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The Single Greatest Threat to America is Hiding in Plain Sight

JONATHAN TURLEY

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A startling poll was released last week showing that a majority of voters not only view the opposing party as a threat to the nation but justifying violence to combat their agenda. The poll captures a crisis of faith that I have been writing about for over a decade as an academic and a commentator. Many now question democracy as a sustainable system of government. It represents the single greatest threat to this nation: a citizenry that has lost faith not just with our system of government but with each other.

The polls by the University of Virginia Center for Politics shows a nation at war with itself. Fifty-two percent of Biden supporters say Republicans are now a threat to American life while 47 percent of Trump supporters say the same about Democrats.

Among Biden supporters, 41 percent now believe violence is justified “to stop [Republicans] from achieving their goals.” An almost identical percentage, 38 percent, of Trump supporters now embrace violence to stop Democrats.

Not surprisingly, many of these people have lost faith in democracy. Some 31 percent of Trump supporters believe that the nation should explore alternative forms of

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government. Roughly a quarter (24 percent) of Biden supporters also question the viability of democracy.

Faith is the one thing that no system of government can do without. Without faith in the underlying values of a constitutional system, authority rests on a mix of coercion and capitulation.

For years, I have written about this growing loss of faith and how it has been fueled by our intellectual and political elites. In the echo chamber of news and social media, citizens constantly hear how the opposing party is composed of “traitors” and how the constitutional system works to protect enemies of the people.

Viewers now get a steady diet of figures like MSNBC commentator Elie Mystal who called the U.S. Constitution “trash” and argued that we should simply just dump it.

In a *New York Times* column, “The Constitution Is Broken and Should Not Be Reclaimed,” law professors Ryan D. Doerfler of Harvard and Samuel Moyn of Yale called for the Constitution to be “radically altered” to “reclaim America from constitutionalism.”

Georgetown University Law School Professor Rosa Brooks went on MSNBC’s “The ReidOut” to lash out at Americans becoming “slaves” to the U.S. Constitution and that the Constitution itself is now the problem for the country.

They are part of the radical chic that has become the norm in academia—and widely embraced by the media.

According to these law professors the problem is not just our Constitution, but constitutionalism in general.

Others have argued that key protections or institutions should just be ignored. In a recent open letter, Harvard law professor Mark Tushnet and San Francisco State University political scientist Aaron Belkin called upon President Joe Biden to defy rulings of the Supreme Court that he considers “mistaken” in the name of “popular constitutionalism.”

“Popular constitutionalism” appears a form of discretionary or ad hoc compliance with constitutional law. If only “popular” constitutional rules are followed, the Constitution itself becomes a mere pretense for whatever the shifting majority or forming mob demands.

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Politicians have also contributed to this crisis of faith in challenging constitutional values or core institutions. Members like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., have questioned the need for a Supreme Court.

Others like Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., have called for the [packing of the Supreme Court](#) to simply create an immediate liberal majority.

Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., thrilled his base by going to the steps of the Supreme Court to declare “I want to tell you, Gorsuch. I want to tell you, Kavanaugh. You have released the whirlwind and you will pay the price! You won’t know what hit you if you go forward with these awful decisions.”

It is little surprise that one man showed up at the home of Justice Kavanaugh to kill him for his “awful decisions.”

Conversely, former President Donald Trump has regularly denounced his political opponents as “traitors” and “enemies of the people.” He recently declared “If you go after me, I’m coming after you!”

With leaders engaging in such reckless rhetoric, it is hardly surprising that the Constitution itself is now viewed as a threat to our nation rather than the very thing that defines us. It is designed to restrain the majority and protect those who are the least popular in our society.

In the end, a constitution remains a covenant not between citizens and their government but between each other as citizens. It demands a leap of faith; a commitment that despite our differences we will defend the rights of our neighbors.

If nothing else, the Constitution has one thing to recommend it: we are still here. It is a Constitution that has survived economic and political upheavals. It survived a Civil War in which hundreds of thousands were killed.

It is not a particularly poetic document. It was written by the ultimate wonk, James Madison. If you want truly inspirational prose, try any of the French constitutions. Of course, they had more practice since they regularly failed. Other countries based their constitutions on aspirational statements of the values that we shared. The Madisonian system spent as much time on what divided us; it not only recognized the danger of factions but created a system to bring such divisions to the surface where they could be addressed.

The danger of other systems was realized when these divisions were left below the surface where they would fester and explode in the streets of Paris. The American

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Constitution allowed for a type of controlled implosion toward the center of the system; these factional interests would be expressed and vented in the legislative branch. The Madisonian system does not hide our divisions; it invites their expression.

The question is whether we have reached a time when the things that divide us will now overcome what unites us. This is not our first age of rage. Indeed, at the start of our Republic, rivaling parties were not just figuratively trying to kill each other; they were actually trying to kill each other through laws like the Alien and Sedition Acts. Thomas Jefferson would refer to the term of his predecessor John Adams as “the reign of the witches.”

Yet, that history is no guarantee that it can survive our current age of rage. The relentless attacks on the constitution from the political, media, and academic elite has turned many into constitutional atheists. Yet, the future of our constitutional system may rest with the rising number of constitutional agnostics -- those citizens who are simply disconnected or disinterested in the defense of our founding principles.

Philosopher John Stuart Mill warned in 1867 that all it takes for evil to prevail is for “good men [to] look on and do nothing.” We are now in an existential struggle to preserve the values that founded the most successful constitutional system in the history of the world. It is our legacy that now can be either boldly defended by a grateful people or lost in the whimper of a disinterested generation.



Jonathan Turley is the Shapiro professor of public interest law at George Washington University and a practicing criminal defense attorney. He is a Fox News contributor.

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