Twitter Thread by Kirbmarc



Kirbmarc
@kirbmarc

I think there needs to be precision in categorizing sets of authoritarian political ideas - responses also vary according to the nature of the authoritarian political ideas.

Fascism is ideological in ways Trump isn't - Trump is still a danger in terms of democratic backsliding

> Let's say all agree Trumpism is fascism. What flows from that?
> I advocate precision in categorizing terrorism because it informs strategy. Responding to not-terrorism with counterterrorism can fail or backfire.
> What changes if people call Trump "fascist" instead of, say, "bad"? https://t.co/yv9byQWKnR
>
> — Nicholas Grossman (@NGrossman81) January 19, 2021

An important difference between 20th century fascism and 21st century right-wing authoritarian populism is that fascism was explicitly deadset on exposing democracy as bad - people like Orbàn or Erdogan or Trump are fine with the superficial trappings of democracy.

Mussolini shut down true accusations of voter intimidation through the intimidation of his critics, which led to the assassination of Giacomo Matteotti, who had exposed the fascist intimidation at the polls. Trump spread and encouraged conspiracy theories about voter fraud.

Why does this matter? Because right-wing populist supporters make arguments that THEY are the ones defending not just the abstract "will of the people" (that's common in fascism too) but the procedures of democracy itself. They accuse their rivals of authoritarianism.

People like Mussolini or Hitler made no secret that they thought of democracy as decadent and corrupt, not just morally, but politically, as a system. Trump or Erdogan or Orbàn (or to a lesser extent Putin) claim that it's LIBERALISM which is decadent and corrupt.

This is an important difference because 21st century right-wing populist movements can take over established conservative parties - as it has happened in the US and Hungary - without the needs for their own party. In a two party system that's especially effective.

In a two party system like the US partisan voters will vote for their party no matter what - and they can claim continuity with a previous less populist/less authoritarian incarnation of the party. 21st century right-wing populist movement can very easily become "normalized"

Insisting on calling those movements "fascist" leaves room for equivocation and minimization - since 21st century right-wing populism is less ideological, less explicitly anti-democratic, less explicitly hierarchical, an accusation of fascism will look extreme and overblown.

So there's a continuos motte-and-bailey back-and-forth between "fascist" and "dangerous for the liberal democratic system", which is a waste of time and may alienate some people.

A political movement can lead to democratic backsliding without having organized squads of goons in uniform explicitly sanctioned legally and politically, or without building concentration camps, or without a clear anti-democratic ideology.

In order to reduce the hold of a right-wing authoritarian politics onto a conservative party you need the non-authoritarian parts of the conservative party, and authorities of a conservative leaning to respond to the threat, without equivocations or whataboutism.

Fascism and Nazism in the 1930s created their own parties and attracted support from conservative parties or voters by using the threat of communism and painting themselves as the only serious anti-communists - but they quashed liberal democracy quickly and by force.

It took Hitler less than six months to move from assuming power (30th January 1933) to outlawing any political party other than the Nazi Party (14 July). Mussolini abolished elections little more than two years after he had been put in power WITHOUT winning an election.

By contrast Orbàn still allows elections and opposition parties, after ten years of being in office - even though he has sapped their strength and restrained their room for action by making them largely ineffective.

Trump also didn't abolish the opposition party, and took part in an election. He didn't explicitly denounce democracy as a system, either. He had to resort to alleging voter fraud - to say that his rivals were the secret authoritarian ones.

Even Putin at least formally respects things such a term limits - he's been in a position of power since 1999 but has alternated between the job of president and prime minister to at least FORMALLY acknowledge term limits.

Why is this important? Because while no one had any doubts about what kind of regime fascism was and what were the consequences for dissent, average conservative voters might easily be persuaded that the democratic backsliding isn't happening - that it's overblown partisanship.

Why is this important in the US? Because even right now, after the disaster of the assault on the Capitol, Trump has an extremely high approval rating among Republicans - and he, or someone who behaves like him in terms of rhetoric and methods, might still run even after the loss

So it's important to establish that the democratic backsliding is REAL and DANGEROUS even though there are no concentration camps for dissenters and elections weren't abolished, or parties disbanded - that it doesn't take ideological fascism for a movement to threaten democracy.