong. What followed was the beginning of the greatest period of economic growth in the history of the country. And Clinton was the last president who really wrestled the deficit to something manageable.

To me, I have to look at facts. You have to say, look, that worked. And what's followed since hasn't worked with Republican presidents. But there's a failure to adapt to that.

And I think it's just in large part, part of a greater failure to adapt to the world as it is today that the Republican party struggles with.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:03:06] Tell me about your process of personal conversion here, because you mentioned Bill Clinton. As you know it, I wasn't born yet. I was born just late on George W. Bush's second term. And one of the things about your book that is different from a lot of books like it, is there is a sub genre of literature that basically says "I didn't leave the Republican party; the Republican party left me." And your book is a conversion narrative where you look back now and say, I should have left the Republican party.

But after that Bill Clinton campaign, you were working for Republicans after George W. Bush. You're working for Republicans. I mean, it's Trump. So, so tell me a bit about what it is with Trump that triggers not just a conversion on where the Republican party is now, but on how you understand the Republican party's history before that and your role in that history.

STUART STEVENS: [00:03:58] Yeah, it's a great complicated question. That's why I wrote a book, really. You really nailed it there.

I think that there's always been these two elements in the Republican party. They go back to say Eisenhower and McCarthy that played itself out. In many ways, when you get to the Bush campaign, '99, 2000, you can argue that Republican -- the center right -- was sort of a victim of its own success. So what do I mean by that? Okay. The cold war was over and let's say we won. There had been a tentative welfare. Crime, welfare, taxes in the Republican party. Well, Bill Clinton instituted welfare reform. He famously ran on ending welfare as we know it. Crime increased greatly and continued to increase. And taxes were much lower certainly than the 70% they had been once.

So I sort of left the Republican party struggling with what does it mean to be a conservative? So I think the thing governor Bush really looked at this and that was part of the whole construct of compassionate conservatism. So then Bush gets elected. What's his first piece of legislation? That major piece, No Child Left Behind.

And if you look at that photograph it's extraordinary today. I mean, he signing that No Child Left Behind with Ted Kennedy standing over his right shoulder. I mean, that would be submitted like in a war crimes trial today. So there was a belief that we had that there was this dark side. People like myself, dark side to the party, but it was a recessive gene, and that the inevitability of the party was to become a more inclusive, a bigger party that we had to change, and we would change. Now all of this gets sidetracked when Bush becomes a wartime president, and you don't have another Republican presidency until Trump. So you go through this process of the autopsy, so called, after Romney lost, which I think Reince Priebus deserves credit for instituting that analysis; it's always hard for any group to be self-critical. What was it? It was pretty obvious. Party had to expand more, appeal to non-whites, younger voters, women. But that was presented not only as a political necessity, but a moral mandate -- that if you're going to earn the right to govern this big confusing, wild changing country, you needed to be more like it.

So then Trump comes along and you could almost hear this audible sigh of relief because everybody just throws that out their window. It's like, thank God! We don't have to pretend we care about this stuff. Well, we can just win with white voters, which to me just proves you

really didn't mean this. And you have the ascension of this element of the party that was racist, that was a white grievance, and it's just an entirely different approach to government, approach to life, approach to politics, just as McCarthyism was different than Eisenhower. So we thought we were dominant in what I think we turned out to be the recessive gene. And we lost.

Is Trumpism the New Conservatism? - The Atlantic - Air Date 7-20-17

McKAY COPPINS - STAFF WRITER, THE ATLANTIC: [00:06:48] For decades, being a Republican meant believing in conservative ideas, like limited government, free markets and American exceptionalism.

RONALD REAGAN: [00:06:56] America is freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of religion.

GEORGE W. BUSH: [00:07:01] I'm a proud member of my party, but I'm more than that. I'm an American.

McKAY COPPINS - STAFF WRITER, THE ATLANTIC: [00:07:06] Even though Trump has pursued things that make him seem like an old school Republican, like tax cuts and entitlement reform, he continues to surround himself with advisors who want to tear down the old GOP establishment.

So what does it mean to be a Republican in the age of Trump? And is Trumpism just a phase or could it be the beginning of a major realignment in American politics?

To understand the changes taking place in the Republican party now, it helps to go back to the last time the party went through a major transformation. The first half of the 20th century, the GOP was more ideologically diverse than it is today. The party had many conservatives, but it also had liberal Republicans who supported things like social security, infrastructure spending and civil rights.

It was Eisenhower, a Republican, who forcibly desegregated schools in the South. But in 1964, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater shocked the political world when he won the Republican nomination by running on an unabashedly conservative platform. If you listen to his acceptance speech, now, the rhetoric will feel familiar

BARRY GOLDWATER: [00:08:09] Rather than useful jobs in our country, our people have been offered bureaucratic makework. Rather than moral leadership, they have been given bread and circuses.

McKAY COPPINS - STAFF WRITER, THE ATLANTIC: [00:08:21] At the time, Goldwater was widely seen as a radical. His victory in the Republican presidential primaries was so controversial that Nelson Rockefeller, a moderate, stood up during the convention and gave a blistering speech, denouncing Goldwater and his fellow conservatives.

NELSON ROCKEFELLER: [00:08:36] These are people who have nothing in common with Americanism. The Republican party must repudiate these people.

McKAY COPPINS - STAFF WRITER, THE ATLANTIC: [00:08:46] But Goldwater's brand of politics prevailed. His book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, was a best seller in the 1960s and influenced a whole generation of Republican leadership from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush to Ted Cruz.

Goldwater's conservative movement ended up dominating Republican politics for 50 years. Could Trumpism dominate the next 50? So far, the GOP's old guard is entrenched enough that the Trump administration is still pursuing some of its conservative policies, from cutting the corporate tax rate to repealing Obamacare.

But the old guard could eventually be replaced as a new generation of mini Trumps, people in the mold of Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller, rise to positions of prominence in government and media. Some high profile conservative pundits like Tucker Carlson are already remaking themselves in the image of Trump.

TUCKER CARLSON - HOST, FOX NEWS: [00:09:34] It's been pretty obvious for a while now that the Trump/Russia story is essentially bogus. So why are the other news channels still behaving like the stupid little conspiracy tale is the moral equivalent of the Nuremberg trials?

McKAY COPPINS - STAFF WRITER, THE ATLANTIC: [00:09:47] For now the main issue they face is that their ideology isn't quite as clear cut as conservatism. They don't have a best-selling pamphlet to inspire a new generation like Goldwater's, but there is a coherent philosophy that started to be built around Trumpism.

The Trumpist Republicans want the GOP to be a more populist party. They believe in economic nationalism, meaning America should withdraw from the world stage and put up trade barriers. They oppose Paul Ryan-style fiscal conservatism and condemn costly military interventions, like Bush's invasion of Iraq.

Many on the left and right want to write off Trump is an anomaly in American politics. And to be fair, it's hard to argue that he's really governed like a populous nationalist so far. But political revolutions take time. In 1964, Goldwater got destroyed winning only a few Southern states. But in the decades that followed Republicans built on Goldwater's vision. In 1980, Ronald Reagan beat Jimmy Carter by using Goldwater's playbook and governed based on many of his principles.

The crisis isn't Trump. It's the Republican Party Part 1 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 11-12-20

ANNE APPLEBAUM: [00:10:44] You're, I think, maybe missing one aspect of it, which is why were the people who you described as neoconservatives or people who were attached to the idea that there was a special role for America in the world, what was motivating them? And very often what was motivating them, and again, these are my friends and actually I should say me, although I have not been a Republican for many years in this I have in common with them, was this belief in democracy, as an, as an ideal, as something that America could help share with other countries or could help bring to the world, not necessarily in fact, usually never, through invasion, but more through the power of example. Through the kind of role that we played during the cold war in Eastern Europe, for example, which I witnessed and remember.

And if you're attached to the idea of democracy, if you think that that is the thing that makes America special, then Donald Trump was an abomination and remains an abomination because what he is, what he seeks to be, the way he maintains power is through undermining the faith that Americans have in their own political system. And is beginning with birtherism and continuing now with the fake story about stolen elections. If you look at the so-called never-Trumpers, you'll find often that that's the distinction is that people who were attached to the idea of democracy or the ones who just were never able to accept Donald Trump.

If for you, it was all about American power on the military and realpolitik, then maybe you felt a little bit differently about it, but if what you were really interested in was democracy then Donald Trump was just never, ever going to be acceptable to you.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:12:33] On that very specific note, I've been doing myself a lot of interviews in the past week or two, and I find that I keep being out of emotional step with the people I'm talking to because, this might be changing now as the Republican party coheres around the stolen election narrative, but I have found this whole era and even in many ways this election really depressing.

And the reason is that Donald Trump doesn't strike me as a difficult challenge. He's not a competent autocrat where you have to choose between effective governance and your liberties. He's not a strategic autocrat who hides his narcissism or as nepotism. He's not a beautiful speaker who cloaks his lust for power in glittering ideals. And yet the Republican party fell so easily to him.

It fell so easily to the most crude, bizarre, libertinish, secular, erratic, insulting person, you could imagine. Including by the way, a lot of people in the Republican party who he insulted. Ted Cruz, whose wife he insulted, Lindsay Graham, whose phone number he gave out.

I mean, the whole thing is wild to me. So what do you think happens? What do we take from this as predictive, when a more competent capable would be autocrat or demagogue emerges?

ANNE APPLEBAUM: [00:13:53] I think the possibility of a more competent autocrat emerging four years from now is one that cannot be excluded. I agree with you completely. It's the shoddiness of Trump, but also the low stakes. The senators who were afraid to vote for Trump's impeachment, despite the fact that he was abusing American military aid in order to bribe a foreign leader to launch a fake investigation of his political opponent, I mean, it was the most shoddy crime. It was something that there's no question a previous generation of politicians would have would've chucked a president out for.

What was at stake? They were going to lose their Senate seats and they might end up teaching at Harvard, or they were going to suffer a little bit in the polls, or the president might attack them on Twitter. I mean, it wasn't like they were going to go to prison, or they were going to suffer in some real way for defying the president or for doing the right thing, and yet all of them went along with it.

So I agree with you. I think that we very badly underestimated in the previous decade, probably, how weak some of our political institutions are. Certainly how weak the political

parties are, how they no longer serve as filters for extreme ideas. But also how little faith Americans had in their own system.

A fairly recent poll showed that 20% of Americans when asked, say that they wouldn't mind living under military dictatorship. That's a lot of people who no longer have that much faith in our political institutions and how they work. It's a longer conversation than we probably have time for today to understand why and how that happened. And there's a role that was played by changes in the media and social media, there's a role that was played by the financial crisis, there's a role that was played by politicians themselves, but are Americans prepared to accept some kind of autocrat? I mean, I think unfortunately the experience of the last four years, and even as you say of the last week, shows that many of them are.

The Good Germans - Gaslit Nation with Andrea Chalupa and Sarah Kendzior - Air Date 9-8-20

SARAH KENDZIOR - GASLIT NATION HOST: [00:15:54] Over the past five years, and well before that, there have been countless studies of the psychology of Donald Trump. They come from journalists, acquaintances, academics, family members. He has been a public figure for over 40 years and his actions are easy to predict. We know he is sadistic. We know he is without conscience. We know he sees all relationships as transactional and all human beings as disposable. This is well known and understood. What we don't understand is how people sit by and watch. And why people who could have stopped him and his crime cult, and can slow it down right now, have refused to do so.

These people are the "good Germans" of America, and you will find them in big tech, big business, the military industrial complex, the mainstream media, the intelligence community, the Vichy Democrats who refuse to use the full powers of the House, and in the GOP. Although Republicans have become overtly "bad Germans" for years, since they are fully on board with Trump's white supremacist crime cult.

The phrase "good Germans" refers to the Germans living in the Third Reich who enabled Hitler and his Nazi regime, yet remained in denial that they were doing so. Or alternatively, they did know, but they put on a show of respectability. They were "just following orders," they'll say. Or they'll claim they didn't have a choice.

Fascism is about the limitation of choices. The way to prevent fascism is early, before you run out of options. Unbelievably, the US is still on the early side of fascism, though it is much farther along than we were even a year ago.

That means people with power still have a choice, and they are choosing cowardice, complicity and cruelty. This is a choice that they are making. They made their choice. And we at Gaslit Nation made ours.

The other day, someone brought up the famous quote where Trump said he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and not lose his supporters.

I wrote back the real question of that quote, though, isn't why do his followers support him. It's, who gave him the gun? It's who loads the gun. It's who refuses to arrest him after the

murder. It's who creates the propaganda to whitewash the murder. That's why he can shoot anyone on Fifth Avenue.

Don't You Dare Call It Trumpism - The Professional Left Podcast with Driftglass and Blue Gal - Air Date 11-13-20

BLUEGAL - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT: [00:18:32] I wrote this in the summer of 2016, before Donald Trump -- was a possibility of Donald Trump winning an election -- was discussed. And I did not think Donald Trump was gonna win, I'm going to fess up to that. I didn't predict that. But I did notice this in the summer of 2016, and this fell right in with what we have been talking about on the podcast since 2010.

So for six years, we've been talking about this. And so this needed to be said about Trump before he was elected.

Have you noticed a number of media outlets calling the Republican campaign for president Trumpism? And as I mentioned on last week's show that the recurring mentions of Trumpism have exploded this week.

DRIFTGLASS - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: [00:19:26] Yeah. You track those.

BLUEGAL - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT: [00:19:27] Right, I do track those. Calling it Trumpism and what's going to happen to the Republican party, is it going to remain Trumpism or is it going to go back to being the Republican party, as if they are not the same thing?

It isn't Trumpism. It's the Republican party. And it has been the Republican party for far longer than Donald Trump has been running for president.

I showed a video in this post from July of 2015, in which CNN's Alisyn Camerota asks a focus group of Trump and leaning-toward-Trump voters, why they like him? If you've ever watched any of these average Trump voter panels, you know their trademarks: "He speaks his mind and says what I am already thinking." "Illegals are the number one issue on my mind." "He'll make America great again." The reason the news media puts these panels together is because these panels are made up of registered Republican primary voters. They didn't just register to vote this year or fall off a truck into the Republican party. They voted for Bush twice, they voted for McCain/Pailin, they voted for Romney, and they're tired of losing and being embarrassed by their votes. So embarrassed that they fell for a Tea Party rebranding, just so they would not have to associate themselves with George W. Bush.

And then the Republican establishment had the nerve to suggest they vote for George W. Bush's brother. And really Jeb was the media's front runner in 2015, 2016. He was going to be the one. And then when he failed, it was going to be Rubio.

DRIFTGLASS - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: [00:21:19] It was definitely going to be Rubio.

BLUEGAL - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT: [00:21:20] It was definitely going to be Rubio. That's what David Brooks said.

DRIFTGLASS - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: [00:21:24] Many, many times.

BLUEGAL - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT: [00:21:27] Donald Trump lies about a lot of things, but he is not lying when he says he received more Republican primary votes in the 2016 election than any other candidate in US history. That statistic is skewed by how many Republicans voted for someone else other than Trump. But the fact that the race boil down to Trump versus not Trump is not helpful to the Trumpism argument. It was Republican voters that selected Trump as their candidate. In state after state after state, the beltway news media -- remember, I wrote this in 2016 -- the beltway news media is terrified that the Republican party will be forever tarnished by this Trump candidacy. Why? Because Trump as Republican busts open, their "both sides" myth, that both sides of the political spectrum are equally bad, equally wrong and right, equally to be blamed for the mess in Washington. Both Siderism protects the beltway's need for an election horse race as well as a view from nowhere in which the media is outside of the race altogether and just an observer of the process. Both Siderism picks a side. And that side is the side that's willing to lie repeatedly to win elections and policy points.

So if a Democrat says, let's try to pass the Affordable Care Act and give seniors access to end-of-life counseling and hospice care if they want it. And the entire Republican party went, Obamacare is death panels. They want to kill grandma. Obama isn't a real American or a legitimate president. And the beltway media said, "Both sides race to the bottom."

Donald Trump is such an outlier on the lying and the pathological narcissism scale that it's easy to think, "well, he's not really a typical Republican." But Trump won Republican primary after primary by appealing to Republican primary voters. And he did that by echoing what they were hearing on Fox News all the time. And Trump is not an outlier on the insane rhetoric that has accompanied Republican talking points, particularly on immigration.

Remember when Fred Thompson, during the 2008 presidential race said, we are now living in a nation that is beset by people who are suicidal maniacs and want to kill countless innocents. That was Fred Thompson; that wasn't Donald Trump.

DRIFTGLASS - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: [00:24:06] Now I just want to interject that it's nope, they're remembering things, but please continue.

BLUEGAL - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT: [00:24:11] Remember when Republican representative Steve King said calves the size of cantaloupes, they're hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert, all these children of illegal immigrants are all pot importers. And Mike Huckabee was at a Republican presidential debate suggesting that UPS and FedEx knew how to track packages; why don't we outsource the immigration to UPS and FedEx so they can label people.

Let's not forget that Donald Trump is not even the first Republican whose judgment was called into question by US generals for using rhetoric that harms national security. In 2009 -- I mean, there I go, remembering shit again -- a group of retired generals lambasted Liz Cheney and vice president Dick Cheney for creating hysteria concerning the closing of the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Retired general David Maddox said, "Some of the fear issues that are being raised in this are really unfortunate. It gets people excited about things they shouldn't be excited about, and impedes doing what is critical to this country. We take a setback internationally every time somebody, whether it's a former vice president or his daughter,

comes out and says the things that they say." And you can see how that worked out. Guantanamo is still operating largely thanks to Dick Cheney

DRIFTGLASS - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT PODCAST: [00:25:42] And a brief aside, when Dick Durbin, our Senator Dick Durbin found out about the torture program, and said, this is not something you, as soldiers should do. This is, this is Nazi shit. This is Pol Pot stuff. There was a united freakout on the right that screamed, how dare you compare the noble military of the greatest nation on earth to Nazis. And they flogged him into apologizing. Well, now we have what? Six years later, eight years later. Yep. They're Nazis all right. The Republican party are fascist through and through, and everyone who called them on it before the Never-Trumpers decided to make it fashionable, was treated to the same abuse, which was "How dare you. How dare you even mention fascism in the same voice as the party of Lincoln, you sleazy terrorist-loving scumbags.

BLUEGAL - HOST, THE PROFESSIONAL LEFT: [00:26:40] Yeah. They're better at messaging than we are.

The crisis isn't Trump. It's the Republican Party Part 2 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 11-11-20

ANNE APPLEBAUM: [00:26:43] I don't think Trump himself is personally very interesting, and my book is not about autocrats, it's about the people who work for them, who create them, who sell their myth and their legend and who promote them. One of the reasons I wrote about them, as you say, is because some of them in some countries or people who I know, and so it seemed like maybe I had some insight.

Both in that book and in a couple of articles I've written on a similar theme in the Atlantic, I've tried to stay away from sweeping vast generalizations—they are all like X or they are all like Y. There's a famous historian of Vichy, who once wrote that he could never write a book about collaboration, he would write about collaborationisms. Because people's path towards this kind of political change is so different depending on their personality and background and their interests.

The only sentiment I think that you can say that links them, and here we're talking about people who were once part of the center-right or in my case the anticommunist movement in Poland or Reaganism or Thatcherism and who began to change in a different direction over the past decade or so, the one thing that does tend to link them is disappointment.

So these are very often people who are disappointed and they are almost always disappointed with their society, whether it's the dullness and superficiality of modern democracy. Whether it's the demographic change that they don't want or like. Whether it's the decline in morals and values that they see all around them. Whether in the case of Britain, it's England's loss of its voice in the world and it's reduction to a medium sized country that acts together with other European countries rather than striking out on its own as it once did. So it's a feeling of loss or disappointment, and sometimes it's quite an extreme form of disappointment. It's a kind of despair—"my society has ended."

I wrote a little bit about someone who was a friend of mine, Roger Scruton, who was a British philosopher who wrote a really extraordinary book about England, his country, he's

an English conservative writer. He wrote about England, "I'm writing an Elegy to my country. I'm writing about a country that has died. I'm going to tell you about the values of the country that used to exist." In other words, he's someone who had already moved beyond the idea of decline or decay and to the idea that it was gone.

And I think anybody who has that. View of the contemporary world, that it's over, it's finished, "my civilization is dead and gone. My society is decayed.", that view leads you almost inevitably into a kind of radicalism. And you can have that view on the left too, by the way, this is not necessarily at all unique to the right. It's just that I wrote about the right, because that's the piece of it that I know.

But if you have that feeling that it's over, then why wouldn't you try to smash everything? If everything's a disaster, if civilization is dead, if morality is declined, if traditional values can't be recovered, then you might as well have whatever you want to call it, the flight 93 election or the let's change the system, or let's replace the elite with a new elite. Those are all the same kinds of sentiments.

It plays itself out in different ways. You can find people who are also personally disappointed. So whatever it is about the current political circumstances isn't good for their careers and sometimes that's a factor. They see that by aligning themselves to a movement, they can, I don't know, become more popular or make more money or have more power and sometimes that's it.

And sometimes it is quite philosophical. "My civilization is dead and I'm now going to be part of smashing it." And that's usually the link that you find particularly on the most radical part of the right, as well as the most radical part of the left.

WHOA: 86% of Trumpists Think Biden Didn't Really Win - The David Pakman Show - Air Date 11-13-20

DAVID PAKMAN - HOST, THE DAVID PAKMAN SHOW: [00:30:57] I've talked before about the mind virus that is trumpism. And I've talked about the very real impact that watching Fox News and listening to Trump has on people. An *Economist* yougov poll finds that 86% of Trump voters believe Joe Biden has not legitimately won the election. 86% of Trump voters fell for the Trump voter fraud scam, which according to reports we got yesterday, Trump doesn't even really believe and is using just to pay off campaign debt. Trump built this up for months saying it will be rigged. Voter fraud is for er voter.... er... vote-by-mail is fraudulent, etc. And it worked. In a Washington Post poll, more than 75% of Trump voters believe Trump should not concede.

So, Trump does have the support of his base to continue not conceding, which is a reminder, is merely a formality; concession is not legally relevant. Now, even more interesting is that when asked whether Trump should contest the results of the election in court about 85% of trumpists believe Trump should go to court. Remember, the latest is Trump doesn't even think it will work. And when asked whether it will work to change the election results and hand Trump a victory, trumpists are marginally more realistic, but 60% of Trump voters believe what Trump is doing will get him a second term. I really need you to understand that. What we are seeing right now, even though Joe Biden is moving forward with

appointments and his transition team, a coronavirus task force, the election is over, foreign leaders are calling Joe Biden, they're already setting up transition with Joe Biden, more than half of Trump voters expect that Donald Trump will be inaugurated to a second term on January 20th. This is a mind virus. Donald Trump succeeded, not in winning the election, but in using months of rhetoric about mail-in ballot fraud and rigged elections to convince most of his supporters that it was rigged and that Joe Biden didn't really win.

But then, we really need to get to the next part which I mentioned earlier this week, if you watch Fox News at Night, every anchor is saying this stuff: it was stolen, there was fraud, illegal votes, illegal ballots. If you only get your news from Fox News, and you look at Trump's Twitter, why would you think anything else? Their go-to news sources are telling them exactly that. And 86% of Trump voters fell for it. 86% of Trump voters is more than 60 million people. 60 million people think Joe Biden didn't really win. These are doctors, your kids' teachers, accountants, waiters, truck drivers. You don't get 60 million from, you know, unemployed, basement-dwelling al-Qaida, if you understand what I'm saying. Now, if you went and you interviewed some of these 60 million and you asked them, Oh, okay. You think Trump actually won? By the way, why did you vote for Trump? What first-term successes are you most proud of? What issues did you care about? Their answers will make no sense, and then you'll have a better understanding of how 86% fell for this voter fraud, uh, storyline. But I want to go back to where we started the week on Monday. As ignorant as they may be, as unempathetic as they may be, whatever you want to say about these people, whatever you want to believe about these people, there's 72 million of them, okay? Biden barely won when it came to the margins in the key three states that ultimately won this for him. We have to do something about those trumpists. I don't yet know what the answer is. And some people wrote to me saying you really should be presenting a solution. Well, I don't have one yet. I'm being upfront. I don't know. This is a real problem. It's a mind virus, okay? 72 million. 60 million belief that Trump actually won. I don't yet know the answer, but as soon as I have some ideas, I will come to you.

Trump Tries A Suplex On The American People - The Muckrake Political Podcast - Air Date 11-13-20

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL PODCAST: [00:35:06] Even people who don't like professional wrestling or think it's ridiculous, you need to understand a lot of the rhetorical stuff that goes on in it. And so, I want to give everyone a quick little dive into this.

In wrestling, which by the way, is a total grift, you have a bunch of people who are pretending to have fights in front of people who pay to watch them have fights, right?

And by the way, if, if you and your competitor who you talk backstage and talk about how you're going to have a match and you talk backstage about how you're going to insult each other, if you do a good job, people will pay you more money to watch you fake fight, right? That's called heat. That's called trying to get an audience hot after this stuff.

Well, the grift of wrestling is divided up into what's called "works" and "shoots." A work is where you and I have a conversation. It's like, I'm going to do this. You do that. And it's going to take their money. Then there is the rubes in the crowd. We'll call them marks, you know,

like any con job. They are the marks. They don't know what's going on. They're like a chain-smoking grandma saying, "That fights real." Right? So that's who -- we're going to take their money. Smarts are people who know that. They know what the secret thing going on is, right?

Well, so something has happened in the past few years, in the past few decades where all of a sudden, because of the Internet and because of rising media, wrestlers and their audiences, their audiences know it's fake. Right? They know that it's scripted. But now they're really fascinated by how it's scripted. They're really fascinated by what conversations are taking place to who's getting a push, who's winning a belt, who's winning the match, who's making the most money. It's like palace intrigue. Right? Does this sound familiar by the way?

Because now we're an entire nation politically, we're an entire nation of pundits. We all know that it's all fake. We know that all the politicians are getting paid and they're getting their power. And what we're concerned with is, well, Jared's on the inside right now. Steve Bannon's being pushed away. Giuliani just made his case. Ivanka is in there doing this, right? That palace intrigue is that next level stuff.

Well, Trump is a total grifter and his entire time as a politician has been a work. He's been pretending to be a populist. He's been pretending to be for the people. He doesn't give a shit for the people. Right? Well, what ends up happening is in wrestling, even the competitors are like backstage and they're like, I'm going to insult you and you're going to insult me and then we're going to fight. Well, what happens when they're working with each other is occasionally they'll do a thing called working themselves into a shoot, where suddenly the insults, something hits a little funny. You know what I mean? And all of a sudden one person gets mad at another person. And all of a sudden it turns into a real thing, right now, Donald Trump's saying that the election has been stolen. It's at work. He's trying to get all the money that he possibly can from his supporters to pay off his debt and probably to try and launch this entire news organization, which by the way, you want to get people away from Fox News, tell them Fox News helped steal the election.

Meanwhile, Republicans have to win the Georgia runoff. Meanwhile, Republicans have to maintain the support of Trump supporters. So what are they doing? They're working the crowd, right? They're saying, Oh, I think this election was stolen. Mitch McConnell doesn't think this election was stolen. Ted Cruz doesn't think this election is stolen. They're not stupid. They're not falling for this mark bullshit. They're smart to it. But guess what happens: if this thing gains traction somehow or another, you have a real coup, right? If this thing keeps going or if you don't have a coup, you have a bunch of marks, who back in the old days, when the bad guy came to the ring, they would try and punch him as he walked out in the crowd. You have a bunch of marks who think that they're in a civil war. They think that they need to attack Democrats in order to save the country because this con man keeps telling them that they're under attack. So this idea of what this grift, how it works is what we're watching play out now. It's both real and fake. It's both legitimate and a con at the exact same time.

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL PODCAST: [00:39:27] Right. And the danger being that the marks could take over and actually effect become the monster. It's almost like in *The Producers* were -- not to ruin this for anybody -- but they create the worst

show possible to have it tank and they get the insurance money. But instead it becomes a comedy and everyone loves it. It becomes successful that way. And they have no idea, they had no conception of that when it started.

Here's one thing I wanted to throw out there because when we start talking about professional wrestling and how it's fake, or it's not, I instantly remember, this is like 1984, a, 20/20 episode, they interviewed some of these professional wrestlers and this guy, John Stossel, he's asking them, they're showing you how to do it. Like they show how he cut his forehead and then with a really thin razor so that it starts bleeding later in the match as if he got hit, when it wasn't really getting hit. I believe the phrase was "red is green."

PRODUCER: [00:40:20] Red means green, baby!

NICK HAUSELMAN - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL PODCAST: [00:40:22] Yeah. And so, but at the end when he goes, is it fake? And they're in the bowels of a stadium, this dude hauled off and hit him as hard as he can on the side of the head. Knocks him down. He gets up, he does it again saying, is this fake? Now I have to tell you, I think that, that might've changed some hearts and minds for a little while people thinking, Oh, you know what, maybe this really is real. Look what he's willing to do. And, and, you know, beat this poor reporter who I think is if I recall correctly, was complaining about his hearing not working real well cause he boxed his ears to do that. So that's another kind of interesting thing where that also is playing out to some degree here, too.

JARED YATES SEXTON - HOST, THE MUCKRAKE POLITICAL PODCAST: [00:40:59] Well, okay. Are you ready? Because we're getting ready to go. We're getting ready to go into that. That was introductory level wrestling. Let's go to moderate level wrestling, okay? Now remember the terms, right? A work is a cooperative grift. It's a lie that we're engaging in, right? A shoot is real. Right? It's actually happening. Like this is legitimate. There are worked shoots. So when the con men realized that the audience knows that it's fake and they find out that the audience is actually really sort of seduced by shoots. So there's an entire, so, and at this point, when we go up to the moderate level, we don't just have smarts who know what's going on and marks who have no idea. We have what's called smarks, who are people who know that wrestling is fake, but they think that fight right there is real that one's real, that one's fake, that one's fake. That one's bullshit. That's a real fight, they're actually fighting and the wrestlers up their game.

And what ends up happening is they're in a reality within a reality. I say this, by the way, as I'm looking at my calendar, this weekend, Saturday, in fact, there is a major March on Washington. Do you know about this? There's a major March on Washington, which is like, Don't let them steal the election March, and it's not Trump and it's not the Republican party, Nick; it's all of the grifters underneath Trump. It's all of the YouTube people. It's all of the social media people. It's all of these people who like, it's almost like Trump is like a shark, and you know, the little fish that swim beneath the shark. Right? It's all of the people who have made their money from it. They know the election wasn't stolen. They even know, they know full and well that there's not some computer program that did it and that the Sharpies didn't take it. They know. But what are they doing? They're doing this entire grift in a worked shoot type situation to make themselves more prevalent, to make more money and to keep the con going.

They know. And by the way, who is the biggest smark of them all? A personal like Alex Jones. Alex Jones knew for years what he was peddling was conspiratorial bullshit, until what happened? He stopped knowing, and he just went with it and he just lived within it. Right? And all of a sudden he didn't know who he was anymore. And he was lost in that reality.

This is really, really weird stuff, but it explains who Donald Trump is, what Trumpism is and what these followers are about. They're lost in a reality that has absolutely nothing to do with our own. And the grift just keeps going. They're going to go with him to this network. They're going to pay all of his debts. They're going to continue treating him like he's the president of the United States of America. They're lost in it. They are just fundamentally lost in this reality that's been created.

The crisis isn't Trump. It's the Republican Party Part 3 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 11-11-20

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:44:00] The people I'm most interested in are the people who they saw exactly what Donald Trump is and they loathed it and then also accommodated to it. And somebody I want to use here as a case study, because you've written about him and I've spent some time reporting with him as well, is Lindsey Graham. He ran against Donald Trump in 2016, he called him, and I'm quoting Graham here, "a race baiting, xenophobic, religious bigot." and he said, "if we nominate Trump, we will get destroyed and we will deserve it."

Now he's out there, he's telling Trump not to concede the election. He's saying that if Republicans concede, they'll never win again. He's telling Sean Hannity that Democrats will only win elections when they cheat. He believes he won the election on the same kind of ballot that he's now saying are full of cheaters.

What do you think happened to Lindsey Graham?

ANNE APPLEBAUM: [00:44:44] Lindsey Graham is particularly difficult to explain when you look at where he comes from and his background, because if you were to stand a million miles away from him and look at him as a type, you would imagine him to be the most loyal American patriot, admirer of the constitution there is. He's from a small town in South Carolina. He has a very strong affiliation to the military. He got through college on a military scholarship. His parents died when he was young so he had a kind of hard knocks story and was saved by the American military and he's said that many times. He is someone who if you were to imagine a type of person who would never betray American ideas, it would be Lindsey Graham.

But this is where you have to get into questions of personality and personal weakness and what kinds of character people have. Graham is clearly someone who needs to be around a leader or who is not himself the leader of a movement, but is the number two. For many, many years he was kind of John McCain's sidekick, and in those years he was a "McCainyite" Republican. I saw him at conferences in Europe, where he talked about America's role in the world and America promoting democracy.

And then when McCain died, he seemed to need another role. And he attached himself to Trump. He appears to like the role of power broker. So when he runs into journalists in

Washington or others in Washington who he knows, he likes for counting how he was just on the phone with the president, he was just in touch with him. So the feeling of being close to power of being next to someone important being the person who then transmits that power to other people. This is somehow a role that he is psychologically attached to playing. I don't know him well enough and I don't want to do a phony psychological analysis of him, but this is a recognizable personality type.

Again if you look at the story of other countries or nations that have been occupied by others or where people are part of political systems that they don't admire, you will always find people like Lindsey Graham, who give up their ideas, who, move close to power and who, then seek to play some kind of role in the new system, benefiting them and probably he explains it to himself as he's benefiting the United States in some way. He will be telling himself a story about how what he's doing is useful or important.

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:47:17] I mean, my understanding of him, and I spent a bit of time with him over the years, was in the middle of the Trump era, as he began to make this transition, he was explaining it in terms of. If he flattered Trump enough, he could direct Trump in important ways on things that were important to him, particularly foreign policy, this ends up, I think in a lot of ways, failing, take the abandonment of the Kurds, which was a huge blow to Graham in the way he thought.

But he does try to become this advisor to Trump. And as I understood it from him and people around him at the time, there was a certain level of just realpolitik about that. And then slowly, it clearly became something other than that, That he made a series of decisions that narrowed the space, but then at some point there was no space left and then he began to look at things, through new eyes.

He was very radicalized by the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. He's out there telling people that the thing about the left is they hate us, all those smart people out there, they hate us that he feels very embattled.

And something that you emphasize in the book is the way that cooperating with a regime like this often is a product, not of one big decision, "I'm going to change sides", but of a series of small decisions. A series of small accommodations that eventually you wake up and you're on the other side. The people you're listening to her on the other side. You made enemies with the people who used to be your allies. And so the whole world ends up being different.

And I'd like for you to talk a little bit about that, the way, it is a series of small decisions, not one big one that ends up seeing parties and people accommodate to something that they would have rejected just a couple of years before.

ANNE APPLEBAUM: [00:49:00] So there's actually social science studies of this, and usually it's done in the form of examination of corruption inside companies. So how do people come to go along with corruption if their company is carrying out some kind of scam? And the studies do show that it's always a step-by-step process. In other words, you accept one aspect of it. "Okay, well, everybody else is keeping double books so I can too", and "that's just what people do in this company and it's normal" and then the next step is "I'll do this transaction in cash and I'll keep it in the drawer. And. I'm still a good person, I'm still, a good

worker." "I'm doing this to help my company stay out of trouble or keep its head above water."

And as each step becomes normalized, as people get used to the situation, then they can take the next step. And this is very, very similar to what happens in occupied countries. I'm not saying that the United States is Vichy France, or the United States is occupied East Germany, but these are useful parallels to look at because they show you what human psychology is like when someone is working inside a system whose ideology they previously disagreed with or disliked.

And you see the same kinds of patterns. I wrote a book about Eastern Europe after the second world war and the Sovietization of Eastern Europe, and I found these very specific examples. For example you can look at a printing press in East Germany after the war. A law is passed that says the printing press is not allowed to print anything, except what's been decreed by the central plan. And so the head of the printing press who has a mother in the hospital and his wife is ill and his children need to get to university and decides, okay, well, so if that's the rule, then I'll go along with it and I won't print the dissident pamphlet that my friend wants me to print because it's against the law. And he makes these decisions always with the feeling that he himself is a good person and a good citizen, and he's making a decision that takes into the interest, his wife and his mother-in-law and his family and so on. And he never has the sense that he's doing something immoral. But when everybody at every printing press and all of East Germany takes the same kind of decision, eventually the only things being printed are the books about lauding Stalin and the German Communist Party and all kinds of other literature eventually disappears.

And something like that also happened inside the Republican party, namely that people who thought of themselves as patriots, as good people, as politicians working in the interest of the United States, made small decisions over time, each time reminding themselves that what they were doing was for the good of the country. Like Lindsey Graham, I'm here to guide Donald Trump in the right direction. At each stage the situation becomes normalized, eventually Lindsay Graham came to see any of his opponents as anti-American, radical, leftist, socialists. He probably still thinks that he's playing the same role. That he's a good person fighting for American values even though what he's doing is almost precisely the opposite of what he said he would do, or the kind of person that he was four years ago.

The crisis isn't Trump. It's the Republican Party Part 4 - The Ezra Klein Show - Air Date 11-11-20

EZRA KLEIN - HOST, THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW: [00:52:22] Donald Trump has not conceded. He is saying that he won the election, that he won it big, that it was stolen from him, that he's going to fight back. None of which is a surprise. It's what he said he would do. That's what he said he would do in 2016. It's what he said he would do in 2020, and he's doing it, but he's gone further than that.

He's executing a purge of top officials in the military, beginning with Defense Secretary Mark Esper. If we saw this somewhere else, we would know what to call it. That this coup attempt will probably not work does not mean it is not important, does not mean it is not dangerous and does not mean it cannot work. The fact that it's being carried out farcically and

erratically and ineffectively doesn't mean it's not happening or that it won't have consequences. And in fact, the fact that is being carried out so farcically, erratically and ineffectively but has captured the Republican Party so completely makes it in some ways a more dangerous signal of where our political system really is and how vulnerable it really is. I want to say this so clearly, what has chilled me in all this is not Donald Trump, never Donald Trump. He is acting exactly as I expected him to. He is always acting exactly as he promises to. It is the rest of the Republican Party.

Republicans have taken overall two strategies in response here. One is to wholeheartedly endorse Trump's claim. Senator Lindsey Graham went on Fox News to say Trump shouldn't concede, and Democrats only win elections when they steal them. Lindsey Graham knows better but he has fully, fully, fully bought in. The other strategy we've seen is to make these carefully worded statements that signal a kind of emotional solidarity with Donald Trump without fully endorsing his claims of theft. Vice President Mike Pence, for instance, tweeted, I stand with Donald Trump. We must count every legal vote. And the trick of course is that's not what Trump wants done. It's actually what the Democrats want done. So, Pence here has a way of walking the line, and that's what a lot of Republicans are doing right now.

And there's a reason they're doing it. They think they need the energy of Trump's aggrieved, angry base and the support of Trump himself to win, among other things, the Georgia Senate runoffs. Nobody wants to be a Republican, an elected Republican at odds with the Trumpist base. Indeed, in Georgia, the two Republicans running for Senate, they've called for the Republican secretary of the state in Georgia to resign because of something; they've not substantiated any electoral malfeasance with the exception maybe that Trump lost, but that's enough. That is itself a kind of electoral malfeasance; that is the failure. The mark of an election that was well conducted in this country right now to the Republican Party is that a Republican won it. All these Republicans out there saying the media doesn't project winners, they're not saying that the projected winners who are Republicans in Senate and House races are not real winners. They're not saying that those same ballots that elected Republicans to Senate and House seats were stolen or cheated or somehow fraudulent. The mark of a well-conducted election right now to the Republican Party is that they won it.

This is so dangerous. It is so dangerous. However it ends, we've seen both in the past four years and in the past four days, how swiftly and easily the Republican Party will coalesce around an authoritarian demagogue, how much it will burn on the altar of short-term electoral self-interest. So, even if Biden takes the presidency as planned, as expected in January, none of this is truly over. This Republican Party is still here. Trump's Republican Party is still here. The Republican Party that made Trump and accepted him and defended him again and again, that is still the Republican Party that will control the Senate, the Supreme Court, most state legislatures, redistricting, and so much more.

And so it is so clear that our system is completely undefended, that someone more capable than Trump could easily exploit its weaknesses. And that weakness above all is the Republican Party itself, what it will accept, what it will defend, what it has become. There's just no other way to say it. There's no other way to say it.

This then is not a podcast about Donald Trump, really. It's a podcast about why he was able to take over the Republican Party so easily. Why authoritarians in country after country are able to coopt a party so easily. That's the question, not the authoritarian demagogue himself,

usually is a he, but all the people he convinces, the people who know better, who know better at the beginning and by the end are sycophants. The people who see the danger at the beginning, and by the end they are themselves the danger.

Summary

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [00:57:02] We've just heard clips today, starting with Ezra Klein speaking with Stuart Stevens about how the compassionate conservatism he believes in turned out to be the recessive gene in the GOP. A video from the Atlantic discussed the parallels between the party realignment in the wake of Barry Goldwater and the potential permanent realignment after Trump. Ezra Klein also spoke with Anne Applebaum about the GOP becoming the party of Sarah Palin rather than of John McCain. Gaslit Nation discussed the good Germans of the GOP who are rationalizing their support for a degenerating movement. The Professional Left Podcast took the position that Trump isn't different enough from mainstream Republicans for his governing style to be called a Trumpism. Ezra Klein continued his discussion with Anne Applebaum on the topic of radicalization among the likes of cultural conservatives in the US and UK. The David Pakman Show highlighted that 86% of Trump voters think that Trump won the election, setting up a massive break in perceived legitimacy. And the Muckrake Political Podcast explained the separation from reality of Trump supporters through a professional wrestling metaphor.

That's what everyone heard. But members also heard two bonus clips, both from the Ezra Klein Show. He's had a lot to say about this, I guess. They continued discussing the sad, strange conversion of Lindsay Graham and how that happened, and some theories as to what's behind that, and a commentary on how it is the Republican support of Trump, rather than Trump himself, that is the real threat to the country. For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and they are part of the transcript for today's episode. So you can still find them if you make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content, which includes bonus episodes, where I, or Amanda and I come together to discuss a variety of things conversationally. If you want all of that delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at BestoftheLeft.com/support or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. And every request is granted. No questions asked.

And now we'll hear from you.

More nuance about legitimacy - Dave from Olympia, WA

VOICEMAILER: DAVE FROM OLYMPIA, WA: [00:59:27] Hi, Jay. It's Dave from Olympia. I am playing catch up again. I just listened to episode 1376 about stories and myths and your very kind words at the end following up on my response to your original thoughts about need for legitimacy. But my obsessive need for nuance is compelling me to make the call. Just what gives legitimacy is what the people at the time think gives legitimacy. So, at the time when the bloodline of kings was what really, really mattered, Yeah!, people would fight and die for the legitimate king because they had the pure bloodline or whatever, but that's what everyone . . . that was the common myth that everyone bought into. Nowadays, and I think

it's overstating to say that our measure of legitimacy today is that the leader legitimately represent the will of the people, the leader has to win the election, right? And that is vague, and it gives the opportunity to do all kinds of shenanigans, but that's really, I think, what the majority of Americans see today as what conveys legitimacy, right? That the winning of the election and whatever weird rules are in place, whatever shenanigans, voter suppression or whatnot, last-minute Supreme Court interventions to stop the vote counting, you know, make things a little weird, but they're the winners!

Therefore, you know, that is legitimate, but it's it's yeah, here's the thing. You start hollowing out that sense of legitimacy, and the whole thing starts to fall apart. There were kings that were, and I guess they were always somewhat paranoid, but you know, had long reigns, had successful careers as leaders. They built stuff. They either defended their country or, you know, get involved in wars and saw their people fed and good stuff happened. And so, they could function within that system of legitimacy; it was possible. I mean, when, when the Romans, like, when legitimacy was conveyed by the acclaim of the legions, you know, if they determined that you should be emperor, well, you're emperor. That's what makes you legitimate. That was an unstable system, but that seemed to be the rules that everyone played by, and even in that system, there were stretches where there were peaceful transfers of power from one emperor to the next for up to five or six emperors in a row, and for them that was, you know, a good hundred years was a good run. And so the fact that we managed 200-plus years of successful power transfers without armed violence over who the new leader should be, that, I mean, I guess that's something. to put in the win column. But your thoughts on Mr. Trump and his obsessive need for validation and where that comes from, that's not just a petty narcissism. You're right. That also stems from a fundamental knowledge that they're not legitimate, that they don't actually have popular support, and so they need to bolster that with other kind of psychological crutches.

I really enjoyed that commentary. Uh, it made me think interesting thoughts. As always, stay awesome.

Final comments on the high likelihood of violence and death between now and Biden's inauguration

JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT: [01:03:17] Thanks for listening, everyone.

Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets and activism segments. And thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can either record a message at (202) 999-3991 or write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.com.

So, the timing of this has been pretty good. Dave is responding to a conversation that was taking place just prior to the legitimacy of our democratic system coming fully to a head. And now that it is in the process of coming fully to a head, the conversation continues. So, we have right now a manufactured crisis of legitimacy in our system, but it's actually sitting on top of a real crisis of legitimacy. The real crisis is widespread voter suppression, gerrymandering, the electoral college, and so on, that is genuinely threatening our system's

ability to accurately reflect in a democratic way the will of the people in government. The fake crisis of legitimacy is what we've been seeing for a decade now: accusations of voter fraud and vast, unfindable conspiracies to hurt the Republican Party or Trump, in particular. And what's happening right now is that the fake crisis of legitimacy is leading to a real crisis of violence, which is almost certainly going to happen.

And so, just like after 2016, the conversation -- we heard a little bit of it from David Pakman today -- the conversation about the need to understand Trump voters is kicking up again. And I think that it's different this time. I will certainly admit that four years ago my instinct to understand Trump voters was I would say primarily a sense of genuine befuddlement and curiosity with maybe a little bit of, I don't know how much of it really is, economic problems with neo-liberalism, not that they would necessarily know that term, but that they're maybe attracted to someone like Bernie Sanders but vote for Trump? Explain to me what's going on there. And books like *Strangers In Their Own Land* can explain how a person can feel so unhelped by the government that they then support the party in government that is most promising to not be helpful. So there's lots of interesting things along those lines, and frustration about that line of thinking, I think, came from -- look, like there's obviously this strain of racism. This is clearly a through-line that stretches back decades. We don't need to understand and coddle the feelings of these people. We need to defeat them. And that's a perfectly reasonable position to take, I think, just from a, as I said, a genuine befuddlement and curiosity perspective, I was still interested in understanding. And so that's coming up again with a, maybe slightly different tinge, this idea that 70 million people voting for this absolute monstrosity of a politician as an individual and political party as an entity. It's not a fluke that there is something there that these people really want that is being tapped into. Also, I would argue, you cannot set aside the dynamics of hyperpolarization. You just can't because what that creates is an environment where people will vote for a party that they hate because they hate the other party even more. That absolutely happens on both sides of the spectrum. And so, I would argue that this call to understand these people and understand the psychology of why they would vote for Trump or be so fervently dedicated to him, it's not about coddling so much. It's not about understanding their feelings so that we can make them feel better. It's more about at a minimum figuring out how to co-exist because that is becoming vanishingly small possibilities that that is going to be able to continue without violence, and at best maybe figuring out how to deprogram people. That's a harder one. That's why I say at best. But what I've been seeing and what resonates to me as to imagine why this wouldn't be true is, is beyond me, that militia groups and the Proud Boys and the people we saw show up to any version of the Stop the Steal marches from Phoenix to DC or anywhere else that these events -- I mean, DC did get violent -- but these events have been as minimally violent as they have been because they still have hope. They have been fed this line about a vast conspiracy theory, and that is enough to give them hope.

And so, in the immediate days after the election when the election results seemed to be so clear, I definitely went through a day or two of sort of a sigh of relief. Like, okay, I guess we didn't have violence on election day, as many thought. And we didn't have violence in the days after, as we were counting. And then as the protest movements began to form, I realized, Oh right. That's why we haven't seen violence yet because they still have hope. And so one of two things can happen. The system can work as it should, and the legitimately elected person will take office which will take away the hope of all of the people who are primed and on the verge of violence. Or the system will not work, and there will be a coup.

Either of those situations is not good, and so what I am seeing going forward, and, you know, I'm not big on predictions, but I would definitely say that, based on what I've been hearing, and, as I said, it just, it's the idea that this would not be the case is beyond me, that the militia is sort of waiting. They're waiting for their cue. And the moment they lose hope is their queue. And that might be inauguration day. It may come before that, but I read an article about the chat rooms, the conversational chat rooms, where militia members hang out and plan to do whatever they're going to do, they say, look, like we are stationed outside of DC. We are heavily armed and we are stationed. And when we are needed, we will move in. And the idea that that is not the case seems ridiculous. I think, of course, of course they're stationed, of course, they're ready. This is the civil war they've been waiting decades for. And so, and, you know, as I said, I'm not big on predictions; it's not generally where I go, but if there are no deaths between now and the inauguration or maybe slightly after, that would be to me the most surprising thing to happen during the Trump years.

The anxiety a lot of people on the left are feeling right now is what if the election is stolen, and that's a perfectly legitimate thing to be anxious about. But I think coming right after that should be, what if the election isn't stolen? What horrors are we going to face at the hands of right-wing domestic terrorists who we have been warning about for years and years and years, but that the right wing has sort of been working the refs and bullying the government to systematically ignore that threat.

And so here we are. So, yes, David is absolutely right to point out that legitimacy is based on whatever it is the people perceive to be legitimate. That really is how it works. I admit that when I did my initial commentary on this that I committed that cardinal sin of projecting my own perspective back into history and thinking that, come on guys, even living under the rule of a king, you must have had a sense, like this is kind of bullshit, right? Like you must have, but look, that is really not necessarily the case. Dave is right to point out that they could have been fully bought in to the legitimacy of the royal bloodline nonsense, and that that could have worked perfectly well for them. But to bring it into modern times, Dave is also right that it's not about the legitimacy being drawn from genuinely representing the people. It's about winning the election. But when that is the case, it leaves room, as Dave said, for chicanery. And that is what we're witnessing today. And we are living in a world in which we have hyperpolarization which is feeding this. Like that is the that's the driving force; that you could have the propaganda and the mythmaking and all of that, but if the parties weren't hyperpolarized, then they just wouldn't have the same purchase. That propaganda would not sink in as much, and people just would not gravitate towards it as much as they do. But when there is hyper-partisanship, that drives the desire for something, anything that people can grab onto, in the hopes that their side, their ideology, their party can win out. And so that's what we're witnessing. And so with hyper-partisanship being the driving force, propaganda, social media, all of that stuff -- happy to feed the flames. And then the propagandist-in-chief, who's happy to pull all of those levers at the same time, we are coming to a point where, you know, maybe for the first time in, I don't know, you know, a hundred years or more, that the legitimacy of our election is being questioned for wholly illegitimate reasons.

But half the country doesn't see it that way, and since your perception is your reality, well, imagine the anxiety you'd be feeling if you were living through a hostile coup, takeover from the legitimate president who you support. Well, you'd be pretty anxious and pretty upset about that. And so, the results on the ground that we are about to be witness to is what

happens when the most disconnected-from-reality people who are the most armed lose hope and come to the conclusion that their country is now being run illegitimately. It is not going to be good. And it is for that reason that I think it is important to understand these people, not to coddle their feelings, but to navigate some form of legitimate governance over the next several years, that doesn't result in the second civil war.

As always, keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at bestoftheleft.com/support. That is absolutely how the program survives. Of course, everyone can support the show just by telling everyone you know about it and leaving us glowing reviews on Apple podcasts and Facebook to help others find the show. For details on the show itself, including links to all of the sources and music used in this and every episode, all that information can always be found in the show notes, on the blog and likely right on the device you're using to listen.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to twice weekly. Thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.