

It is an interesting phenomenon that some events occur at just the right time, and the scales fall from our eyes even though we knew the right thing all along. Nevertheless, we have as to be grateful for these incidents that serve as wake-up calls.

This is the case with Robert Kagan's article of September 23, 2021, in *The Washington Post*. Kagan is (or was) a conservative Republican of the "Neocons" variety that gave us the Iraq War in March 2003. He advised conservative Republican officials and presidents and is currently a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a conservative think tank. In 2016, he left the Republican Party because of its nomination of Donald Trump for president.

Now Kagan is forcefully raising the alarm about Trump and is convinced that the former President is on an unstoppable path to destroy American democracy. His provocative article, "Our Constitutional Crisis is Already Here," begins with this attention-grabbing sentence: "The United States is heading into its greatest political and constitutional crisis since the Civil War, with a reasonable chance over the next three to four years of incidents of mass violence, a breakdown of federal authority, and the division of the country into warring red and blue enclaves."

Kagan makes three salient points. The first: barring health issues, Trump will be the Republican presidential nominee in 2024. As proof, he points to his "mammoth," growing, lead in the polls, despite talk of other nominees. Josh Hawley, Missouri Senator who pumped his fist in support of demonstrators during the January 6 assault on the capitol, is one. An attractive, Harvard-educated lawyer, Hawley has been biding his time but is unlikely to challenge Trump for the nomination. Florida governor Ron De Santis might be in the running, but he has been fiercely criticized for his handling of the Covid-19 crisis and Florida has been one of the worst-affected in the United States. Moreover, Trump has shut down talk of his possible nomination.

Kagan points out that Trump's Great Lie about the election being stolen from him has morphed into a smooth, wide-ranging, political campaign. While prominent Republican politicians previously condemned the January 6 attack, most have recanted. House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy, denounced Trump after January 6, then made up with him and now follows his directions. Iowa's Chuck Grassley, the Senate's longest-serving member at 88, one-time critic, accepted Trump's endorsement at his recent Iowa rally. Iowa is a politically sensitive state because it holds the first caucuses that will choose the presidential nominees, and Republicans solidly support Trump. It does no good that Republican politicians have been captured on tape condemning Trump and January 6 because the Trump base just ignores it. Why do Republicans humble themselves before Trump? Because they are afraid of losing their jobs, but not their country. Speak of "trasformismo"!

Furthermore, Kagan highlights how Trump has raised enormous amounts of money by claiming that he was fighting to reverse the "stealing" of the 2020 election. These funds serve as preparation for the mid-terms in 2020 and for his return to the presidency in 2024. In August, the amount raised by different Trump-affiliated committees in the first six months of 2021 has been estimated at \$102 million. Trump can dole out money for primaries and elections to his loyal supporter who pledge fealty to him, sealing his stranglehold on the Republican Party.

Second: Kagan emphasizes the activities being employed by Republicans to suppress the vote in the democratic-leaning counties in states where they control the legislatures. At least nineteen states have passed such legislation in ways that I have already enumerated in my previous *Avanti!* articles. The difference with previous efforts to depress the Democratic vote is that legislators are going after state officials that control the vote-counting machinery, including Republicans. In the last election, upstanding Republican officials resisted pressure to

change the votes or “find” new votes that would switch swing states to Trump’s column. The case of Brad Raffensperger, Georgia’s Republican Secretary of State, is the most clamorous instance. Once these officials are removed, Kagan underscores, Trump-backed voting officials will steer the count to favor Trump. To intimidate officials, legislatures are also instituting penalties for election officials who make honest mistakes or who resist efforts to keep the count honest. A bill in Arizona goes so far as to give the legislature power to “revoke the secretary of state’s issuance or certification of a presidential elector’s certificate of election.” Federal legislation can block such measures that will ensure Trump’s victory in 2024, but a solid wall of Republicans and the threat of desertion by some Democratic conservatives have so far ensured that no such remedy can pass.

Kagan’s third point: even moderate congressional Republicans who voted for impeachment support Trump when it comes to legislation the Party wants to block. These include the Utah Senator and 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney. Republicans remained solidly in opposition when the Democrats proposed legislation to prevent voter suppression at the state level and to raise the debt ceiling. They oppose the \$3.5 trillion package the Administration proposes to bring the middle-class relief from the economic battering it has suffered over the past twenty and more years. Democrats have such a slight majority that they can be stymied by only two Democratic holdouts—Tom Manchin of West Virginia and Krysten Sinema of Arizona. It would alter the entire picture if a few Republican Senators stood with the Administration to supply those votes—but they have not, and there is not much hope that they will.

Kagan calls for Democratic-moderate Republican collaboration, but this sets up another tension. When Biden proposes to compromise with the moderates, the progressive wing threatens to vote against his program. The Democrats are hamstrung by their own left wing.

Kagan hopes that “bipartisanship” can occur but doubts it, commenting that things will get much worse in 2022 and 2024, when an emboldened Trump—avoiding the errors he made in his first term—will appoint loyal hacks to the nation’s highest offices. In short, he thinks that the Republicans have successfully prepared the terrain to change the electoral arithmetic and assure Trump’s election. Some commentators think he is being too pessimistic, as a *Politico* article argued on September 24, 2021. It interpreted Republican actions as proof that they are running scared. Then there is the question of what the House’s January 6 Commission will uncover regarding the insurrection, but the Republicans are acting to discredit the Commission’s findings. The inquiry may end up being as much of a flop as the Mueller investigation.

What is worse is that the Democrats almost seem resigned to losing. Traditionally, the party that wins the presidency loses the midterm elections. Articles in the press have predicted that the Democrats will be out of power for a decade because of Republican machinations. Trump’s bold-faced action in perpetrating the lie that he won, his outright refusal to accept the facts, the tenacity of his base, and his control of the Republican Party has produced a malaise that Kagan highlights. To win, the Democrats owe it to democracy to snap out of the defeatist slump they are in, make limited agreements with Republican moderates and Republicans who have called on their party members to vote for Democrats to save the country, and break the Republican momentum.

Hopefully the Kagan article will encourage Democratic progressives and Republican moderates to collaborate. One hundred years after the March on Rome the United States can't afford to repeat the mistakes liberals made then.

Spencer M. Di Scala