Twitter Thread by Matthew Sheffield



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Thread: Conservative Policy and the Trump Presidency

On the last full day of the Trump administration, I think it's useful to examine why he accomplished so little legislatively. TLDR version: American conservatism has almost no policy program.

The most important thing to know about conservative politicking is that people do not vote FOR Republicans, they vote AGAINST Democrats.

The GOP is dominated by a minority of far-right activists and wealthy donors who have views that their own voters don't support.

American conservatism is premised on the twin ideas that the New Deal & Great Society were immoral and that God himself created America and that we should honor this creation by establishing full Christian supremacism in which LGBT people, atheists, and Muslims have fewer rights.

Because God created America, this means that conservatives believe in essentially no domestic policy of any kind. If it wasn't literally in the Constitution, then the feds shouldn't be doing it is their opinion.

This is not, however, how things used to be in the GOP.

For much of its history, American conservatism was a sort of intellectual parasite on the Republican party which was run by a mix of moderates and liberals. They actually had domestic policies. Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon had many policies that actually helped America.

Over time, however, conservative activists, whose domestic policy was to have no policies began to displace and "cancel" the moderates in Congress and elsewhere. This process is detailed by @RuleandRuin https://t.co/kOxRHics63

Once the Cold War ended, the conservative parasite began consuming the brain of its Republican Party host. The process accelerated with the emergence of the Tea Party and the vice presidential nomination of Sarah Palin.

Donald Trump's victory marked the definitive death of Republican intellectualism. Conservative intellectual parasitism had fully consumed it.

Next, with Trump's encouragement, it began trying to consume the brains of marginally attached Republicans and other low-info citizens.

I talked about right-wing epistemology and intellectual history in detail with @willwilkinson on his latest podcast episode which you can listen to here: https://t.co/SrUYkG65eY

When Trump came into office, because the American right had become so completely intellectually vacant, he actually could not fill many top-level executive positions. There simply were not enough people who had domestic policy experience or even ideas about policy.

Let me modulate that a bit to say that there actually are conservative policy thinkers but because they focus on achieving conservative values rather than adhering to the right's minimalistic view of government, they had no influence or cachet in the Trump WH.

Despite having total control of the lawmaking branches of government, Trump and his conservative allies were not able to pass any major domestic policy laws except for the one thing on which they all agreed: giving tax breaks to wealthy people.

So while Trump/the right have no affirmative agenda, their negative agenda has been an astounding success: coarsening politics, dismantling regulations on corporations, reducing oversight of law enforcement, and appointing judges who will rule against regulations and programs.

And of course, the biggest "achievement" of Trump has been to poison the minds of millions of Americans into believing pathetic lies about fraudulent elections, imaginary pedophiles, and a nefarious "Deep State" that somehow hates Republicans but never can actually stop them.

The Big Lie campaign against Biden's legitimate victory will not die easily. And it will continue to radicalize conservatives long after Trump is evicted.

This is why it's so extremely critical that media, businesses, and educators publicly reject these toxic lies.

There is still hope for many people who have only recently been bitten by right-wing intellectual parasitism. Here's my working list of some steps that can be taken to make our country healthier: https://t.co/5RAUT1mywE

> Republican politicians condemning the #TrumpCoupAttempt who are also not calling for his immediate removal and irrevocable prohibition from holding any federal office are nothing more than rats leaving a sinking ship.
>
> The GOP will have no political future unless it does this.
>
> — Matthew Sheffield (@mattsheffield) January 7, 2021

Thanks for reading down to the end. If you liked it, please share the first post. I hope you'll follow me as well if you are not already. Cheers!

PS: There is a very small subset of ultra-ideologues on the right who actually loved Trump's incompetence such as Grover Norquist

To them, a dolt who ruins things is their fantasy because he makes it easier for the public to hate government like they do. https://t.co/hhVg8KjExc

PPS: The policy & politicking nihilism of the U.S. right has effectively made it so that the GOP became motivated solely by will to power. But now that it has no power, all that's left is a violent thanatos instinct.

Thread for those interested: https://t.co/wztIp5PZUz

> Thread: Meaning and loss in American conservatism
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> I've written a lot about how Christian supremacism (expressed and implicit) is the underlying objective of most Trump supporters but the psychology of American conservatism is very important in its descent into madness.
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> — Matthew Sheffield (@mattsheffield) January 12, 2021