Twitter Thread by Jay Van Bavel



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I see a lot of fantastic discussions, papers, threads, and op-eds about the insurrection from experts from various fields.

As a social scientist, I want to add that it's important to understand that collective action like we saw yesterday is due to *many* factors.

Yes, the leadership of Donald Trump played the central role in instigating the anti-Democratic effects--from his initial attempts to dismiss and discredit state votes to fomenting the insurrection yesterday.

Leadership matters a great deal for motivating collective action.

Of course, leadership doesn't occur in a vacuum. Trump was supported, enabled, validated and empowered by Republican elites for his entire term.

This came to head with the concerted efforts by GOP members of the Senate and House who tried to overturn the election certification.

The main attempt to overthrow a democratic process was by spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories.

This was primarily spearheaded on social media, which is why freezing Trump's social media accounts is such a big deal.

These social media account accounts were used to spread misinformation and organize, but this misinformation was laundered and legitimized by right wing media figures to millions of people.

From Fox to OAN to Newsmax, these false messages were spread to millions of homes.

But these messages would not have landed with such resonance if they had not met a receptive audience.

The people who stormed the Capitol came from racist and pro-fascist groups (like the Proud Boys) and proudly waived the Confederate flags during their attempted insurrection.

And there were institutional failures. Why wasn't security easily overrun when this was widely telegraphed?

It's impossible to imagine police officers taking selfies with another group as they violently invaded government property.

This just begins to scratch the surface of these issues--there is also a clear sociopolitical history.

This is bound up in sectarian politics, where extreme affective polarization leads people to see the election of their political opponent as a mortal (and immoral) threat.

The fact is that all of these factors appear to have played a role and it's impossible to separate them.

Collective human behavior is complex and there is space for expertise on all of these angles since these (and other) factors likely all matter a great deal.

If one scholar is not considering a perspective, it usually just means they are bringing their own expertise to bear on a complex issue.

It's important to think more deeply about how they interact. In the real world, collective human action is never caused by a single factor.

I would also add that there is almost always diversity within a group--even an insurrection.

Accept that these people do not all share the same assumptions, identities, backgrounds and goals. This makes it impossible to find a simple, single explanation for all of them.

The consequence is mutliple causation and diversity within groups means that any intervention to prevent this from happening in the future must be multi-pronged.

Simply removing Trump from office of closing his social media accounts will not resolve all the underlying issues.

I could write the same thread about pretty much any social science issue, from vaccine hesitancy to voting behavior.

This is something that social scientists take for granted. But it's easily to lose sight of it in hot takes, breaking news, and journalistic coverage.