



TDS STRATEGY MEMO:

**MANY AMERICANS ARE IN A CLINICAL STATE OF DENIAL
ABOUT THE SYSTEMATIC GOP ATTACK NOW UNDERWAY
AGAINST THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT**

BY
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MANY AMERICANS ARE IN A CLINICAL STATE OF DENIAL ABOUT THE SYSTEMATIC GOP ATTACK NOW UNDERWAY AGAINST THE AMERICAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

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Every serious democratic strategist is aware of the systematic GOP attack that is now underway against the American system of government. It is being prosecuted at every level – from threats of violence against individual vote counters to new laws that give the GOP control over the entire process.

Third Way has published a vivid, easy to read summary of the threat at the presidential level.¹ As they say:

This isn't Rudy Giuliani and his clown car full of "lawyers" holding a press conference at Four Seasons Landscaping...It's not Sidney Powell threatening to "release the Kraken"...

This time the threat is coming from the core of the Republican Party. It is a systematic, sophisticated, and serious plot to execute a coup. Their plan? To steal the 2024 presidential election – and it is well underway.

Their plot has five distinct parts

- 1. Suppressing the Vote*
- 2. Installing Big Lie Vote Counters*
- 3. Threatening Election Officials*
- 4. Seizing Legislative Control*
- 5. Sabotaging the Electoral College*

The alarm has been sounded in the pages of the New York Times, the Washington Post, the London Economist and Time Magazine and in many other publications. It is impossible for serious Americans who follow the news to pretend that they are unaware of the danger.

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¹https://thirdway.imgix.net/pdfs/override/The-Plot-to-Steal-the-Presidency_2.04.22.pdf

But the vast, widespread outrage that should be occurring is missing. This assault on the American system of government and the principle of democracy should be generating a wide and powerful response from what used to be called “the establishment” – from the leaders of the business community, the military, the political system, the universities and cultural institutions.

After all, after World War II there was a broad consensus that the rise of dictatorship that had occurred in Germany and Italy could never happen in America because the 200 hundred year old American commitment to Democracy and the American system of government was unshakable. High School civics textbooks proudly explained why “It Can’t Happen Here” and after Richard Nixon resigned rather than be impeached by a majority of congress that included even many deeply conservative Republicans this faith in the solidity of America’s political institutions and basic commitment to democracy was reaffirmed.

Today, however, there is remarkably little panic and forceful outrage outside the liberal and Democratic world. The “hollowing out” of democracy is proceeding with little protest.

This cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge or understanding. Ordinary people who only watch the six o’clock news or the vast number mired in conspiratorial media may have no idea what is actually going on but people whose positions give them serious responsibility for the nation’s well-being—the executives of major corporations, highly educated military officers, economists, scientists, diplomats and leaders in global finance and international relations—have no similar excuse. There should be a fierce, pervasive pushback against what is now going on inside the Republican Party. But, for example, many major corporations that made half-hearted, temporary freezes in their corporate political giving after January 6th have instead now quietly returned to “business as usual.”

In this situation simply repeating the same warnings over and over seems inadequate. The opponents of the Republican assault on Democracy need to find a more effective way to break through the current inertia and indifference that large sectors of America now display.

One potentially powerful strategy is to break out of the framework of normal political discussion and insist that a person’s failure to respond to this threat with the appropriate degree of energy and outrage reflects an actual psychological disorder – one that is literally clinical in its dimensions. The reality is that people who convince themselves that there is no massive threat to Democracy today are in a profound state of psychological denial. They read articles in publications that they trust and yet nonetheless convince themselves that somehow “It won’t *really* happen here.”

One useful way to understand this pattern of denial is to compare it with another deeply pathological form of denial – the denial that occurs among mothers whose children are being sexually molested.

The psychological literature contains many clinical reports of cases where this occurs. When told by their children or even when they personally see the abuse occurring, some mothers literally deny the evidence of their own eyes. Often they accuse the child of lying about the abuse or having somehow provoked it rather than face the reality of their husband’s grotesque behavior.

As an article in the Yale Law Review Journal notes:²

Denial is a psychologically incapacitating state that some mothers experience when faced with the possibility that their children are being sexually abused by their partners. Denial can hinder a mother's capacity to acknowledge, or even consciously know, that such abuse is occurring, thereby preventing her from intervening to protect her child or children. Even in the face of clear evidence that her partner is abusing her child, a mother who is in denial may simply stand by and allow the abuse to continue—often for a period of years.

Psychologists who have studied this syndrome have noted two key reasons for this behavior.

1. Facing the truth means causing the destruction of the family and the invalidation of the person's entire adult life. It converts the person's entire conception of their life into an illusion. As one psychiatric study noted:

As someone substantially dependent on the approval and generosity of the father, the mother in the incestuous triangle is confronted with a mind-splitting dilemma. ...Either the child ... or the father is ...lying and unworthy of trust. The mother's whole security and life adjustment and much of her sense of adult self-worth demand a trust in the reliability of her partner. To accept the alternative means annihilation of the family and a large piece of her own identity.

Torn between her husband and her daughter, and terrified of the consequences of disrupting her marriage, the mother may be virtually paralyzed and incapable of taking action alone.

People who are in denial about the current assault on American democracy face a parallel kind of challenge to their entire conception of their social world. They must face the fact that people who they consider their close friends and business associates—people with whom they socialize and work every day—simply do not share their most fundamental values. This was hard enough to face during the Trump administration but the current threat to these people's social world is even greater. They face the frightening prospect of returning to their jobs and neighbors after the 2024 election is stolen and finding their associates acting as if everything is entirely normal.

The understandable reaction is a profound psychological refusal to believe that such a thing could possibly happen. The person simply can't face the ugly prospect of having to live in what they will know is a one-party dictatorship and—to retain their jobs, friends and social circles—find it necessary to smile and pretend that everything is OK.

2. A second major reason why some mothers choose denial instead of facing the truth is that denouncing their spouse will unleash a cascade of horrible consequences – the arrest and jailing of the spouse, a series of investigations and intense interrogations, the need for public testimony in courtrooms and the consequent shame and humiliation of public exposure. The spouse making the accusation also faces the likelihood of bitter recrimination and even violent assault from the family and friends of the husband.

²https://openyls.law.yale.edu/bitstream/handle/20.500.13051/16781/19_12YaleL_PolyRev519_1994_.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

The probable consequences of recognizing the reality of the current assault on democracy are similarly daunting. A person must face the likelihood of social chaos and angry confrontations if the Republican attack is challenged. Extremist vigilantes with AR-15 assault rifles surrounded state capitols in 2019 and 2020 and only held back on January 6th because their leaders explicitly warned them to *“keep their power dry”* for more organized future action. If the 2024 election is indeed stolen, business will be disrupted, public discourse will become poisoned and the nation will subside into two deeply divided hostile tribes.

The powerful desire not to face the fact that this is a very real possibility provides the motivation for intense psychological denial. There is an urgent need to believe that this won't really happen, that somehow or other “everything will somehow turn out all right.”

The fact that many Americans are in a state of extreme psychological denial about the current attack on America's democratic institutions indicates that a critical step in breaking this denial is to directly challenge the people in denial. So long as people are treated as if this denial is somehow normal or “just about politics” they will persist in it. What people who are horrified by what is going on must do is directly challenge the people in denial with the view that their attitude is not in any way normal but is indeed clinically delusional. These people will predictably be offended and react with anger at the person challenging them in this way. But, challenging the illusion that their attitude is “normal” will force them to face the reality that it is not. So long as everyone around them seems equally complacent, they will persist in their delusion. When others directly challenge them they will be forced to face the reality. There is an intense sense of discomfort that occurs when someone you consider a close friend or associate calmly insists that you are suffering from a clinical delusion comparable to that of a mother in denial about the sexual abuse of her child.