

Opinion: The GOP has become the Jan. 6 Party. It stands for insurrection and authoritarianism.

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Columnist

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I am haunted by a recent Gallup poll showing a significant shift in party identification: 2021 began with Democrats ahead of Republicans, 49 percent to 40 percent, and ended with Republicans ahead of Democrats, 47 percent to 42 percent. What accounts for that seven-point swing toward the GOP?

Obviously, a lot of it represents unhappiness with President Biden's policies. But you don't have to identify as a Republican to signal displeasure with inflation or the covid-19 pandemic. By joining the GOP, you endorse what the party stands for. Last month Biden demanded "What are Republicans for?" He still hasn't gotten a good answer.

House Republicans have recruited former speaker Newt Gingrich to come up with an agenda, and he wants to haul out old chestnuts like a "balanced budget amendment." A balanced budget after former president Donald Trump added \$7.8 trillion to the national debt? LOL. The Republican Party has also lost all credibility on foreign policy after Trump spent four years genuflecting to dictators. Now Tucker Carlson, the most popular TV host in MAGA land, has become America's leading defender of Russian strongman Vladimir Putin and Hungarian strongman Viktor Orban.

But while jettisoning old issues, Republicans have found disturbing new causes. Their chief, if not only, passion is Trump himself. Despite a small drop-off in Republican support for the twice impeached former president, his dominance was confirmed on Friday when the Republican National Committee (RNC) voted to condemn Reps. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) and Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) for investigating the events of Jan. 6. In the RNC's version of reality, they are "participating in a Democrat-led persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse."

Legitimate political discourse? One hundred forty police officers were injured when insurrectionists stormed the Capitol, at Trump's instigation, in an attempt to overturn the election results. Republican leaders in the immediate aftermath expressed horror — and blamed Trump. But now, however much party mouthpieces may try to spin it, the official Republican position is that the violent mob was engaged in “legitimate political discourse.”

It's true that former vice president Mike Pence on Friday belatedly condemned Trump's attempt to overturn the election as “un-American.” Good for him. But he has much less support than Trump does. He doesn't speak for the party. The RNC does. That means the GOP has become the Jan. 6 Party. It stands for insurrection and authoritarianism.

Opposing the Jan. 6 committee is only a small part of the GOP's antidemocratic agenda. Republican legislatures are limiting voting rights, ostensibly to fight nonexistent voter fraud, while MAGA minions run for positions overseeing elections to ensure that Trump will never lose again.

By a not-so-odd coincidence, the top 10 states with the most gun deaths per capita are also red bastions. Yet Republican legislatures are making it easier to buy firearms and carry them in public. Republicans have become the party of death even as they pass legislation under the “pro-life” banner.

A Texas law has all but outlawed abortion and other Republican-controlled states are following suit in anticipation of the conservative Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*. The GOP view seems to be that no one should be forced to vaccinate but women should be forced to carry unwanted pregnancies to term.

Republicans also increasingly attack intellectual freedom under the guise of fighting “critical race theory.” Hundreds of books are being pulled off library shelves in Texas. Virginia's Republican governor has set up a “tip line” for informants to snitch on “divisive” teachers. A Republican bill in New Hampshire would even prohibit “negative” depictions of U.S. history in classrooms.

Republicans, once pro-immigrant, have become rabidly anti-immigrant. Republican governors such as Greg Abbott of Texas are dispatching troops to the border for no good reason and falsely blaming undocumented immigrants for the high covid rates in their states, playing into the old nativist trope that foreigners are disease-carriers.

Pro-Trump, antidemocracy. Pro-“medical freedom,” anti-intellectual freedom. Pro-gun rights, antiabortion rights. Pro-insurrectionist, anti-immigrant. This is what the GOP stands for now. This is what all the new Republicans are signing up for.

The Jan. 6 Party has little in common save its name with the one I joined in the 1980s. It is no longer a conservative party but a radical nationalist-populist party that poses a dire danger to U.S. democracy —

and to the lives of ordinary Americans. The fact that so many voters are flocking to the Republican banner anyway sends a dismaying signal about America's future.
