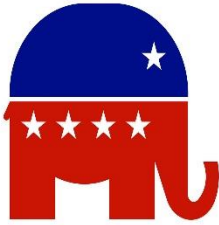


How Did the Republican Party Become an Enemy Of Democracy - A Warning Prior To The Midterm Elections

by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

How did the Republican Party become an enemy of democracy in this country? Traditionally both major parties accepted and followed the standards that allow the democratic process to



function while also maintaining the trust of our diverse population. One of the standards that is critical to representative democracy is the acceptance of election results and the smooth transfer of power when a current officeholder is defeated by his or her opponent. As we prepare for the upcoming midterm elections, it seems critical to learn why one of our two major parties has rejected these standards and what this means for the immediate future.

An easy answer to the question of how the Republican Party became the enemy of democracy is Donald Trump. Certainly his election, his actions and words as President, his refusal to accept his legitimate defeat in November 2020, and his behind-the-scenes efforts to illegally stay in office provide ample evidence that he bears a lot of responsibility for the current views and actions of the GOP. The fact that a majority of Republicans across the country still accept "the big lie" about a stolen election even after all the publicized findings of the January 6th Committee shows his staying power with the base.

Nevertheless, it is important to look at recent political history and to ask the question how did the Grand Old Party reach the stage where Trump could win its nomination for President? After all, this was the anti-slavery Party of Abraham Lincoln and the progressive Party of Theodore Roosevelt. Although the GOP has been supported by big business since Reconstruction days, it has also had an active progressive wing that influenced its policies for many decades. Let us briefly look at its evolution as a political organization since the 1960s.

I grew up in a Republican family in the 1940s and 1950s. My parents backed Eisenhower, a moderate, over Robert Taft, a conservative, as the GOP nominee in 1952. If I had been twenty-one instead of twenty in 1960, I probably would have voted for Richard Nixon. As I became more progressive in my thinking, there were still quite a few liberal Republicans candidates around even in Ohio who I could support.



In fact, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, both major parties possessed conservative, moderate and liberal wings. This fact required compromise within each party and provided a route for coalition building across party lines concerning legislation in Congress or in state legislatures. Such coalition building was essential in passing the major Civil Rights laws during the Johnson Administration.

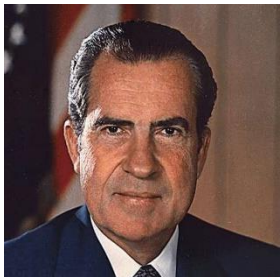
Having such ideologically diverse parties was especially beneficial to organizations and

individuals involved in promoting issues. Issue advocates could appeal to members of both the Republican and Democratic Parties, and also work for legislative coalitions involving both parties. The movement to end the Vietnam War provides a good example of an initiative that enlisted strong support from Republican and Democratic public officials. For instance, Senator George McGovern, a Democrat, could be matched up with Senator Mark Hatfield, a Republican.

When did this diversity begin to disappear from the Republican Party? It did not happen overnight, but the conservative wing of the Party was growing during the 1960s. The nomination for President in 1964 of Barry Goldwater, an arch conservative, over Nelson Rockefeller, a liberal, is an early portent. The initial success of Ronald Reagan, when he was elected Governor of California is further evidence of a shift. The South, which had been solidly Democratic since

The Civil War, began to shift to the GOP after President Johnson threw his full support behind the passage of Civil Rights legislation during his Administration.

Richard Nixon began his Presidency as a moderate, but he ran his reelection campaign in 1972



as the proponent of conservative values who supported "the Silent Majority" over the radical Hippies of the Counter Culture. By the time Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980, progressives had by and large deserted the Republican Party. Reaganism was like conservative Republicanism on steroids. From the day he took Office in January 1981, Reagan worked to cut or eliminate as many services and programs that comprised the Safety Net as possible. This war on programs that benefited poor and low-income Americans was promoted with some racist rhetoric. Reagan was fond of using the

phrase about "Welfare Queens driving in their Cadillacs to pick up their welfare checks." Although African Americans had started to desert the Republican Party during the New Deal era, the actions and words of the Reagan era prompted a further loss of Black votes for Republicans.

Thus, the Republican base was becoming more conservative, rural and white from the 1980s to the present era. Although George Bush Senior, George Bush Junior, John McCain, and Mitt Romney were not racists, the GOP continued to resort to political campaign ads that catered to white males by implying that the secret agenda of the Democratic Party was to reduce white power and influence. Furthermore, the election and reelection of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 tended to reinforce this fear even more. The Tea Party's emergence during the Obama years was a movement largely comprised of angry and disgruntled white males. A number of Tea Party backers became Republican state representatives and Congressmen.

The question that Republican leaders who represented traditional conservative, pro-business values needed to take seriously is: How does a Party with a shrinking white base continue to flourish without giving way to its most active and extreme elements. The answer came in the Republican primaries to nominate a Presidential nominee in 2016. It couldn't! If the old Republican establishment had prevailed, the nominee would have been Jeb Bush. The primary victories and nomination of Donald Trump show that the new Party activists were unwilling to support a nominee who didn't truly support their extreme views.

Next came the election of Trump as President, complete with four years of inciting racism and using immigrants as a scapegoat for the loss of jobs and illegal voting. Since He actually lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by over two million votes, he also spent four years talking about widespread voter fraud and the evils of absentee voting that could be used to steal an election. His final chapter as President features all the illegal measures that he supported behind the scenes in order to stay in power after his loss to Joe Biden.



This brief history reveals how the Republican Party evolved to its current status of questioning and opposing the traditional norms needed to carry forward and protect the democratic process. Well aware that it is a minority party, its leaders seek to suppress the voting of African Americans and others who tend to vote for Democrats. They also work to elect state officials who advocate for powers to overturn elections that they deem to be fraudulent. A large majority of its members believe "the big lie" that the 2020 election was stolen, and Trump seems to have their support as the Republican 2024 candidate. However even if Trump is not the candidate, people like Florida Governor Ron DeSantos and Senator Ted Cruz of Texas appear to be eager to carry on the Trump legacy. If Republicans win back the House of Representatives and the Senate in November, some of the more zealous Trumpite-members of Congress are calling for revenge against elected officials who are currently working to expose the illegal activities that threatened the normal workings of representative democracy such as the January 6th Insurrection.

This article should be read as a warning to beware of the current Republican Party. Since the midterm elections take place in less than three months, voters need to be cognizant of the stakes involved. If Republicans regain power in Congress, will this enable further steps to weaken and discredit representative democracy? Republican candidates at every level need to be challenged by citizens to state where they stand on voting rights, protecting the fair administration of elections, and their commitment to insuring the peaceful transfer of power after an election. These are not normal times in our public life, and this midterm should not be viewed by voters as a typical election. If people need more of a warning than this synopsis of recent Republican history, then tell them about all the violent rhetoric now calling for going to war for Trump that appeared on right wing websites after the FBI recently searched the ex-President's home in Florida to take back some missing classified government documents. That info should spark their attention!