

Praise for *Politics, Principles, and Standing Up to Donald Trump: Moral Courage and the Republican Party*

"As someone who personally experienced the consequences of standing up to Trump during his first impeachment, I find Kristen Monroe's *Politics, Principles, and Standing Up to Donald Trump: Moral Courage and the Republican Party* to be a resonant and necessary exploration. This book is a crucial reminder that upholding democratic values and ethical principles against the tide of authoritarianism transcends party lines. It serves as both a call to action and a tribute to those who have shown true moral courage for the sake of our country."

Alexander Vindman, Director of the Institute for Informed American Leadership, retired US Army lieutenant colonel and former Director for European Affairs for US National Security Council.

"People ask why I stood up to Trump when most Republicans have not. I've seen firsthand how great a threat Trump poses to democracy. How he's coarsened political life, legitimizing a politics of anger and pitting us against one another. The authors do an excellent job of detailing how this happened and why it's essential that Trump never again hold political office."

Anthony Scaramucci, Former Communications Director for Donald Trump

"Brilliantly profiles the moral courage of leading Republicans who stood up to Trump's desecration of basic institutions and processes of American government up through January 6, 2021, and beyond. Americans who believe in preserving our founding principles should read this book and remember Franklin's famous warning that ours is a republic - if we can keep it."

Richard Painter, Chief White House ethics lawyer in the George W. Bush administration 2005-2007

“A terrific contribution to the struggle between freedom and authoritarianism in which we are now engaged. The words of Republican leaders who have the courage to speak out are both chilling and inspiring. Hopefully, this book will help others speak the truth to power and choose a path to a more just future.”

Heather Booth, social change organizer and founder of JANE

“An important, careful exploration of one of the more puzzling issues of our time. A complex book for our challenging times.”

Dianne Pinderhughes, Professor in the Departments of Africana Studies and Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, and Past President of the American and the International Political Science Associations

“A great service, examining how and when public actors exhibit compelling moral courage. Offers hope for our country and lessons for us all.”

Jennifer Hochschild, Henry LaBarre Jayne Professor of Government, Harvard University and Past President of the American Political Science Association

Illuminates the sources of Republican resistance to what some conservative Republicans regard as a uniquely dangerous individual who has moved to the center of American politics.

William A. Galston, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

“A welcome account of conservative Republican leaders who risked their careers by breaking with Trump.”

Milton Lodge, Distinguished University Professor Emeritus, SUNY at Stony Brook, and Past President, Midwest Political Science Association

“For years, Kristen Monroe has been political psychology’s go-to for the analysis of the courage of ordinary people who have helped the innocent victims facing evil. Here, she and her students turn their talents to Republican leaders who have stood up against the authoritarian, anti-democratic bullying of the Trump world.”

Politically conservative themselves, they have had much to lose personally from the risks they have taken. Nothing would seem to be of more importance for our threatened democracy. In the end, evil must be confronted by individuals who are willing to bear great personal costs. This is the most detailed psychological analysis available yet of the moral decisions they have made in the midst of the most urgent political crisis of our day, and its ripples throughout the globe."

David Sears, Professor of Psychology and Political Science and Director of the Institute for Social Science Research, UCLA, and Past President of the ISPP

Politics, Principle and Standing Up to Donald Trump

Moral Courage in the Republican Party

By

Kristen Renwick Monroe

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Dedication

To my young co-authors, who inspire me with their enthusiasm and idealism, and provide hope for a future that is bright and kinder.

To their parents who, like mine, rarely even mention the many little sacrifices, from the constant chauffeuring and paying of bills to their unconditional love and unwavering belief in our ability to succeed and find happiness.

To the woman who told me, "I'm a lifelong Republican, but he lost me at 'Grab 'em by the pussy.'" And to all my Republican friends, good people who deserve better.

“Devoted Party members who break with their president over principle, one may disagree with these people’s underlying values but nevertheless recognize their courage.”

George T. Conway III, *Unfit: The Psychology of Donald Trump*, 2020.

“Somebody needs to stand up and say, ‘This is not our party; this is not normal.’”

Senator Jeff Flake, 2016

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Preface

Moral Courage, Complicity and the Resilience Of Democracy

“Once you understand what is at stake, and what is ahead, and what the consequences of cowardice are, moral courage should be easy. It should be the simplest decision you ever make.”

Rick Wilson, Lincoln Project, 7/22/22

This book is not intended to bash Donald Trump, although it ends by being extremely critical of both Trump and his policies. It is a scholarly attempt to analyze the Republican politicians who have stood up to Trump and to understand what drove their moral courage. We thus considered Senators John McCain, Mitt Romney, and Jeff Flake plus Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger from the House of Representatives. Anthony Scaramucci and Miles Taylor were former Trump appointees and Rick Wilson, founder of the Lincoln Project, is a top Republican politico. All of them are conservative Republicans who risked censure and physical threats because they broke with Trump. Why? What triggered their actions, and could examining them tell us something important about moral courage in politics?

Our analysis revealed four noteworthy findings. (1) Policy concerns did not trigger the decision to break with Trump. These people were dedicated Republican conservatives; most voted with Trump over 90% of the time. They supported the majority of policies Trump advocated and pursued. Political life is complicated, of course, and there were some policy differences but on the whole, policy disagreements were not the cause of their disaffection with Trump. Instead, (2) they broke with Trump because they feared he was ignoring, disrespecting and thus hurting the Republican conservative agenda in which they believed and around which they had organized their lives. They felt that Trump would limit the Republican Party’s ability to govern according to conservative principles in the future. Worse, (3) they worried that Trump’s ignorance of and disregard for basic

democratic principles and procedures would do irreparable damage to the country's underlying democratic institutions, culture, and processes. They were shocked, disturbed, and ultimately offended that Trump would expect elected officials to disregard their oaths of office and proper democratic procedures in pursuit of Trump's personal agenda. Finally, (4) they were alarmed at what felt like Trump's coarsening of political life. Comments like "grab them by the pussy" and policies that separated immigrant children from their parents – even putting them into cages -- led to a powerful, visceral revulsion; these were not actions reflective of who Americans are. If fidelity to individual freedom and democracy is the code of our political culture, then concern for human decency and compassion for our fellow human beings is the code of our humanity. These Republicans feared Trump would damage both. To remain silent would betray these core values. Such complicity warred with their underlying ethical standards, the moral values so deeply held that they constituted who they were. If they wanted to live with themselves, they felt they had to speak out.

As the rest of this book will reveal, what can only be called moral courage on the part of these speakers now poses a challenge for the rest of us. Are they right? Policy agenda aside, does Trump threaten American democracy? Will his re-election change who we are as a people, irreparably damaging our civic culture as well as our democratic institutions and procedures?

The importance of these questions cannot be overstated. I am writing this book because I, like many Americans, especially academics who inhabit rarified worlds, initially underestimated Trump. I found him distasteful, crude, slightly ridiculous, a buffoon. Someone totally unqualified to be president by virtue of experience, character, or temperament. I failed to grasp how a wealthy, privileged real estate mogul and casino owner could recognize and establish a bond with a large segment of American society who felt lost, left behind, ignored by the political establishment. I missed the extent to which the distrust of elites – of authority in general – created a paranoia that enabled a clever politician – a con man extraordinaire -- to exploit public resentment and sell himself as the savior who would bring retribution and revenge on the establishment that had discounted and

neglected them. I missed the degree to which the normal laws of political physics did not apply to the Trump ecosystem. I did not take seriously the idea that this man would be elected to the highest office in the land, thus becoming the most powerful individual in the world. I simply didn't get it. I was stupid and arrogant. And I was wrong.

I was heartsick the night of his election and, indeed, throughout much of his presidency when virtually every political cause I cared about came under attack. I breathed a sigh of relief when Joe Biden was elected in 2020, believing the country was back on track. I knew I would not necessarily agree with every policy decision Biden would take but at least a grownup was in charge, someone who knew how to govern and who cared about the welfare of the country, not just his own financial and political future. As the 2024 election approaches and the polls show Trump's political resilience, however, I find myself increasingly alarmed. Like the people in this book, I listened with amazement as Trump effectively called for terminating the *Constitution*,¹ vowed to weaponize the prosecutorial powers of the Justice Department, using it as a tool for revenge,² continued to lie about the American electoral system, and even boasted that he would become a dictator.³ Having studied comparative politics and written extensively on the powerful confluence of psychology, politics, and ethics during World War II, I was acutely aware that democracies can and do descend into authoritarian rule, and I find myself increasingly concerned about the future of American democracy.⁴ I do not find comparisons with Adolf Hitler to be apt; such hyperbole antagonizes and hampers further intelligent discussion. But it does trouble me that Trump resorts to the rhetoric of Hitler in discussing how he would deal with immigrants, communists, Marxists, and the radical left. I am concerned that Trump mimics Hitler in *Mein Kampf*: laying out a platform of radical change in outrageous language in a manner cleverly designed to normalize a new, more extreme, and uglier political reality. My work on politics and moral choice during the Holocaust made me familiar with this phenomenon. It also alerted me to the tremendous power of bystanders, enablers, and collaborators when democracy is under threat. I had studied and interviewed too many people who warned firsthand of the lure of autocratic control, the crippling effect of threats and fear of retribution, of political expediency, and the powerful, raw drive for survival, among both

ordinary citizens fearful of antagonizing neighbors and friends and of public officials who want to keep their jobs and their political influence. It has all happened before. As I listen to Trump describe his plans for a second term, I am disturbed and fearful about the future of American democracy and its independent political institutions.

I have few illusions that an academic book -- and one that focuses on ethics and morality at that -- will impact a national election. But it is incumbent on me, as an educator hoping to serve as a positive role model for students -- thirteen of whom worked diligently with me on this book -- to do what I can to alert people to both the danger and difficulties facing the nation and the liberating experience of standing up and speaking truth to power.⁵ The analysis of those Republicans, those too few Republican political leaders who risked everything -- their careers, their position, their physical safety, and that of their family members -- is both a caution and an inspiration to us all. There is always something you can do, and if we do not, if we choose to sit silently, saying nothing, for whatever reason, we become complicit. I do not want my students to take that lesson from me.

In an age of cynicism, when political courage is doubted and written off as long-term self-interest, not genuine, and extremes on both the political left and the political right assert that truth is a fiction, a shifting miasma that self-serves and reflects self-interest, not objective reality, it is imperative that we remember that sometimes people *do* take the high road. Sometimes people *do* care about more than themselves, their own political gain, their own self-interest. People may have mixed motives. They may be fallible, not at all perfect, larger-than-life heroes. But even the least of us can rise above our own self-interest to think about the good of others and the good of the country. As we shall see in the following pages and the analysis of the words spoken by politicians who claim they were trying to act out of genuine concern and care for their country and its commanding yet still vulnerable political institutions, it is sometimes possible to step back and do the right thing. We hope our analysis of the political moral courage of a handful of these people will encourage others to speak out. The resilience of liberal democracies lies in the collective moral courage of all its citizens.

Kristen Renwick Monroe, April 2024

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- ¹ CNN, "Trump calls for Termination of the Constitution," uploaded by CNN, Dec. 3 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc0YKKGbuy4.
- ² "Trump signals he's out for revenge in second term." Brett Samuels. *The Hill*. 11/16/23 6:00 AM ET.
- ³ Trump's initial comment was at the New York Young Republicans Club. December 11, 2023. "Donald Trump repeats comment he would be a dictator 'for one day' if reelected in 2024." Marina Pitofsky. *USA TODAY*. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2023/12/11/donald-trump-dictator-one-day-reelected/71880010007/>

"Former President Donald Trump on Saturday repeated comments that he would be a dictator for "one day" if he's elected to a second term in the White House.

Trump during a keynote speech to the New York Young Republican Club mentioned New York Times correspondent Peter Baker, saying the journalist "said that I want to be a dictator."

"I didn't say that. I said I want to be a dictator for one day. You know why I wanted to be a dictator? Because I want a wall, and I want to drill, drill, drill," Trump said during the club's annual gala, according to multiple reports.

The former president appeared to reference a weekend article from Baker, which came after Trump mocked questions about authoritarianism last week. Trump during an event with Fox News host Sean Hannity told a crowd

that he would be a dictator only on "day one," and then he's going to close the border and get to drilling.

"After that, I'm not a dictator, OK?" Trump added.

The former president drew further comparisons to 20th-century dictators like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini last month after calling some of his political opponents "vermin." His critics have also pointed to his calls for "retribution" against some of his political rivals.

President Joe Biden, during a fundraiser last week, jabbed Trump over his apparent joke, saying "Thank God, only one day" at a fundraiser in Los Angeles."

- ⁴ See Monroe 1996, 2004 and 2012 for an analysis of the Holocaust that touches on how democracies disintegrate from within. This question is discussed in more detail in the conclusion, where we draw on work by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018).
- ⁵ Because I am the one writing the final analysis of what is joint work, I have carefully tried to use the first pronoun – speaking only for myself, in other words – when I give an interpretation that may cross the line into opinion. I do not want my students to feel they have to share my views, and I am grateful for their trust in allowing me to write up the results of our empirical findings.

Introduction

Moral Courage and the Republicans: The Challenge

From the inception of his 2016 campaign, it was clear that Trump was different. Initially, the Republican establishment fought him.

“Donald Trump is not going to be the nominee of the Republican Party. If he is, that’s the end of the Republican Party.” Lindsay Graham, CNN, March 30, 2016.

“He’s a race-baiting, xenophobic, religious bigot.... You know how you make America great again? Tell Donald Trump to go to hell!” Lindsay Graham, CNN, December 8, 2015.

“Trumpism: a toxic mix of demagoguery, mean-spiritedness and nonsense that will lead the Republican Party to perdition if pursued....Let no one be mistaken: Donald Trump’s candidacy is a cancer on conservatism, and it must be clearly diagnosed, excised and discarded.” Rick Perry, Address at the Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C. July 22, 2015.

“He’s not going to win the nomination because he’s not a serious candidate. He’s a bully.” Jeb Bush, CNN, December 18, 2015.

“Mr. Trump is a con man, a fake....Donald Trump is a phony, a fraud. His promises are as worthless as a degree from Trump University. He’s playing the members of the American public for suckers. He gets a free ride to the White House and all we get is a lousy hat...He has neither the temperament nor the judgment to be president. And his personal qualities would mean that America would cease to be a shining city on the hill.” Mitt Romney, The Hinckley Institute, March 3, 2016.

As Trump gained in the polls, won the Republican nomination and then – to the surprise of many -- won an Electoral College victory over Hilary Clinton, Republicans shifted.¹ Those who had once denounced Trump climbed onto his bandwagon, showing “the remarkable flexibility wielded by one whose spine is as invented as one’s convictions.”² Lindsey Graham

became one of Trump's strongest supporters, explaining his shift as "I went from, 'O.K., he's president' to 'How can I get to be in his orbit?' ... "to 'How can I have a say in what's going to happen today, tomorrow and next week?" thus casting his change of heart as one based on principle and a desire to be where the action is.³ Unlike Graham, Rick Perry and Jeb Bush largely disappeared from the political view. Mitt Romney first either made his peace with Trump or put aside his scruples long enough to meet with Trump on the off-chance he would be offered the top job at State; Romney's eventual, ineffectual and modest opposition to Trump would cost him politically, and contributed to his announcing he would not seek re-election in 2026, fearing a primary challenge from the Trump right.

Republican support ebbed and flowed once Trump took office, as the president seemed to move from one egregious act to another. The Muslim ban of January 2021. The oddly sophomoric friendship/hero worship of brutal dictators and authoritarian rulers, from Russia's Vladimir Putin and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Xi Jinping of China or Korea's Kim Jong Un. The family separation policy regarding immigrants left shocked Americans viewing crying children placed in cages and separated from their parents. Then came the disastrous ignoring, minimizing, and poor handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the 2020 election loomed, Trump seemed suddenly fallible, though Trump was probably defeated not by policy differences so much as by COVID-19 and by Americans yearning for less drama and a sense of decency. Competence and civility were embodied by Joe Biden and crystallized by Lincoln Project ads depicting the 2020 race as one between honesty and the defense of democracy versus authoritarian misrule by a Trump intent on revenge.

Trump nurtured claims of a stolen election even before the 2020 election. The consequences of these claims culminated on January 6th, 2021, when the world watched Trump's supporters storm the Capitol Building, attempting to overturn the election many felt had been stolen from them. The mob menaced legislators and threatened to kill Trump's loyal vice president, Mike Pence. Pence was only fulfilling his Constitutional duty in certifying Joe Biden as President but this act was cast by Trump as a betrayal. Again, key Republican leaders denounced Trump. Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell initially held Trump responsible

for encouraging the attack on the Capitol by his supporters, indicating he was not sure how he would vote regarding impeachment for this. Speaking on the Senate floor, McConnell said, “The mob was fed lies. They were provoked by the president and other powerful people.”⁴ In private, McConnell went further. “The Democrats are going to take care of the son of a bitch for us,” McConnell said, referring to the second Trump impeachment shortly after the insurrection.⁵ Remarkably, McConnell initially described Trump’s role in the events of January 6th as clearly impeachable. “If this isn’t impeachable, I don’t know what is.”⁶ Kevin McCarthy, the short-lived Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, also began by condemning Trump for his role in the uprising. According to an audio recording, McCarthy even advocated pushing Trump to resign immediately, saying, “I’ve had it with this guy.”⁷ Nevertheless, a surprising number of top Republicans, including both McConnell and McCarthy, again backtracked. They evinced no shame or embarrassment in contradicting what they had begun by denouncing as an act of sedition and ended by falling in lockstep again with their now-former president.

Why? What in the world is going on?

Much has been made of the great physical courage on January 6th when the Capital police risked their lives to protect Congress as it sat in session to certify the results of the 2020 election. Such physical courage is commendable and rare. However, moral courage – the willingness to stand up and fight for what you believe to be right, even when you know it will cost you – is even rarer. The puzzle here thus becomes two-fold. Why are so many in the Republican Party abdicating their duty and moral responsibility, continuing to support Trump despite what they themselves have privately called clear legal and moral violations on his part, violations especially obvious after January 6th? How can we explain this Republican complicity? True believers in the MAGA cult seem far from the norm. For every Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, we have other Republican members of Congress – Kevin McCarthy, Lindsay Graham, and Mitch McConnell – who have publicly rebuked Trump only to later back down and support Trump and his version of the truth. Whatever motivates these powerful political leaders – fear, craven self-interest,

bribery, extortion, lack of moral fiber –is interesting and important and it forms the backdrop for our analysis.

What concerns us directly here, however, is a closely related question: What drove the few politicians who dared defy their party and take a moral stand? Why did these people, who share the same Republican principles and voted with Trump over 90% of the time, nonetheless refuse to go along with Trump and his obvious lies? How can we explain why Flake, McCain, Romney, Kinzinger and Cheney followed their consciences while McCarthy, McConnell, Graham, and so many other Republicans did not? This is the topic of this book.

Our first concern is to construct a substantive political and ethical analysis of the thoughts and drives that led these politicians to break with their party and its president. We do this by analyzing the statements they made explaining why they took this stand. We set this in a framework (Monroe 2023) designed to give specificity to the concept of moral courage in everyday life. We then ask how moral courage in the political world differs – if it does – from moral courage in the everyday world. A second, more methodological issue deserves mentioning. How do we best get into the heads of the people we are analyzing? As political psychologists, this is our main challenge. There are a variety of ways to do this, two of which we pursued. First, listen and read carefully all relevant sources that might give insight into what drove their actions. This meant consulting public speeches, interviews with journalists and related media outlets such as Facebook/Meta or Twitter/X, etc., legal testimony, Congressional hearings, biographies/autobiographies, private letters, etc. This material is extremely useful in revealing the mindset of the people being analyzed. What explanations did they give for why they went against their party and President Trump? What was the language they used to explain and justify their acts? Was it policy differences or something deeper? Second, ask people about their motives directly via interviews, when possible to obtain. “Why did you stand up to Trump? What motivated you to do this?” Such interviews provide a rare opportunity to gain insight into the political mindset by asking people straight up the questions that concern us. Because of the sensitive political nature of standing up to Trump – including the once close personal ties and potential legal liabilities of

speaking on the record about events that might end up in court – it was difficult to obtain personal interviews with many of the people we contacted. Often, people simply ignored our requests. Occasionally, we had extended negotiations that fell through in the end. A few people wrote back saying they could not discuss the issues involved because they were concerned for their safety and that of their families.⁸ Others expressed political or legal concerns. (We received gracious notes from Mark Meadows and Mike Pence’s office to this effect.) A few people, however, *were* willing to talk on the record. Their transcripts have been edited but only for clarity and to avoid extraneous material. We showed the interviews to the people involved and asked them to correct anything in the transcript that was incorrect or that later troubled them. (Perhaps it was too private; perhaps over-stated, etc.) In both cases – Anthony Scaramucci and Rick Wilson – there was no request to delete anything. During his interview, Rick Wilson declined to speak about the effect of his actions on his marriage. But neither he nor Scaramucci asked us to correct, add or delete anything from their transcripts. We are deeply grateful to Wilson and Scaramucci for their candor and their time.

We devote one chapter to each of the breakaway Republicans analyzed here. Although most of the renegade Republicans need no introduction we do begin each chapter with a brief biographical description of the speaker and their actions we judged as morally courageous. We then analyze the data using our typology developed to understand universal moral courage, that is, the general phenomenon, not necessarily acts set in a political context. One of our interests was in determining whether everyday moral courage differs significantly from its political expression and, if so, to determine in what ways it differs.

Our substantive analysis thus begins with four different types of renegade Republicans: (1) Senators John McCain, Mitt Romney, and Jeff Flake; (2) Congressional representatives Adam Kinzinger and Liz Cheney; (3) committed, stalwart Republican leaders like Rick Wilson of the Lincoln Project; and (4) dedicated White House officeholders like Miles Taylor and Anthony Scaramucci. The credentials of these people as die-hard Republicans are impeccable, yet each eventually began speaking out; most even now work actively to combat the man they believed betrayed the

Republican principles around which they had organized their political lives. We analyze a wide range of documents, trying to determine what listening to their stories teaches us about what can be viewed as a battle for the conscience of the Republican Party. A narrative interpretive analysis of in-depth interviews, public speeches, journals, documents, and other data lends insight into what thoughts were percolating inside them that led these politicians to dare go against their party and take a stand.

Part 1 of the book provides context through a brief history of the Republican Party's policy positions. It then describes how we did our research to get at the relevant questions in the literature. This section contains our research design and data description. Part 2 presents a brief bio for each person in our sample and then analyzes the moral courage of each using detailed descriptions of what we judged were triggers for the acts by John McCain, Jeff Flake, Mitt Romney, Liz Cheney, and Adam Kinzinger. This section relies only on data sources gathered in the public domain. It contains no personal interviews conducted by us. Part 3 does contain analysis of such in-depth interviews, conducted with Anthony Scaramucci and Rick Wilson. We also analyze their public statements and biographies/ autobiographies. We analyze the Wilson interview and then present the interview itself, following the format for the rest of our speakers. For Scaramucci, however, we followed a different tack, thinking it would be fun to challenge the reader to do their own analysis first. We thus first present the interview in verbatim form, suggesting readers assess the interview themselves, before reading the part of the chapter in which we present *our* analysis of Scaramucci's actions. Part 4 analyzes the anonymous Op-Ed in the New York Times, later revealed to have been written by a Trump appointee named Miles Taylor. Part 5 contains Chapter 10, which evaluates the findings from the full data set to suggest what triggers moral courage in political life and how that differs, if it does, from more general forms of moral courage as traditionally conceptualized. The conclusion addresses the warning, thrown down like a moral challenge, to us by the Republicans who stood up to Trump: Does Donald Trump pose a threat to American democracy?

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Endnotes

¹ Clinton won the popular vote with 65,858,514 votes to Trump's 62,984,828. Trump won the Electoral College with 304 votes versus Clinton's 222.

² Thakker 2023. The quote refers to Graham but easily fits the many other Republicans who have flip-flopped on Trump, first condemning him, then kissing the ring.

³ Leibovich *et al* 2019.

⁴ Youtube, January 19, 2021.

⁵ "This Will Not Pass." Alex Burns and Jonathan Martin. I've Had It With This Guy': G.O.P. Leaders Privately Blasted Trump After Jan. 6," *New York Times*, April 21, 2022.

⁶ Burns and Martin, CNN Audio Transcripts, April 22, 2022.

⁷ Burns and Warren, CNN Audio Transcripts, April 22, 2022.

⁸ One person spends \$5000 a month for extra security because of MAGA threats and harassment. Another has the police at his house at least twice a week due to threats so these concerns are real.

PART 1

Divisions within the Republican Party

“ There is no courage to fight Trump in the Republican Party. It’s a bunch of cowards and weak people and they’ll fall in line behind Donald Trump.”

Stuart Stevens, Lincoln Project Senior Adviser,
November 15, 2022

“If I have been critical, it is because I believe it is my obligation to do so. And as a matter and duty of conscience, the notion that one should stay silent — and as the norms and values that keep America strong are undermined and as the alliances and agreements that ensure the stability of the entire world are routinely threatened by the level of thought that goes into 140 characters — the notion that we should say or do nothing in the face of such mercurial behavior is ahistoric and, I believe, profoundly misguided.”

Senator Jeff Flake, Speech announcing his retirement from the Senate,
October 24, 2017

Chapter 1¹

What Gives With the Republicans?

History and Research Design

What is going on with the Republican Party? Are we witnessing just another nasty run-of-the-mill clash over policy, the kind that plagues political parties all the time? Is Trump an aberration, someone unique who has upended traditional Republican Party politics? Do the current battles reflect a redefining of what it means to be a Republican, a struggle for the heart and soul of the Grand Old Party, as some have suggested? Is Trump reshaping Republican *conservatism*, or is he abandoning ideological principles altogether, making loyalty to Trump the defining characteristic of being a Republican? Or is something even deeper at work here? Does the MAGA movement signal a threat to democracy, a national shift toward populism with an authoritarian bent? Any consideration of moral courage within the Republican Party must begin by addressing these questions in order to provide a historical context within which we can then construct a thoughtful if skeptical, objective, analysis of Republicans who challenge Donald Trump.

As we approach the 2024 presidential election, Republicans divide into three fluid groups.² (1) The flip-flopers constitute much of the Republican establishment – people like Mitch McConnell and Lindsey Graham – who initially criticized Trump, then embraced him, and since then have again vacillated, both publicly and privately, fluctuating between criticism and expressions of almost adulatory support for Trump. (2) The MAGA crowd includes Congress members like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Jim Jordan plus the hardcore Trump supporters. The MAGA people show consistent and genuine enthusiasm for Donald Trump and either share or soon adopt his worldview; in particular, they consider the January 6th storming of the

U.S. Capitol a legitimate protest over a stolen election. (3) Finally, we have a few Republicans who have solid conservative ideological and policy credentials and a history of dedicated Republican political activity – people like Liz Cheney and Mitt Romney – yet who broke with Trump and are now both criticizing and working actively against Trump’s re-election. Trump refers to these people as traitors; they think of themselves as the ones who remain loyal to Republican conservative principles. Understanding them is the main concern of this book.

The first question thus is what is going on. Part 1 addresses this, asking if we are witnessing simple policy differences or something deeper that cuts into more basic ethical concerns. This question necessarily involves us in determining the extent to which Trump is an aberration, an anomaly, or the manifestation of deeper trends within both America and the Republican Party. Our initial straightforward political assessment of Trump’s policy positions suggests Trump (1) reflects traditional Republican policies on critical economic issues, such as tax cuts, and (2) has adopted – albeit probably more out of political opportunism and expediency than genuine conviction -- right-wing Republican positions on social/cultural issues, such as gay marriage and abortion. But this analysis also suggests (3) Trump’s appeal is not based solely on policy. His attraction – and thus what triggers opposition to Trump -- is something far deeper than simple policy differences. Trump has broadened the parameters of America’s political discourse, building on anger at being forgotten and overlooked and legitimating and celebrating a political and civil society that rejects both the democratic *and* the ethical norms that traditionally constrain politics in this country. Thus, to understand Trump and why he has upended Republican Party politics – as he has politics more generally in this country -- we must move beyond the policy dimension to examine the ethical foundations of the Trumpian political world. Our analysis of the Trumpian opposition, set in the context of ethics, will help reveal what drives this opposition and why that is of great importance to the American polity. This we do in Part 1 of this chapter.

Part 2 first asks if Trump’s Republican challengers represent true moral courage or just a veiled form of political expediency. This section provides the philosophical and ethical context for our analysis, suggesting why we

find it useful to examine the political manifestation of moral courage in the theoretical context of what our recent work (Monroe 2023) revealed about moral courage. We will argue that this framework offers analytical advantages over more traditional explanations stressing pure politics. The framework we employ here effectively enters ethical considerations directly into the political equation, thus allowing for genuine concerns for principle. We hope our framework can better detect the subtle political psychology of moral courage and that this insight might then reveal the powerful and critical link between cynical political calculus and political identity.

Finally, Part 3 describes our data and the analytical method employed as we construct a narrative interpretive analysis that parses the moral courage among those few Republicans who stood up to Trump. Our conclusion grapples with the larger question of the Trumpian challenge to democratic norms, values, and institutions.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Republican Values and American conservatism since Nixon

It is not unusual for fights to occur among political parties over policy issues. Nor are battles over conscience and principle new to politics. Indeed, the Republican Party historically emphasized its birth in the fight over slavery, specifically the extension of slavery into new territories after the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed in 1854. Far from being only dedicated abolitionists, however, the early Republicans were a somewhat motley crew composed of factory workers, professionals, businessmen, northern Protestants, and well-off farmers, as well as the few who wanted to free the slaves or – as was more often the case, given the historical period -- people who merely wanted to give slaves better living conditions. From its very inception, Republican core values were laissez-faire economics, specifically free trade, free markets, decreased governmental spending, privatizing social welfare programs in favor of private sector nonprofits, and above all, a heavy dollop of personal responsibility. The post-World War I period saw a Republican Party that turned inward, moving away from involvement in foreign affairs to a more isolationistic and nativist-orientated policy.

Eisenhower moved the Republicans back to their initial orientation, however, and some of what may be going on now is an uncertain shift, looking for a new position between these two poles. This was the situation and the values generally held by Republicans when Donald Trump entered the political scene as a Republican circa 2009;³ by then, of course, what the 19th century considered progressive political values were deemed conservative by the early 21st century.

Overall, 21st-century Republicans tend to espouse conservative values and favor smaller and simpler governments than do Democrats, who seem less fearful of strong government, viewing it as a tool for social, economic and political change.⁴ Traditional Republicans remain fiscally conservative. This means they support lower taxes, smaller government, free trade, free market capitalism, and the deregulation of corporations. Fans of small government, Republicans dislike the regulation of corporations and favor restrictions on labor unions. Their positions are socially conservative as well, with the advocacy of gun rights and heavy support for the Second Amendment, the death penalty, and what are often referred to as *traditional values* but which, in practice, is code for values with a distinctly Christian tone to them. This includes restricting abortion and policies reflecting what are dubbed *traditional family values*. Again, in practice, this means defining marriage as between one man and one woman and diminished support for gay rights, transgender people, etc. Republicans tend to support school choice and school prayer and oppose affirmative action, pornography, and drug legalization. In foreign policy, traditional Republicans usually advocate military spending and a strong national defense. They tend to favor restricting immigration, especially illegal immigration, which they associate with increased crime and drug legalization. These are general themes, of course, and one always finds Republicans who differ with the party on any one of these policies, just as one finds alterations in policy positions among the majority of Republicans.

An increasingly polarized world: A personal view

Much of the current ugliness of politics is attributed to increasing polarization, and the importance of this polarization is the subject of much recent political discussion (Sunstein 2017). I find this change evident even

in its shift in my own lifetime, and perhaps a personal picture is helpful here.

The area of homes where I was raised, just outside St. Louis, in downstate Illinois and mid-century middle America, held a cluster of houses built around a lake. The neighborhood had several common events each year, including a Pine Lake picnic each summer. In the 1950s pre-air-conditioning era, the children all swam in the lake each afternoon. They were supervised by mothers who chatted on the little beach, seated on benches under a huge elm tree. The neighborhood was not especially affluent, but it definitely was socio-demographically mixed. It included a doctor who stopped by on his way home when a child he had delivered years before became ill. Often, he would have a meal and chat with the family after seeing the sick child. My father and the other lawyer in the neighborhood routinely took care of minor legal issues for neighbors, free of cost; indeed, when my mother died in 2015, the lawyer who refused any money for probating her estate was the now-grown son of the realtor who had lived at the other end of the lake. The milkman and his five daughters lived next door, and the garage mechanic's house was catty-corner from us, adjacent to the home of the landscape architect and two doors down from the sociologist at the nearby university, the linotype man at the local newspaper, and the steelworker at the end of the lane.

The next-door neighbors were Roman Catholics whose children went to Catholic School; the crabby elderly couple with whom I watched bowling on TV on Saturdays as a bored 11-year-old were Christian Scientists. They lived next door to a German couple of unknown faith and a Mormon couple with their four children. My aunt and uncle were Methodists who let me sit in church with them, although my Uncle Tom invariably fell asleep in the highly visible choir loft, often snoring loudly enough to be heard as well as seen. To my embarrassment as a pre-teen seeking conformity, my parents did not attend church. Daddy considered himself an existential humanist and Mother a transcendentalist Taoist. But Mother dutifully took her extraverted daughter to enjoy socializing at Sunday School before she then dropped off the Christian Scientist who lived two doors down. She then proceeded to pick up freshly made pastry at the local

bakery, Sunday mornings being held sacred by my parents for newspapers, scrambled eggs, and family.

We knew the doctor had money, as did the areligious neighbor who owned an extremely expensive children's clothing store. The landscape architect drove a flashy car, which he traded in each year for a new one, something that annoyed my father, whom my Mother had difficulty convincing to spend the extra money for even a radio in a car. Both the landscape architect and the tax lawyer had homes with private swimming pools, despite living on the lake. When the local banker moved into a new house directly on the lake, he built a dock that was large enough for his helicopter to land on. Some neighbors were impressed with that, feeling it gave the neighborhood a cachet and the social class it otherwise lacked. Nevertheless, that all ended the night the banker's wife forgot to turn on the lights and he buzzed my Aunt Alice's yard near her bedroom window for 15 minutes. With the support of the neighbors, my father and the tax lawyer informed the banker it violated Pine Lake bylaws to have an airplane docked on what was essentially a large pond, not much of a lake.

The world I saw as a child in the 1950s thus included cross-cutting cleavages of neighborhoods, schools, churches, clubs, and youth groups with participants from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious classes. Prejudice clearly existed, though, and even as a young girl, I was aware of this. I remember my father regularly marrying people in our living room, in front of the grand piano overlooking the lake, once he became a judge. Mostly, it was couples from Missouri who came to Pine Lake to be married, Missouri being one of sixteen states whose miscegenation laws forbid marriage between a Caucasian and an Asian or a Black person until the 1967 Supreme Court decision, *Loving v. Virginia* decreed all state anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. During my childhood, there were only a handful of Black families in town, all clustered in one geographic area: a poor one. (After my parents died and I inherited their home, I discovered clause 1 in the Pine Lake bylaws forbade selling to Blacks, so racism was alive and well then, as now.) Jews were more accepted since they were professors and doctors, but religious tolerance was limited. My father discovered this first-hand, in an especially petty occurrence that would have caused my father to be angry had Daddy cared

about things like social acceptance. During a brief period of church attendance, precipitated by his love of music, Daddy volunteered to serve as the unpaid choir director in the local Methodist church. He was fired after a few months, however, because he included too much *Lutheran* music. "A little Bach goes a long way," he was told.

I intend this personal jaunt down 1950s memory lane to provide a human dimension to the increasing polarization in our country and to make the following point: Increasing political polarization is a result of the decline in what are cross-cutting cleavages in American society. The differences that characterized my childhood on Pine Lake no longer exist for most of a country that has become more socioeconomically uniform, and their disappearance has contributed to the country's political polarization. Having said that, I should note that the idea that the past was a gentler, quieter political time is a myth exploited by populist demagogues throughout history (Monroe 2022). Certainly, Donald Trump continues to exploit it big time. He began by wooing supporters who longed for a simpler time and were confused by a cacophony of "strange alien" visitors and hyphenated ethnic groups they believed received special and unfair preferential treatment from the Democrats. These people were told that he -- Trump -- would make America great again, a phrase ironically used by other politicians, including Hillary Clinton's husband in the 1990s, and by the Republican Ronald Reagan, who promised to restore America to that shining city on the hill. What is too often overlooked, especially by liberal academics like me, is Trump's ability to have picked up what too many others missed: the deep sense of alienation and anger at being forgotten that many in America felt, people who flocked to both Trump and to Bernie Sanders in 2016.

Trump and Republican conservatism since Nixon

The GOP's conservative branch evolved throughout the 20th century. It began much earlier than my lifetime, with the party an inward-looking one after World War I, when isolationism and anti-immigration were strong forces within the Republican Party, as among the country as a whole. This went into abeyance with Eisenhower's presidency, when the GOP resembled its original appearance and became the one we knew until