Twitter Thread by Seth Cotlar



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Wish folks cared as much about countering the political culture of far right hyper-nationalistic populism that traffics in anti-Semitic tropes and naturalized conceptions of racial and gender hierarchies, as they care about dissing those who use the word “fascism” to describe it.

Ultimately, I think that’s what lay behind this terminological dispute. Is democracy more threatened by “center-left/center-right neoliberalism” or by the far right? People who resist the f-word say the former is the *real* threat. People who use the f-word focus on the latter.

My sense is that the people who use the "f-word" are not the neoliberal simpletons their critics tend to think they are. And likewise, the f-word refuseniks are no fans of the far right, they just don't see it as being as powerful and threatening as others do.

This might be overly reductive, but I think at least some of this has to do with where one lives. If one lives in a very blue part of the country, I can see how the threat of far right paramilitaries would seem hyperbolic and exaggerated.

I happen to live in a state capitol were heavily armed, far right paramilitaries have spent the past year assaulting people on a regular basis and working in cahoots with GOP legislators to invade and shut down the state legislature. Things feel quite edgy here.

I used to go to right wing protests all the time to see what was going on there. I haven't done that since last fall because it has become an empirically unsafe thing to do, even for a tall, normie-looking white guy like me. Something has changed that seems to require a name.

At night I frequently hear gunshots in the distance. Until last year, that didn't used to happen. I suspect the gunshots might be some of the folks in my neighborhood with the 3% militia decals on their cars doing some training in the woods nearby, but I could be wrong.

This far right political culture has very deep roots in US history. It didn't start in 2016. Trump didn't invent it. Hell, he barely understands it. But he's the symbol around which this culture has quickly coalesced, strengthened, expanded, and sharpened over the past 4 years.

Maybe it'll all just melt away once Trump leaves center stage. I sure hope that happens. But just because this fascist political culture didn't mature into a fascist regime, that doesn't necessarily mean that it's inappropriate to use the f-word to describe it.

As a historian, I'd say that contingency matters A LOT. What would our conversation look like right now if those protesters had turned right instead of left, or gotten to the house chamber 60 seconds earlier before they were secured? Would they have murdered elected officials?

It's horrible to contemplate, but we were arguably a few lucky accidents away from that Capitol invasion being MUCH more deadly and politically disruptive. Who knows what would have happened then? All I know is that such scenarios were unthinkable before 2016. Now they're not.

There are so many elements of the contemporary far right that remind me of the American fascists of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Those strands in our political culture never vanished. But what's changed is that they've begun to dominate one of our two major parties.

There are still people and interests in the GOP that keep that far right somewhat in check, emphasis on somewhat. But the problem is that the already electorally-challenged GOP is becoming ever more dependent upon far right (or fascist) voters to win elections.

The GOP has a crap track record of policing its right flank. We have no reason to expect they will start doing that any time soon (though I hope they do). And if the party just keeps moving ever rightward, then what exactly is the term we should use to describe that destination?

So sure, are they *fully* there, in f-land, yet? Debatable, and I get why someone would argue "no" on that. But the signs that the party is NOT heading the direction of f-town are few and far between...and in a two party system structurally tilted toward the GOP, that's scary.