

The Donald Trump Phenomenon: The Drift Towards an Autocratic Presidency in the United States

Donald Trump can be seen as some sort of a deadly "political virus", which was introduced accidentally into the American body politic in 2016.

By [Prof. Rodrigue Tremblay](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

"Experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go". —Montesquieu (1689-1755), 1748.

"Where you have a concentration of power in a few hands —all too frequently —men with the mentality of gangsters get control." —Lord Acton (1834-1902), 1866.

"The totalitarian mass leaders based their propaganda on the correct psychological assumption that, under such conditions, one could make people believe the most fantastic statements one day, and trust if the next day they were given irrefutable proof of their falsehood, they would take refuge in cynicism; instead of deserting the leaders who had lied to them, they would protest that they had known all along the statement was a lie and would admire the leaders for their superior tactical cleverness." —Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), (in 'The Origins of Totalitarianism', 1951, Part 3, Ch. 2, p. 80).

"If this [U.S.] government ever became a tyrant, if a dictator ever took charge in this country, the technological capacity that the intelligence community has given the government could enable it to impose total tyranny, and there would be no way to fight back because the most careful effort to combine together in resistance to the government, no matter how privately it was done, is within the reach of the government to know." —Frank Church (1924-1984), American lawyer and U.S. Senator, chairman of the Church Senate Committee, (in an interview with TV program 'Meet The Press', Aug. 17, 1975)

"When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross." —Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951), American author (in 'It Can't Happen Here', 1935, a novel about the election of a fascist to the American presidency).

Introduction

Wednesday, February 5, 2020 will come to be remembered as a date of historic significance for the United States. Indeed, this is the date when a Senate majority of 52 Republican Senators (with the notable exception of Sen. Mitt Romney), voted against convicting President Donald Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of justice, in the [impeachment trial](#) of the latter. That is also the date when Donald Trump interpreted such exoneration as a blank check to move towards a fully autocratic presidency.

Thus, in open defiance of the American Constitution and of America's checks-and-balances

system, Trump's Republican enablers have placed the American people before a *fait accompli* and the only question now is to see if this [dangerous drift](#) toward autocracy will be condoned or reversed in the next presidential election of November 3rd.

How far will Donald Trump push the United States towards autocracy?

According to the well-known duck test, "*If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck*"!



President Donald Trump is a [most excessive](#) person in anything he does or says. For example, he likes to take the so-called authoritarian "[Mussolini pose](#)". He also likes to embark on totalitarian style "[purges](#)" of persons working for the United States government who do not heel to his commands, —persons he considers his "enemies".

He surrounds himself with hard-core sycophants, lackeys and puppets, who are expected to give him a [loyalty pledge](#), not a pledge to the U.S. Constitution or to the American people. Consequently, it is said that the U.S. under Trump is turning into a "[banana republic](#)"!

Donald Trump, the law and the privatization of the U.S. government

Mr. Donald Trump has often used the courts to his personal advantage. He has arbitrarily and unprecedentedly [attacked the courts](#) and about [everybody](#) else who stands in his way. He has second-guessed prosecutors and contested judges' decisions, and he has expected favors to help his felon "friends" receive reduced sentences. This is showing an elevated level of disrespect and contempt for the [rule of law](#), and it is undermining the American [legal system](#) in a big way.

Mr. Trump has also declared that the Secretary of the Department of Justice should *de facto* work as [his own personal attorney](#), and not be the independent chief lawyer of the federal government of the United States. This could have the effect of destroying the integrity and independence of the Justice Department and its reputation.

Indeed, it is to be feared that the [DOJ](#) under William Barr is going to be Mr. Trump's weapon of choice against his so-called "enemies". What Trump is doing is *privatizing* the U.S. Department of Justice for his own personal benefits. Fearing the worst, more than 1,100 former U.S. federal prosecutors and officials have pressed Mr. Barr to [resign](#).

Donald Trump is also showing a profound lack of judgment when he does not hesitate [to tweet](#) about pending criminal cases before the courts. Donald Trump seems to really believe that because he is president, he is [above the law](#). Do Americans accept that? They did not accept it when Richard Nixon said, "*if the President does it, it's legal*"! Would they do it now?



The current American president constantly [attacks the freedom of the press](#), which is protected by the U.S. Constitution, calling journalists “*enemies of the people*” —an expression used in Nazi Germany. Donald Trump also shamelessly befriends other countries’ [dictators](#) and autocrats, while making fun of democratic leaders. And, to top it all, Trump has used in public the hubristic [Nazi slogan](#) of “*God is on our side*”, (‘Gott mit uns’), ... etc.

—Well. One gets the picture, if one is not totally blind by partisanship or embroiled in his emotional [cult of personality](#). Ever since he took the oath of office, with his inappropriate daily tweets and reprehensible pronouncements, Donald Trump has been a daily scandal in American politics, and his behavior is going from bad to worse.

As an authoritarian, Donald Trump is going further and further toward turning the USA into a [one-man government](#), with himself as an intolerant, ultra nationalist tin pot dictator-in-the-making, who openly yearns for unchecked, and if possible, absolute power. His plan, notwithstanding the U.S. constitution and its founding principles, is to transform the USA into a militaristic and neo-fascist state, with all the trappings, under his control, and with as few constraints as possible.



He is, by far, the most unprincipled and the most dangerous occupant of the White House that the United States ever had. He has no qualms in bulldozing American institutions if he feels such institutions are an impediment to him exercising full powers.

In this [post-impeachment era](#), Mr. Trump feels unleashed and he thinks that he can do whatever he wants, including meddling in the functioning of the justice system of the United States.

Conclusion

As the duck test above wisely teaches, “*if a politician thinks, talks and acts like an autocrat, that is probably because he is an autocrat!*”!

Such a politician can be expected to undermine the very democratic institutions (Congress, the courts, the press, etc.) that stand in his way. Maine Republican senator Susan Collins has been much chastised for [claiming](#), after the Senate impeachment trial, that Donald Trump “has learned from this case ... a pretty big lesson ... I believe that he will be much more cautious in the future.” She should have known better, i.e. that after a personal setback, Donald Trump always doubles down and that, in fact, he would get much worse as time goes by.

Therefore, it is time for Americans to hear a wake up call before it is too late.

When constitutional democracy is dying under one’s very eyes, the least a concerned citizen can do is to stand up and denounce the forces whose aim is to destroy democracy and replace it with an authoritarian regime. Please keep in mind that the [Second World War](#) (1939-1945) was fought at very high costs to defend the principles of democracy and liberty. How could one accept that these principles could be undermined from within?

If one is comfortable with corruption, abuse of power and amorality in politics, if one accepts that the U.S. Congress could be by-stepped and the courts compromised, and if one does not mind if an autocratic politician wants to be a one-man government and if he shows disrespect for the constitution and its core principle of division of power, he or she may be tempted to vote for such an autocratic candidate.

Yes, I know. The stock market is up and unemployment is low. As an economist, let me tell you something. First, one should not get obsessed with the stock market. The current [stock market bubble](#) is largely the artificial result of huge tax cuts to corporations. The latter are buying back their shares with public money, while the government is going deep into debt. Add to that artificially low, sometimes negative, interest rates pushed down by central banks in a panic over debt levels, and you have the result that you see.

Secondly, the current low unemployment rates are mainly the [demographic result](#) of baby-boomer workers going into retirement in droves, thus creating a shortfall in the supply of labor in many professions and trades. —Don’t be fooled by these mirages and slight of hand.

Yes, I know also how clumsy and amateurish the retrenched [Democratic establishment](#) is. One has only to see the complex [rules](#), based on proportional representation, chosen to select a Democratic presidential candidate in 2020. Such rules seem to have been designed to divide the democratic electorate and weaken the Democratic presidential candidate to the utmost.

Nevertheless, if a citizen values democracy, liberty and freedom, for the present as well as for the future, he or she should think twice before giving Mr. Trump a second chance. Otherwise, this would be like playing dangerously with fire.

Indeed, as Hannah Arendt wrote, “*If someone cannot be mobilized when freedom is threatened, it is because nothing can mobilize him.*”

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International economist Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay is the author of the book [“The Code for](#)

Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles”, of the book *“The New American Empire”*, and the recent book, in French *“La régression tranquille du Québec, 1980-2018”*. He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG)

Please visit Dr. Tremblay’s site: <http://rodriguetremlay100.blogspot.com/>

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