Twitter Thread by John Ganz



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I think the total divorce from reality evinced by these efforts to overturn the election are not a positive sign for the country's political life and I really don't understand the continued "Oh, haha, it's all ridiculous nonsense" in some quarters

There's this reflexive need to denigrate custom because defending it is either duping oneself into going along with "the system" or just dowdy; I don't share that disposition. I agree it's important to keep perspective and recognize the absurdity, but it's also disturbing

Corey Robin, someone who I admire a lot even though I disagree with him, said recently "Well, Trump lacks the sort of emphasis on the power of the will that fascists have." The point is taken: he is lazy, but his will manifests itself in this total denial of reality

Trump's combination of utter cynicism and total belief in nonsense is part of the reason why fascists viewed him as an avatar of their type of politics, maybe he's more a John the Baptist than a Christ but its nonetheless in the same vein

Again, my position is that this not what Paxton calls "classical fascism" so much as some kind of para-fascism, but the idea "Oh it can't be anything like fascism because its manifestly absurd and attracts losers and crackpots" is just self-contradictory

I think it's obviously true that Trump was not very good at using the power of the state etc., but we've absolutely seen glimpses of the kind of power that totalitarian movements have to deny and distort reality: the insistent lying and invention of bizarre conspiracies etc.

This question "Are they just delusional or do they really believe this insanity?" that we are constantly forced to ask is precisely the same question people as about totalitarian regimes, because they practice a politics that confounds the boundaries between belief and cynicism

The response to this by critics on the left is often to point to precedents, "Oh, the Bush administration did so and so," Yes, of course there are precedents, this type of politics requires time to crystallize and damage to be done

When you point to pure facts like "there are paramilitaries, there is street fighting, there is an effort to overturn election", critics have to respond with a series of interpretations, namely "it's not very powerful, it's a bunch of loser jerks", maybe, but the facts remain

Being charitable, I think the problem is that this type of politics outrages common sense, so the reaction of sensible people is often to be like "oh this couldn't be happening because its absurd", sometimes that judgment will be correct, of course, but sometimes it will not

I still think the intellectually honest approach to this era and its politics is that it poses real serious challenges to our powers judgment, and its not really that easy to dismiss or encapsulate whats going on with a phrase

Sometimes it's actually harder for people with a record of good judgment and discerning critical powers to see what's going on, because they are relying (correctly in most cases) on common sense to do so much of the work for them

But there’s the worry in some quarters about the political implication of admitting that something special is up with Trump, there’s a sense that would be a concession to the politics of centrism, I think that’s just a bad approach to argument