

Systematic Analysis of Threats to the American Democratic Republic in 2025: The Grid

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The grid below represents part of a larger project, a systematic analysis of deficiencies currently observed in the political system that we will label as the *American Democratic Republic*. That is, we are attempting to identify the gaps between the operation of a stable and productive American government and its current functioning. Analyses such as this are often phrased as examinations of “threats to democracy.” However, the US is not technically a *democracy* according to its founders; it is a *republic* based on *representative democracy* principles.

The authors of the *Federalist Papers* and the consensus of delegates at the Constitutional Convention favored the *republican* form of government informed by the principles of *representative* democracy. Therefore, we use the label *American Democratic Republic* to refer to a republic like the United States of America that strives for economic growth that is widely distributed, encourages participation, and reflects the will of the majority while protecting basic individual rights of property, religion, speech, assembly, voting, citizenship, and due process.

One of the most commonly applied measuring sticks for the health of democratic governments is the set of indices developed by the Varieties of Democracy [V-Dem] Institute based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. In this paper we use some of the V-Dem “indices of democracy” as convenient categories for assessing success on various dimensions of government, recognizing that these indices are neither necessary nor sufficient for measuring how well-functioning a government is. The indices—as we have adapted them to our purposes—are merely a convenient way of organizing our analysis.

For each category, or “facet,” we divide the threats into two types: threats of a **legal** nature, derived from the US constitution, US laws, and Supreme Court decisions; and threats of a **societal** nature, derived from socio-economic forces and practices of political and other types of interest groups. Overall, the grid is intended to show the threats that are apparent in June 2025; some of those threats are the legacy of decisions and acts made decades or centuries ago, including in the original US Constitution. Such historical factors still affect us today.

[The factors listed briefly in the Grid below are discussed at greater length in a Narrative document that is also part of this project.]

Threats to the American Democratic Republic

Arranged in a Grid Format

Facet of the American democratic republic that is affected	a) Legal threats: “baked into” the Constitution and subsequent laws and court cases	b) Societal threats: Socio-economic factors, practices of political and other types of interest groups
1 Electoral facet -Participation (voting and civic engagement) -Free & fair elections (“fair” means even-handed, not necessarily representative)	1 The Constitution, in Article I, Section 4, stipulates that national elections be controlled by the states; hence, there is no national election agency to oversee elections, nor is Election Day a national holiday. Further, the Supreme Court, in the <i>Bush v. Gore</i> and <i>Shelby County</i> decisions, affirmed that voting is not an absolute right, thus can be abridged by the states. Some states even allow partisan control of electoral administration, a feature unique to the US (Walter, 2023). ➤ The lack of uniform rules and practices among states invites abuses regarding access to voting rights and of even-handed election procedures. ➤ No national holiday for voting causes lower voter turnout, which favors individuals and parties with greater resources. 2 States erect barriers to voting. The <i>Shelby County</i> decision in 2013 specifically overturned provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act, thereby permitting states to reinstitute or erect new restrictions on voting. These include: ➤ requiring state-issued IDs and/or requiring onerous citizenship tests (not required in the US constitution)	1 Disenfranchisement as a means of racist social control. Political disenfranchisement and disempowerment through voter suppression and gerrymandering has long been applied as a tool for a dominant party to maintain its dominance. In addition to that political motive, during the nearly 100-year era of Jim Crow laws, violent intimidation and selectively applied laws were applied specifically to Black people to impede their voting rights and the means of advancement in society. ➤ Black people continue to suffer social, as well as legal, handicaps as a result of the history of racial discrimination, thus thwarting their full civic participation. 2 False claims of voting irregularities. Since 2020, Trump has proclaimed—and Republicans have consistently echoed—charges of “rigged elections.” These false claims impact the fairness of the electoral process in many ways: ➤ Encourage disdain for actual facts. ➤ Dilute public trust in election fairness. ➤ Endanger the safety of election workers. ➤ Make recruiting election workers more difficult. ➤ Have led to the appointment of illegal fake electors (a felony).

	➤ limiting absentee and mail-in voting ➤ reducing the days of early voting ➤ purging voter lists, making maintaining one's registration difficult ➤ allow intrusive poll-watching ➤ harassing and prosecuting individuals who may have voted in error, to instill fear of committing a voting "crime," reducing participation by marginalized groups ➤ imposing hardships on voters by shortage of printed ballots, reduced number of voting venues, prohibiting support of voters waiting in line, etc. ➤ The result is lower participation by minorities, women, the poor, elderly, and disabled. 3 The Supreme Court tolerates gerrymandering of state voting districts. Gerrymandering has been the focus of many Supreme Court decisions; the most recent and most dispositive is <i>Rucho v. Common Cause</i> in 2019, in which the court disabled any constitutional challenge to the fairness of election district maps on the basis that no objective test of "fairness" is possible. ➤ The creation of "safe districts" encourages apathy ("my vote doesn't matter") hence lowered turnout and representation. ➤ Naked partisanship in district map drawing has led to grossly unfair electoral advantages to the party drawing the maps. 4 Partisan manipulation of election administration, at the state level. Although the norm is to keep state election procedures non-partisan, since the 2020 election, more than a dozen, mostly Republican-controlled, state legislatures have been seeking to	3 Foreign election interference. The fairness of the presidential elections of 2016 and subsequent years has been undermined. For example, The Mueller Probe determined that Russia interfered in the 2016 election principally through two operations. First, a social media campaign that favored candidate Donald Trump and disparaged candidate Hillary Clinton. Second, a computer-intrusion operation against employees and volunteers from the Clinton Campaign to steal and release internal documents (Special Counsel's Office, Department of Justice 2019). Since then, Russian agencies have conducted a wide-ranging campaign of social media disinformation to distort the outcome of US national elections. ➤ The disinformation has misled voters into accepting false characterizations of Democratic leaders and their policies, thus affecting the turnout of Democratic voters, at the least. ➤ The computer intrusion severely handicapped the ability of the Clinton Campaign to conduct a fair campaign. 4 Inhibitors to voter turnout. Legal barriers and social-psychological influences combine to yield one of the lowest rates of turnout per eligible voter (51-65% in recent decades) compared to other democratic republics. Rational Choice Theory suggests that voters weigh the costs and benefits of voting. They ask, for example, Is my vote pivotal? Should I support my "team"? Do I derive personal satisfaction from doing my civic duty? Am I going to be confronted at the polls? ➤ Legal and societal inhibitors to voting add to the "cost" side of the equation, leading to lower turnout. 5 Decline of civic culture (Almond and Verba 1963).
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	distort election procedures in the name of “election integrity.” Common examples: ➤ Giving the legislature or a state official direct control over election outcomes, instead of the designated chief election official (CEO). ➤ Requiring unorthodox audits or reviews of election results. ➤ Shifting control of election procedures away from non-partisan officials toward partisans in the legislature. ➤ Creating burdensome procedures aimed at increasing confusion and delay. ➤ Creating or expanding penalties for election officials in the ordinary execution of their jobs, including criminalizing inadvertent mistakes (Protect Democracy, 2023). ➤ The intention of such measures is to give unfair advantage over the machinery of elections to the party in power. 5 Partisan manipulation of election administration, at the federal level. According to the Constitution, only Congress and the states can set election rules. However, in both his first and second terms, President Trump has made explicit attempts, often illegal, to alter election procedures. Following the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump, echoed by his political allies, continued to allege that the process was “rigged.” In response, Congress passed the bipartisan Electoral Count Reform Act (ECRA) in 2022 to update existing legislation related to the counting and certification of electoral votes. But since then, Trump has made a concerted effort to undermine free and fair elections (Singh, 2025), including: a) issuing an executive order, reflected in the SAVE (Safeguard American Voter Eligibility)	Americans have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and social structures, including church, PTA, clubs, political organizations, or service organizations, such as Rotary, Lions, or Elks—the “bowling alone” phenomenon (Putnam 2020). ➤ Leads to loss of social capital—networks of relationships that help advance societal goals—and lower civic engagement.
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	Act, which would require every eligible voter to provide documentary proof of citizenship—to be presented in person—to register to vote. This is intended to suppress the vote, especially of women (whose married name might not match their birth name), seniors, students, and communities of color, b) interfering with states’ voting machine choices and procedures, c) intimidating election officials and nonprofits that promote fair elections, and d) supporting officials and others, such as January 6 insurrectionists, who subvert the integrity of the electoral processes. ➤ Trump intends to improperly influence election processes: who can vote, how they can vote, how votes are counted, and who oversees elections. 6 States employing unverifiable voting machines. Some state governments are approving voting machines with designs that inhibit verification of the vote (e.g., no paper trail) and/or lack safeguards against tampering with machines to alter the vote (Brennan Center for Justice 2022). ➤ Machines lacking secure verifiability open up opportunities for those in control to tamper with the vote (Hartmann 2020) 7 Americans’ abysmal civics knowledge. The Founders frequently asserted that maintaining a democracy required an electorate that understood their government and their own rights and responsibilities as citizens. Nowadays, only one-quarter of eighth graders are passing the NAEP civics exam; only ten states require even a year of civics education (Shapiro	
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	and Brown 2018). Only 39% of adults surveyed could name the three branches of government and even fewer could pass the citizenship test that 90% of immigrant test-takers pass. (Davenport, 2020). ➤ Most citizens lack knowledge of rights and duties and of government processes. ➤ Citizens are deficient in the skills and agency for civic engagement.	
Facet	a) Legal threats	b) Societal threats
2 Egalitarian facet -equal representation -equal access to power and distribution of resources -equitable treatment regardless of sociodemographic characteristics	1 The Constitution and subsequent legislation privilege white males by default, due to implicit white male bias. Whiteness is not mentioned in the US Constitution and rarely mentioned in federal statutes, state constitutions, or state statutes because it was assumed to be the “normal” condition. In essence, white people serve as a statutory benchmark. Similarly, gender is not mentioned in the original Constitution, allowing women’s rights, including voting rights, to be ignored by default. In essence, full rights were granted to white men. Racial bias was not addressed explicitly until passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments in 1865-70. Gender bias was not addressed until passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. This “head start” allowed white males to establish a grip on representation and accumulation of wealth and power (Leong, 2021). ➤ Historical white male privilege in law has allowed white males to hold a	1 Implicit white male bias. The Framers of the Constitution claimed to be speaking on behalf of “all men,” but, without consciously intending it, they actually spoke for people like themselves—male, white, free, property-owning, literate, and deistic. In other words, the nation’s statutory basis “was written exclusively by white people, to reflect the interests of white people, to protect the rights of white people, and to create a government run by white people (Leong, 2021)”. ➤ Implicit white male bias since the days of the Founders has supported a social system in which women and non-white people have been marginalized regarding representation and access to power and socioeconomic advantages. 2 Growing income inequality. Since 1981, deregulation, tax cuts for wealthy, offshoring of manufacturing, and weakening of unions has moved \$50 trillion from the bottom 90% to the top 1%; now at historic highs, the gap is among the greatest in the world. With far less access to money and clout, the 90% cannot compete equally for political influence. ➤ Frustration over loss of economic status and the

	disproportionate share of positions of power in the executive and legislative bodies. ➤ Historical white male privilege in law has prevented women and minorities from gaining equal access to resources; e.g., they earn less than white men in the same jobs. 2 The Constitution established the Electoral College for presidential elections, which, together with designating two senators per state, gave a permanent advantage, initially to slave-holding states, and now to rural states. Leads to the election of Congresses slanted toward more regressive agendas. For example, since 1998, Republican senators, added together, have never represented half the population, but they have been the Senate majority half that time. ➤ Allows a minority of the national population to consistently overrule the will of the majority. ➤ Leads to loss of faith in the democratic process. 3 Congress's tax policies (e.g., low corporate tax rate, low capital gains tax rate, myriad loopholes for those able to lobby for advantage) have concentrated wealth in fewer and fewer hands. The Supreme Court's <i>Bellotti</i> decision in 1978 ruled that corporations are people and money is speech; since that time, Congresses have written tax policies that effectively transferred approximately \$50 trillion dollars from lower-income taxpayers to the ultra-wealthy. ➤ This exacerbates the unequal access to a fair share of resources. 4 Plurality tallying system. Declaring “the first candidate past the post” the winner may not accurately	political influence it brings stokes resentment and support of “anti-elite” populist politicians, who tend toward authoritarian solutions. 3 Wealth power inequality. The wealthy have always had an advantage in the legal system: shaping it and treatment by it. They are able to afford powerful legal representation, and with their high social position, they are perceived as more valuable to society, leading to more lenient legal treatment (as in white-collar crime). ➤ Their wealth and social status have allowed them to have easier and more powerful civic participation, and to shape elections, laws, and policies to their advantage. 4 American race discrimination. Throughout US history, racial discrimination has been reflected in laws, customs, language, and—sometimes violent—practice. Whites occupying middle- or working-class status perceive economic gains by non-Whites as threats to their own status and so desire a “bottom rung” below them. ➤ To be classified as non-White has meant less power, less representation, and less access to resources. ➤ It also raises barriers to entry to elected office: lack of resources, lack of visibility in community, and “othering” make entry into politics difficult. 5 Misogyny and patriarchy imposed socially. Women in the US have historically been limited in their ability to exercise power equivalent to men. Women, especially in lower socioeconomic status, are expected to play a subordinate role to men, a precept of patriarchy. Restoring 1950s patriarchal family conditions is the underlying goal of the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025: heterosexual married couples, father as head of household and breadwinner, mother stays at home to care for (many)
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	represent the true distribution of candidate preferences. For example, Candidate A, a liberal, receives 40% of the vote while Candidates B and C, both conservatives, each receive 30%. A is the winner, thus misrepresenting the conservative majority. ➤ Although not intended to be unfair, the plurality system often results in representation that does not reflect the actual preferences of the voters. 5 Senate’s filibuster rule leads, predictably, to “tyranny of the minority,” depriving the majority of their Constitutional right to pass legislation. For example, 41 senators representing 15% of the population can block most legislation (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023). ➤ The majority of voters may consistently be under-represented in terms of legislation passed. 6 The original Constitution allowed slaves to be counted as 3/5ths of a person in census count. Thus, slaveholding states gained disproportionate seats in Congress. This allowed generations of laws supporting slaveholders’ interests and accrual of generational wealth. ➤ This decision has contributed to the systemic wealth gap between White and minority families. 7 The “Great Compromise” agreements of the 19th century ordained that new ‘free’ states could be added only if an equal number of ‘slave’ states were added. This preserved permanent Electoral College advantage for slave states, now rural states. ➤ Like the Electoral College, these agreements led to the systematic, ongoing under-representation of people in the more urban states.	children. ➤ Lowering women’s social and economic status reduces their access to resources and their ability to attain political positions of power. 6 Crony Capitalism refers to a system in which individuals and businesses (the president’s “cronies”) gain advantages through political connections rather than through market forces. The advantages may include access to the leader’s attention, preferential granting of government contracts, tax breaks, or regulations that stifle competition. Examples: a) President Biden was accused of tolerating his son’s use of Biden’s position to gain a lucrative position in a foreign company. b) President Trump appointed son-in-law Jared Kushner to several political offices; he was accused of profiting from policies for which he personally advocated. c) President Trump allowed Elon Musk’s “Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)” to intrude into agencies that oversee Musk’s companies, which receive billions of dollars in federal contracts and subsidies each year, curtailing investigations into fraudulent operations. d) To create another avenue for financial corruption, President Trump has publicly supported cryptocurrency and has directed the SEC to drop investigations and lawsuits against crypto companies. Further: i. Trump Token and Melania Token are meme coins, which have no financial value, and which allow insiders (Trump’s family and cronies) to cash out after initial value soars and before it crashes to zero (as 99% do). Contributors may also gain access to the leader by making notable
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	8 Late granting of suffrage. The Constitution was initially silent on voting eligibility, thus state laws largely prevented women and minorities from voting. Full suffrage was not granted until 1870—for non-white males—and 1920—for all women. Thus, women and non-whites have been historically underrepresented in the Executive and in Congress (e.g., no women presidents; historically women have constituted only 3% of Senate membership). ➤ Under-representation contributes to unequal access to resources. Women and non-whites historically earn less than white men in the same jobs (e.g. in 2025, women earned 85¢ for males \$1). 9 Misogyny and patriarchy imposed legally. Women in US have historically been limited in their ability to exercise power equivalent to men. Married women could own property by 1900, but single women were not guaranteed access to loans and credit on their own until the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974. ➤ This historic handicap has contributed to women’s inability to gain political and economic power equivalent to men. 10 Racist federal policies. Up through the 1950s, the federal government supported racist policies in the administration of many programs. A prominent example is the policy of “redlining” to limit minority access to home loans. Such policies consistently inhibited wealth creation by women and non-Whites (Rothstein 2017). ➤ Families in the discriminated classes/castes have a permanent financial handicap, which also makes them less able to vote, run for office, and	purchases. ii. Trump family members are the major beneficiaries of World Liberty Financial, a crypto-based project, which acts, in effect, as a conveyor belt of untraceable money directly to the Trump family; for example, a \$2 billion “investment” by an Abu Dhabi investment firm in May 2025. ➤ Heightens income inequality between the politically connected few and the rest of the population. ➤ Erodes public trust in government by signaling the decline of the rule of law. 7 Deindustrialization of the “Rust Belt” and the “Coal Belt” has been an ongoing, gradual process. Major causes include: a) Labor union strength increased cost of labor in the 1950s. b) Manufacturers minimized innovation due to limited domestic or foreign competition. c) Automation, especially after the computer era began, eliminated many blue-collar jobs. d) After 1980, free-trade policies increased foreign manufacturing competition. e) After 2000 China was given Most Favored Nation status, accelerating the movement of manufacturing to Asia. ➤ Consequently, blue-collar workers have lost economic and political power, especially with loss of high-paying union jobs. ➤ Income inequality accelerated, shrinking the middle class and its political influence. ➤ The losers feel betrayed and seek scapegoats; populists encourage them to blame “the government,” specifically Democrats. 8 Demographic “hollowing out.” Rural counties are losing
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	demand the attention of candidates and representatives. 11 The Constitution omits education as a public concern; thus states vary in quality, quantity, and equity of education. By allowing states to operate without quality control, some states and school districts fail to attain minimal educational achievement, which has several consequences: ➤ Leads to less informed electorate, recognized from the time of the Founders as a requisite to maintaining a democracy. ○ Inadequate general education reduces citizens’ ability to play a productive S/E role in society. ○ Inadequate civics education reduces citizens’ knowledge of their rights and duties, and of government processes in general.	population, especially of their most capable youth. ➤ The loss of economic vitality leads to loss of hope, contributing to “white rural rage,” a major contributor to support of authoritarian causes (Schaller and Waldman 2024). 9 Othering. Labelling people as belonging to a socially subordinate category in order to exclude and displace them to the margins of society. A trait of the MAGA movement is to promote “othering” of women, non-Whites, immigrants, Muslims, and gender nonconforming people. ➤ Historically, “othering” of non-Whites was formalized into Jim Crow laws, which not only prevented voting but also subjected non-Whites to economic and incarceration discrimination. ➤ Once “others” are identified as dangerous as well as outcast, discrimination against them—even violence—is acceptable, resulting in a reduction of political influence and participation. 10 Wedge issues. Conservative parties have historically represented the interests of the wealthy and business classes—a minority of the electorate. To attain majorities, they raise issues of identity and caste, appealing to the fears of non-wealthy white males (Walter 2023). ➤ Thus, those of higher SES are able to manipulate those of lower SES to vote against their own interests. 11 The shortage of affordable housing. The shortage has many causes, including the Great Recession of 2010, which curtailed housing construction; increases in costs of construction, especially during the COVID pandemic; the hike in mortgage interest rates in 2022; and speculative buying of properties by private equity investors. This shortage raises cost of housing rental or purchase
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		(unoccupied houses kept off the market). Consequently: a) reduced labor mobility and productivity, thus slowing economic growth. b) reduced social mobility, denying opportunity to less privileged groups, stoking social frustration and rich-poor divide. c) increasing homelessness, placing a burden on local government. ➤ The end result is voter hostility toward “the government,” increased support for dissident factions. 12 Gilded giving. Because of historic reluctance to invoke government power to deal with social injustice/inequality, philanthropy has emerged as a major mechanism for addressing S/E problems in the US. a) Creates dependence on good will of billionaire donors, and tax breaks given to philanthropists increase the tax burden on lower-tier taxpayers. b) Used by populist politicians to arouse resentment against “elites.” ➤ Consequently, philanthropic donors become a special interest that receives benefits at the expense of the collective interest while at the same time affording targets for populist resentment against “elites.” 13 Sorting in the US education system. American K-12 schools have historically served to sort the population into “academic” and “vocational” streams. ➤ Increases social distance between SE classes, which spurs animosities exploited by populist politicians. 14 “Vulture capitalism.” Corporations exploit distressed situations by acquiring assets at low prices, implementing cost-cutting measures that harm workers, and ultimately selling off the assets for profit, often leaving behind an
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		aftermath of debt and social instability (Blakeley, 2024). ➤ These practices, although legal, are socially irresponsible, increasing the gulf between the haves and have-nots.
Facet	c) Legal threats	d) Societal threats
3 Civil Liberties facet -rule of law enforced -checks and balances upheld -civil liberties observed	1 Alien Enemies Act of 1789 allows the President in time of war to arrest, relocate, or deport people from a foreign enemy country. It was previously invoked in the War of 1812, WWI, and WWII against people from enemy nations. Most recently, it was used in 2025 to deport Venezuelans to an El Salvador prison. ➤ This is an abuse of human rights and due process because: a) the deportees have not been given the opportunity to respond to charges against them; b) their home country has not necessarily been determined; c) the US is not at war with Venezuela; and d) the deportees were sent to a third country. 2 Emergency powers highly susceptible to presidential abuse: The National Emergencies Act (NEA) of 1976 empowers the president to activate special powers during a crisis...with certain procedural formalities (which are often neglected). Since 1976, 60 national emergencies have been declared, more than 30 of which are still currently in effect. A subset of the NEA is the International Emergency Economic Act (IEEPA), which allows the president to block transactions and freeze assets of foreign entities. There is great potential for abuse of “emergency” powers as the Act grants discretion to the president. His invocation of the Act can be overridden by Congress, but the president can veto the override.	1 Dark Money undermines the independence of the judiciary. Since the 2010s, Leonard Leo has built a secretive network of think tanks and advocacy groups—accelerated by a \$1.6 billion grant in 2022—devoted to installing highly conservative judges on the Supreme Court and lower courts. a) Trump has appointed three conservative justices—Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett—all selected and shepherded through the confirmation process by Leo and the Federalist Society. b) Leo’s network supported Senate Republicans who changed the Supreme Court confirmation rules in 2017, requiring a simple majority rather than 3/5ths supermajority. ➤ The use of dark money to secretly promote a selected group of politically committed individuals to Supreme Court nomination undermines the principle of selection by merit, not party. ➤ The use of dark money to secretly promote the overturning of the rules for confirmation undermines the principle of the Senate acting as a true check on the composition of the Supreme Court. 2 Military and law enforcement members (e.g. police, FBI) are historically conservative in their perspectives and practices. a) Minorities, marginalized groups, and unpopular

	➤ Examples that could be considered abuses include: ○ Used by Trump to divert funds to build a wall at the Southern border in 2019 after Congress denied funds. ○ Used by Biden in 2021 to forgive student debt. ○ NEA invoked by Trump in 2025 to enforce an aggressive crackdown on undocumented immigrants. ○ IEEPA invoked by Trump in 2025 to impose a sweeping regime of tariffs. 3 Expansion of national police powers. First, the Trump administration has demonstrated its intent to ignore the human rights and due-process rights of anyone it deems to be an “illegal immigrant. Human rights investigations have consistently found that ICE detainees are given cruel, degrading, and often inhumane treatment in ICE detention (Human Rights Watch 2025). Second, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA)” of 2025 nearly tripled the budget of ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement), making it larger than the FBI, DEA, ATF, and US Marshalls, combined—putting it on a par with the US Marine Corps. By doubling the number of enforcement officers to 10,000, it creates the largest national police force in American history. OBBA also expanded the facilities of ICE, with \$45 billion dedicated to building new detention centers, with larger budget than the entire federal prison system, with a capacity of 116,000 detainees. With these expansions comes new powers, including:	advocacies have historically been suppressed (German 2024). b) A 2019 poll showed that 36% of soldiers have seen evidence of white supremacism among their peers (Marche 2023). ➤ Consequently, citizens who happen to come from marginalized groups do not enjoy the same “rule of law” as others do. 3 Intruders gaining access to private data. DOGE operatives embedded in Federal agencies have illicitly gained access to a wide swath of databases containing sensitive private information, such as: tax returns, medical records, social service benefits, educational history, student loans, and immigration information. a) “Read-access” allows intruders to copy data for unauthorized purposes; expose secret agents; deny access to public services; “doxx” individuals for public scrutiny; and sell data to foreign governments, data brokers, or private companies. b) “Edit-access” allows records to be altered (Pascal, Stanger and Others 2025). ➤ Unlawful data seizure has put at-risk all citizens’ rights to privacy and protection against government retaliation. 4 Vandalism and arson against Black churches has long been a tactic of white supremacist terrorists, predating the Civil War. a) In the 1950s and 1960s churches were targeted as the gathering places for civil rights activists. b) Since 2015, racist rhetoric in the Presidential campaign fueled a spike in vandalism and arson against churches. ➤ Partisan-fueled attacks on churches not only impinges on the right to free exercise of religion, but they also
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	a) fewer restrictions on handling of, care for, and long retention of children b) a bonus system for arrests and deportations c) empowering state and local law enforcement to assist ICE agents d) allowing use of active-duty and reserve US military personnel to supplement ICE forces e) extraordinary flexibility in allocating the funds authorized. ➤ Overall, the Trump administration has implemented policies, now supported by lavish Congressional funding, to crack down forcefully on immigrants suspected of lacking legal status. In the process, it has shown the intent to use these powers broadly—without regard to due process or human rights—to punish non-citizens and citizens alike. 4 Supreme Court’s lack of accountability. The Constitution stipulates lifetime tenure but establishes no accountability mechanism. Further, with lifetime tenure, superannuated justices are less likely to represent current sensibilities, while their competence degrades with advanced age. ➤ Lacking enforceable ethics rules or term limits, the Supreme Court is the one branch of government that has unchecked power. 5 Executive aggrandizement. The Executive branch has been seizing power at the expense of Congress and the Courts. Schlesinger (1973) used the term “imperial presidency” to refer to the gradual appropriation of authority by Presidents, eroding Congressional authority. Currently, this is being done under the guise	jeopardize the political rights of congregants. 5 Lawfare. Although all parties have used litigation to advance their interests, since 2020, Republicans have used a blizzard of lawsuits to delay justice, particularly around elections, interfering with the normal democratic government processes. ➤ As the saying goes, “Justice delayed is justice denied.”
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	of Unitary Executive Theory, a contested theory of constitutional law holding that the President has sole authority over the executive branch. The theory was first espoused by the Reagan administration and popularized under the G.W. Bush administration. Now carried to its extreme in the Trump administration, particularly regarding the hiring and firing of public employees and eliminating governmental agencies...including independent agencies established and overseen by Congress. Recent conservative Supreme Courts have upheld the strong form of the Unitary Executive Theory. ➤ By centralizing enormous power in the hands of one person, the principle of checks and balances is severely strained. 6 Attack on 14th Amendment Rights. The Trump administrations, first and second, have demonstrated consistent disregard for certain civil rights—birthright citizenship, due process, and equal protection—all of which are enumerated in the 14th Amendment: a) On Inauguration Day 2025, Trump signed an executive order to seriously restrict the right of birthright citizenship. b) His sweeping immigrant deportation program features expedited deportations without legal processes, including bypassing immigration courts to hasten deportations, and issuing statements doubting whether all persons on US soil were even entitled to due process. c) Trump has signed numerous executive orders stripping equal protection from transgenders—banning them from participating in the military and from receiving	
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	medical insurance coverage for gender-affirming care; declaring that there are only two unchangeable sexes; and banning transgender women from competing in women's sports. d) He has stripped equal protection from law firms that have represented clients adverse to Trump, blocking access to government buildings, stripping any consideration for future government employment, canceling government contracts, and preventing any company that uses such a firm from obtaining federal contracts. ➤ This consistent policy of attacking rights guaranteed by the 14th Amendment—birthright citizenship, due process, and equal protection—constitutes a blatant repudiation of the rule of law and the upholding of civil liberties. 7 Over-use of executive orders. An executive order is a directive by the President to manage operations of the federal government. The use of executive orders increased greatly during the FDR administration as he was dealing with the emergencies of the Great Depression and the sudden onset of World War II. Examples of FDR: in 1933, limited the ownership of gold; in 1942, authorized incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Executive orders serve as one of the tools for “executive aggrandizement.” They have sometimes been overruled by Congress or the courts, on the basis that they overreach the powers of the presidency. Currently, Pres. Trump is using executive orders on nearly a daily basis—already exceeding the total of	
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	FDR's four terms—in order to conduct actions that suit his political purposes, whether they comport with the law, precedent, or democratic norms. ➤ Has the effect of expanding the powers of the Presidency <i>versus</i> Congress and the courts, further straining the checks and balances intended by the Constitution. 8 Broadcast media are increasingly partisan. The Radio Act of 1927 and the Communication Act of 1934 granted radio and TV licenses to for-profit corporations. Since the air waves are controlled by corporations and operated for shareholder profit, they tend to reflect pro-business, conservative bias. When the FCC repealed the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, it allowed unfettered partisanship by mass media. To maximize profit on AM radio, stations turned to “conservative talk radio,” where the loudest and most outrageous opinions garnered audiences (ergo, most profitable). ➤ Reduces public access to balanced news and public affairs information. ➤ Broadcasters no longer serve as checks on government power. 9 Presidential abuse of war powers. The balance between the President's and Congress's authority to wage war has been renegotiated constantly since the formation of the republic. However, in recent decades, Presidents have gone beyond their explicit authority to use military violence for causes they deemed worthy. Specifically, the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) and the 2002 Iraq AUMF have been used as the legal basis for military operations against suspected terrorist groups, including some that did not even exist when the AUMFs were passed.	
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	President Trump has issued memos and orders that threaten to expand these abuses even further. ➤ The checks and balances between the Executive and Congress can be overridden by misuse of war powers. 10 Congressional concentration of power. As legislative business has become more complex and partisanship more intense, more power is concentrated in committee chairs (e.g. Ways & Means), who can single-handedly determine which bills advance; majorities don't matter. Consequently: ➤ Reduces the checks and balances within the legislature (leadership vs. members). 11 State legislatures suppressing protest. Several states (with Republican super-majorities) are currently passing anti-protesting legislation. Criminalizes peaceful protest with liability for organizers for any damage or disruption. - Invokes “organized crime” RICO principles to deal with organizers. ➤ Such laws infringe on the First Amendment right to "peaceably assemble for redress of grievances." 12 Stonewalling judicial appointments. Appointments to the Supreme Court and lower courts have become politicized, which jeopardizes fair balance in the court system. The most egregious example has been Republican refusal to even consider Supreme Court appointments that are “late” in the term of recent Democrat incumbent Presidents. ➤ The Constitution intends for the nomination and appointment of judges to follow even-handed	
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	rules regardless of party in power, and this is being violated. 13 Militarization of police forces: The Safe Streets Act of 1968 birthed the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), which granted federal funds to local governments to obtain military resources to quell potential riots. ➤ Now, police shootings of unarmed citizens—typically of marginalized groups—are common, often provoking flare-ups of violent protest. ➤ With military equipment and military tactical training, police are more likely to intervene forcefully in peaceful protests. ➤ Militarization of police has led to denial of the right to peaceably assemble, not to mention the right to life itself. 14 Unequal justice of plea deals. Almost all criminal convictions are the result of plea bargains. ➤ This practice produces a massive underclass of people—disproportionately poor and non-White—who are restricted from voting, working, and otherwise participating in society (Canon 2022). ➤ Facilitates “framing” innocent people to resolve the case, denying them the right to the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, a fundamental principle of our legal system.	
Facet	e) Legal threats	f) Societal threats
4 Communal facet	1 Supreme Court equates money with speech. Recent decisions, such as <i>Bellotti</i>, 1978 and <i>Citizens United</i>, 2019 declare corporations as persons and equate money with speech.	1 Lobbyists (“K Street”) overwhelm congressional deliberation. Well-financed special interest groups support lobbyists who suborn Congress members to favor their interests as opposed to the common good.

-government decisions made with deliberation and in the best interests of the people (collective interests) vs. special interests	a) <i>Citizens United</i> has allowed super-rich to replace parties as primary funding source for politics; partisanship is more extreme because parties used to be a force for ‘centering.’ b) These decisions have led to a vast increase in corporate political activism, drawing hordes of lobbyists to DC (“K Street”) and accelerating the “revolving door” of legislators and government officials who become lobbyists and vice versa (Hart 2022, 39). ➤ Consequently, Congressional partisanship has become more extreme without parties serving to “center” the selection of candidates. ➤ In essence, lobbyists write the laws, in total violation of the principle of “deliberation.” 2 The Supreme Court’s <i>McDonnell</i> decision (2016) has erased the line between “gifts” to political leaders and bribery. a) Wealthy individuals and corporations can purchase the favor of government leaders through campaign contributions and even personal gifts. b) Those corrupted leaders reciprocate by rewarding wealthy donors out of public sources (Hart 2022, 67). ➤ Permission to bribe—and to receive benefits from bribery—strikes at the very heart of the democratic principle of making decisions based on the common good, not special interests. 3 Industry-Congress co-dependency. Since the beginning of the Cold War, Congress has devoted greater resources to “national security,” building what Eisenhower called the “military-industrial complex.” Defense contractors control vast sums of	a) Business groups are the dominant players; they promote pro-business policies in general, such as low corporate taxes and reduction of government regulations. Examples: US Chamber of Commerce, Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturing of America, and American Hospital Association. b) Other special interest groups occupy specific niches; e.g., the NRA vigorously opposes all laws that would limit possession of firearms; it is heavily subsidized by the gun industry and is considered to wield outsize influence since many gun-owners are “one-issue voters” and NRA endorsement can be decisive. ➤ The result has been massive shifting of legislative attention away from issues affecting the community at large in favor of the special interests of those with the means to influence lawmakers. Societal problems go unaddressed, for example the epidemic of gun violence. 2 Decline of the “free press.” Long viewed as the “watchdog of democracy,” traditional mass media are shrinking in size and influence due to market forces (e.g., newspapers, radio, and TV consolidating and disappearing; advertising revenue diverted to social media). a) Fewer media markets have competing voices, diminishing pluralism. b) Less coverage of local issues and opinions. ➤ This decline leads to a less-informed electorate, more prone to persuasion by demagogues and special interests. ➤ Less access to reliable public information contributes to a reduction in civic participation overall. 3 Corporate bias of mass media. Newspapers and radio
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	appropriated funds, necessitating powerful lobbying efforts to maintain those contracts, establishing co-dependency between business and congressmen. ➤ Like bribery, such financially-based favoritism strikes at the very heart of the democratic principle of making decisions based on the common good, not special interests. 4 Populist politicians attack universities under guise of subjugating the “elites.” They push legislation to: a) Scrutinize endowments, as a threat to force administrators to fall into line. b) Question research grants to control research into unpopular or controversial subjects. c) Undermine tenure as leverage against outspoken faculty members. d) Control the curriculum to privilege conservative ideology and suppress unpopular or controversial views, for example, by encouraging students to politically critique their instructors. e) Define professors’ work as “work for hire,” meaning the university owns their work products, thus reducing the independence of faculty members. ➤ Such attacks are meant to weaken the role of higher education in inculcating liberal values in society and creating citizens capable of making informed decisions about governance. 5 The Constitution intentionally made amendments difficult. This was intended to establish stability over time, as opposed to allowing frequent governmental changes based on contemporary issues or sentiments. ➤ While this can protect the Constitution from populist movements that may threaten the rights of the minority, it also favors the status quo,	and TV stations that operate for shareholder profit naturally cater to the interests of advertisers. a) 21st century prioritization of bottom-line commercial and entertainment interests vs. journalistic and democratic values. b) Outright MAGA partisanship: Sinclair Broadcast Group (193 TV stations) requires its stations to broadcast packaged video segments and its news anchors to read prepared scripts that contain pro-Trump editorial content. c) Conservative talk shows dominate AM radio, the medium that people listen to while driving – a virtual monopoly. Besides travelers, AM radio is crucial for people who are geographically isolated, out of reach of other media sources. ➤ Subjected to non-stop exposure to right-wing propaganda, rural residents and audiences who travel through rural areas tend to gravitate toward extreme political views. ➤ Strongly biased programming spreads misinformation and disinformation, as well as demonizing opponents. ➤ The biases of corporate owners and advertisers tend to be reflected in laws, rather than the interests of the community. 4 Social media platforms promote disharmony. They are efficient and addictive conveyors of mis- and dis-information to unwary users. They are unregulated, virtually uncensored (e.g., X has fired all moderators) and users may remain anonymous, thus attract heavy use by bombastic voices and malevolent propagandists, including foreign adversaries. Because social media platforms have become the major battleground for advertising dollars, their algorithms reward clicks, ergo the sensational or salacious gets prioritized [“attentional
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	meaning established interests, making it difficult to address changing needs that may reflect the collective interests of the whole population. 6 State Preemption Abuse. Preemption is a legal doctrine whereby superior government authorities may make rules that supersede those of inferior authorities. Federal supremacy over state laws was established by the “Supremacy Clause” of the Constitution (Article VI, Clause 2), at least insofar as the “enumerated powers” are concerned. This was affirmed by one of the earliest major rulings of the Supreme Court, <i>McCulloch v. Maryland</i>, 1819. For example, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, an act of Congress, preempts state constitutions and local ordinances. However, the Constitution is silent on the subject of the supremacy of state laws over local ordinances. Thus, the power of preemption depends on state constitutions and court rulings. State preemption, for example, allows states to prohibit localities from raising their minimum wage or controlling firearms. Preemption itself is politically neutral, but since 2010 state legislatures with conservative supermajorities have been abusing or weaponizing preemption. Instead of using it to clarify who has jurisdiction over what, they have used it to promote a partisan political agenda. For example, in addition to overturning local ordinances that conflict with their ideological agenda, they have targeted local officials with penalties, such as removal from office, fines, and even criminal liability for any sort of support of ideologically non-conforming policy. This new, aggressive preemption limits the	salience of negativity” (Hayes 2025)]. Thus, social media: ➤ spread misinformation, (e.g. New Deal policies are “socialist” or “communist”), ➤ spread disinformation, (e.g. conspiracy theories, foreign trolling), ➤ rhetorically demonize opponents—not only wrong, but malicious (e.g. “Journalists are enemies of the people”). 5 Individualism as a political ideology, often phrased as “rugged individualism” since the time of Herbert Hoover (Hoover 1928), prioritizes realizing one's own goals and desires, and valuing independence and self-reliance above the interests of the group or the state. This ideology has taken root in the American mind through the film and TV portrayals of “cowboys” and vigilantes as American ideals. ➤ Since it downplays “the common good” versus individual interests, individualism supports such political stances as: anti-union, reluctant support of public schools by childless people, disinterest in public support of mass transportation, acceptance of ‘tipping’ culture, and opposition to public health insurance. ➤ People who implicitly accept this view and who then lose their jobs, suffer shame and loss of self-esteem; seek scapegoats to rationalize their perceived failure. ➤ Individualism rejects viewing the world as a “global community;” it promotes suspicion of “Globalism” or the “New World Order.” ➤ “Competitive individualism” claims that achievement should be based solely on merit; thus it provides the basis for opposing efforts at diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). 6 Wealthy individuals and corporations pour dark
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	ability of local governments to address local problems, especially in areas where local governments are better positioned to understand and address specific local issues, such as the control of gun violence in large urban areas. ➤ As a legal principle, preemption does not have a political valence except to generally impose rules from above, thus limiting the exercise of democracy at lower levels of government, the sphere especially likely to affect people’s daily lives. ➤ Preemption is subject to abuse, forcefully imposing state-level political doctrines onto local jurisdictions that do not reflect the popular will of the local jurisdictions.	money into special-interest campaigns. Millions of dollars—often in hidden or disguised form—are funneled into PR campaigns designed to influence public opinion in ways favorable to special interests vs. the common interest. There are two major examples of this practice. a) Market fundamentalism. Pro-business groups, such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) have opposed government regulation by disseminating—since the 1930s—propaganda falsely equating free markets with democracy and personal liberty. i. Legitimized by “Chicago School” economists. ii. Supported by Christian sects that prioritize “prosperity gospel” over compassion and collective welfare. iii. Bolstered by warped or misrepresented research that is parroted by conservative media to counter legitimate research. iv. Propaganda is distributed as “free educational materials” to schools. b) Science Denial. Front groups representing the oil and manufacturing industries spent millions over decades promoting the systematic rejection of scientific evidence to avoid uncomfortable facts, especially climate change. ➤ These deceptive practices vastly privilege special interests above the interests of the people as a whole. 7 “Low information” voters have little understanding of the issues and the consequences of policy choices. They have less exposure to objective news sources and so are more easily misled by demagogues. Further, they tend to be close-minded about their positions. ➤ As a result, they have a lower participation rate in voting or civic engagement.
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		➤ When they do engage, they tend to have more extreme positions and less alignment with the common good. 8 Complacency of democracy supporters. During Post-Cold War, an era of affluence, Americans have become complacent about democracy; the Left do not see the world in “survival” terms as do the Right. ➤ Consequently, there tends to be an “enthusiasm gap” between committed partisans and citizens who expect matters to naturally follow norms and precedents. 9 “Wokeism” as a political epithet. People take offense when progressives push their cultural agenda down their throats. Advocacy for minority rights and identity politics tend to heighten the reactivity of straight white people. ➤ This triggers feelings of being marginalized and discriminated against, and frustration breeds aggression (Hochschild 2018). 10 Prejudicial, focus-group-tested rhetoric provokes conflict. The use of emotionally evocative terms, pioneered by Frank Luntz, was adopted by Newt Gingrich in the 1980s to 1990s to replace neutral terms with wording intended to produce a negative emotional response. Prejudicial terms, such as identifying “capitalism” rather than “democracy” as the basis of the American system, and labeling rightists as “real Americans” while labeling Democrats as “radical,” “corrupt,” and “liberal,” and describing the current situation as “decay,” “failure,” and “crisis” have become standard terminology among “conservative” and populist spokesmen and media outlets (Corn and Murphy 2011) (Richardson 2023). ➤ Such weaponized language, which is increasingly promulgated by social media platforms with zero or
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		weak moderation, promotes “othering” of political opponents—contributing to the breakdown of communal harmony. ➤ When couched in violent terms, weaponized language stimulates violence and intimidates peaceful people into submission. 11 American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), while posing as non-partisan, has used its vast hidden funding to promote pro-business and politically conservative policies. a) Misleads state legislators to attend supposedly non-partisan summer conferences masquerading as family holidays, then provides state legislators with cookie-cutter legislative language ready for introduction. b) Stealthily undermines regular political functioning. c) Leads the movement to call for a Constitutional Convention, which would be dominated by rural, regressive interests (MacLean and Pearson 2024) ➤ Thus, ALEC plays a major role in promoting policies that serve corporate special interests rather than the common good. 12 Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Unregulated AI technologies are being used to: a) Generate deepfakes and other disinformation to flood people’s social media with false information. i. Intended to distort public opinion and sway elections. ii. Undermines public trust in democratic processes: “You can’t believe anything anymore.” b) Intimidate and control. Examples: i. Surveillance cameras everywhere, allowing facial recognition software to identify protestors. ii. Cross-checking databases to ferret out private
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		information about targeted people to seek ways to punish them, for example by denying permits or disqualifying them from benefits ➤ Disinformation and fear of intimidation poison the information environment, allowing malicious factions to subvert the collective interest. 13 Malignant autocrats influence elections. Anti-American foreign leaders, such as Middle Eastern strong men, Russian oligarchs, and even government agencies covertly influence American elections. Troll farms spread misinformation and disinformation. Foreign autocrats use “cutoffs” (e.g. NRA) to relay money to right-wing politicians and institutions that promote their interest in weakening American institutions (Applebaum 2024). ➤ Malicious outside interests gain greater influence and power within the government than common citizens.
Facet	g) Legal threats	h) Societal threats
5 Existential facet -undermining integrity of government -directly threatening foundations of government	1 Insurrection Act of 1807 authorizes the employment of US military forces inside the US in cases of insurrection or civil disorder. a) It has been invoked during labor conflicts of the early 20th century, by Eisenhower and JFK to enforce desegregation, and as requested by governors to deal with disorder during 1989 Hurricane Hugo and in 1992 during the Los Angeles riots. b) Trump signed an executive order on Inauguration Day 2025 ordering a study of necessity of invoking the Insurrection Act. ➤ If and when invoked, the Insurrection Act can be used in a ham-fisted way to seize sole power, even used as the “decapitation strike” employed by	1 Anti-democracy political ideologies. Several “alt-right” political ideologies with overlapping tenets—such as anarcho-capitalism, right-libertarianism, and neo-reactionary movement (NRx), have gained significant following in recent years, and they now animate the Trump administration. NRx, which has received explicit support from a number of tech billionaires, Elon Musk, and JD Vance, is notable for its total rejection of democratic values and institutions. The DOGE project was originally proposed by Curtis Yarvin, prominent spokesman for NRx, a.k.a., the Dark Enlightenment. NRx specifically rejects pluralism, the belief that democracy is best served if a wide range of interests are included in political deliberations and their concerns seriously considered.

	authoritarians in the past. 2 Originalism, the fringe legal theory that the meaning of a constitutional provision is fixed when it is adopted, is now embraced by five Supreme Court justices and increasing numbers of judges in the lower courts. Rather than consistently adhering to their stated principles, “Originalists” often cherry-pick historical points to buttress their extremely conservative preferences, using the Constitution as a front for their own ideology (Chemerinsky 2022). ➤ To insist on “original intent” would conflict with the intentions of the Founders themselves, who viewed the Constitution as a living document. ➤ Relying solely on supposed original intent would, in effect, put the rudder of the state into the “dead hand” of authors of a long-ago era. ➤ This theory has been employed to undermine precedents such as the “Commerce clause,” a key source of federal authority, particularly in regulating interstate and international trade. 3 Courts altering the Constitution through “judicial review.” Even without formally amending the Constitution, by Republicans’ stacking the courts—the Supreme Court and lower courts—with right-wing activists, policies that could never succeed through legislation are being made the law of the land under the guise of “judicial review,” a charge previously leveled by conservatives against liberal judges. ➤ Whether attributed to one party or the other, “judicial activism” conflicts with the intent of the Constitution and diminishes trust in our Constitutional processes. 4 Irregular revision of agency regulations. Two recent	➤ The goal of NRx is to replace the current democratic republic with a more “efficient” and historically established system, such as monarchism or feudalism (Duran 2024) (Marchese 2025) (Hartmann 2025) (Gunitsky 2025). 2 Authoritarian playbook: Guidelines for the conversion of a democratic state to authoritarianism can be inferred from the experiences of Russia, Hungary, Turkey, and Poland in recent times. The process begins with gradual reduction in democratic safeguards; it may continue gradually or succumb to a sudden “decapitation strike”. The US is not immune to these processes. Some of the gradual steps can be found in the doctrines of a major American political party; see, for example, the advocacy of Steve Bannon, chief strategist of Donald Trump, for “deconstruction of the administrative state,” and see also provisions of “Project 2025.” These projects are devoted to ending the American Democratic Republic through specific actions: ➤ Dismantling the civil service: replace career civil servants with political appointees whose mission is to undermine their agency. ➤ Curtailing civil liberties, e.g. draconian immigration policies; ban on “pornography;” restricting rights based on gender, “wokeism,” reproductive freedoms, etc. ➤ Invoking a national emergency to implement a “decapitation strike,” a sudden imposition of authoritarian rule (Snyder 2017). 3 General anti-government bias. This began in Colonial times as resentment against monarchical misrule. It was inflamed in Antebellum times by Southern resistance to imagined Northern dominance. Currently, it is stoked by the perception of government overreach. Many citizens have
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	cases have altered long-standing procedures for how federal agencies establish and change regulations. a) In the <i>Loper Bright</i> case in 2024, the conservative majority of the Supreme Court overturned the long-established “Chevron deference” which gave agencies discretion in interpreting ambiguous federal laws and regulations. In effect, courts will now interpret federal regulations, not agency experts. b) In 2025, President Trump issued a memo directing agency heads to move forward quickly with a “review-and-repeal effort” to expunge recently overturned long-standing regulations without the normal “notice-and-comment” process, in spite of the Supreme Court’s ruling in <i>Loper Bright</i> that rules should not be changed retroactively. Trump claimed the authority to change procedures mandated by the 1946 Administrative Procedure Act (APA) under the “Good Cause Exception” written into the APA. ➤ These actions allow presidents to halt or quicken the implementation of new regulations to suit their political interests, overturning decades of orderly, deliberative procedure. 5 Supreme Court grants Presidential immunity. In <i>Trump v. USA</i> decision in 2024, the Supreme Court ruled that former presidents have absolute immunity for actions taken within their core constitutional authority. Pres. Trump has acted as though he is immune from prosecution for any and all acts—past, present, or future—that he commits during his term in office. ➤ In effect, this ruling has placed the President above the law, giving him unchecked power, contrary to the Constitution’s intent of checks and	few personal interactions with government agencies, and those are usually negative (e.g., building permits, obtaining licenses, traffic citations). ➤ Anti-government sentiment underlies many of the other specific threats to democracy—propelling firearms purchasing, motivating militia formation, politicizing religious institutions, etc. 4 Conservative revolt over school desegregation. Supreme Court’s 1954 <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> decision found that separate schools were not equal, calling for school integration. This immediately led to the call for “massive resistance” in Southern states (see Sen. Byrd’s “Southern Manifesto” 1956). Southern politicians closed public school systems, shifted state support to segregated schools, started “segregation academies” as alternative schools, etc. Developments since then: a) Voucher plans implemented by conservative legislatures have increasingly shifted students from public schools to “charter”/private schools, most of which are not mandated to require racial integration. b) “White flight”—Americans began self-segregating by moving to locales that suit their socio-political preferences. i. Big-city public schools become more homogeneous by SES, race, and caste. ii. Suburban public schools become more heterogeneous (Meckler and Rabinowitz 2019) c) Accelerated transition of Southern voters to a more conservative party (Kruze 2007). ➤ The consequence of Massive Resistance has been to inflame racial friction and divide communities by race and social class, sowing disunion. 5 Political Sectarianism. What is commonly referred to as “political polarization,” “echo chambers,” or “tribalism”
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	balances. 6 Government gridlock—structural factors. Nothing feeds the popular disdain of “Washington” more than the failure of politicians to “do your job!” Legislation is slowed or stopped altogether for reasons inherent in the structure of our government: a) “Divided government” = when President and one or more houses of Congress are of different parties. Legislation is slowed while difficult compromises are made. Since 1900, the national government has been “divided” 40% of the time. b) Senate filibuster slows or stops legislation even when all branches are in the hands of one party. c) President’s veto can stop legislation even if both houses of Congress agree. d) Lack of party discipline: in the American system, party members can oppose or even form factions to oppose legislation proposed by the leadership of their own party. ➤ Voters are frustrated with “the system” when legislation fails to advance even though the voters have elected a majority at the last election. Leads to loss of faith in the democratic system. 7 Deregulation of firearms: The Second Amendment, as interpreted by recent Supreme Court rulings (<i>DC v. Heller</i>, 2008; <i>McDonald v. City of Chicago</i>, 2010), gives individuals virtually unlimited rights to possess all sorts of firearms, including military type. a) Gun ownership is rising rapidly, about 1 million sales per month; now more guns are in circulation than total of US population. b) The most popular gun is the AR-15, which is useless for hunting or home protection, so gun-owners claim of “self-defense” essentially	may more accurately be viewed as the growing tendency for people to align their political commitments according to moralized identities, similar to how religious sects form (Finkel, Ball, Cikara, & et al., 2020). That is, political identity functions like a religious identity: people who disagree with us are not only wrong, they are evil. Members evaluate political issues based on coherence with sectarian leanings rather than on consistency with a particular political ideology. Some consequences: a) Politicians promote divisive “wedge issues” because keeping their partisans inflamed increases voting support. Such clashes are often characterized as “culture wars” because they involve, not political issues, but issues that tug at the moral stances of conflicting sects. b) Political compromise, which is the essence of democratic governance, is denounced as a moral transgression. c) Congress members increasingly refuse to support any legislation supported by the opposition, including funding basic government operations, because it would give a “win” to the opposing sect. ➤ Since sectarian identity is so central to one’s sense of self, it can evoke powerful emotional and even violent responses. ➤ When sectarianism sows divisions so deep that normal political processes do not function, this reinforces the notion that the government does not work, thus offering autocracy as a more efficient model. 6 Government gridlock—societal factors. Nothing feeds the popular disdain of “Washington” more than the failure of politicians to “do your job!” Legislation may be slowed or stopped altogether for reasons based in societal issues:
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	means defense against possible government intrusion. c) Unregulated proliferation of guns plus state “Stand your Ground” laws contribute to more wrongful shootings. ➤ Guns inevitably lead to gun violence—homicides, suicides, and accidental deaths; they also pose mortal threats to law enforcement and peaceful civic order. 8 Advocacy for a new, slanted Constitutional Convention. Article V specifies the rules for invoking a Constitutional Convention. Dark-money-funded ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) is striving to obtain the consent of 34 states to require a new Constitutional Convention in which rural states would be overrepresented. ➤ ALEC’s allies intend to return to the “states rights” conditions of the Articles of Confederation, ending our current American Democratic Republic (ALEC: American Legislative Exchange Council 2019). 9 Congress ended the military draft in 1972, ending an institution that previously brought together rich and poor, White and minority individuals from all walks of life—an experience that was a form of desegregation. a) Military services are now less representative of the total population. b) Fewer young men have experienced working beside people different from themselves, thus increasing social distance between races and classes. ➤ These factors make the partisan divide wider, hence making compromise more difficult. 10 Presidential misuse of military, as in Vietnam,	a) Special interest lobbying. Those with sufficient wealth or insider contacts can influence lawmakers (for example, by making large campaign contributions) to support or oppose measures regardless of their party’s position. b) Political polarization. Lawmakers hesitate to compromise because extremists in their party (or tribe) insist on ideological purity, regarding compromise as surrender. ➤ When combined with the structural forces toward gridlock, the additional social pressures make gridlock all but inevitable—another reason to hate the government and lose faith in democracy. 7. Conflict between tenets of authoritarian religious organizations and democracy. Many of the world’s religious organizations prescribe leadership by anointed elites and submission and obedience to those authorities—values that inherently conflict with democratic civic values. They serve as models for autocracy (O’Toole, 2025). Further, certain religious groups, by taking strident positions, sow division between themselves and other faiths and with secular society. For example: a) The Christian Identity movement is an interpretation of Christianity (not a specific sect) which proposes that only Celtic and Germanic peoples, or the “Aryan race,” are the descendants of the ancient Israelites and are therefore God’s “chosen people.” It is labeled as racist, antisemitic, and white supremacist by the ADL and the SPLC. b) The Christian Nationalism movement promotes belief in charismatic prophecy and spiritual
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	Iraq, and Afghanistan, has led to decreased respect for veterans by the public and increased anti-government resentment by vets. These resentments are spread among vets' families and fellow members of less privileged social classes, who largely populate the military. ➤ Contributes to the social class divide that dilutes national unity and increases hostility toward perceived "elites."	warfare, which fuels aggressive political radicalization (Taylor, 2024). c) 'New Apostolic Reform' churches constitute a cult: leaders are prophets who get messages from God, demand obedience of followers, and direct them to the brutish "cult of Trump" (Hassan, 2020). d) Fundamentalist Christian churches are losing members like other churches, but they have become more active politically to keep members engaged. i. Since church attendance is declining, those remaining feel more beleaguered, hence more sectarian identity and more militant attitude (Sanneh, 2023). ii. Congregations have become substitutes for extended family, adding emotional traction to their hold on congregants. iii. Their clergy are credentialed by bible colleges instead of by traditional college education, making them more narrowly focused and doctrinaire. iv. Messaging from the pulpit encourages fusion into a tribal identity, separate from mainstream. (See the Christian Nationalism movement.) e) Certain cult-like Catholic groups, such as Opus Dei—a secretive ultra-conservative sect allegedly involved in bank fraud and human trafficking (Gore, 2024)—and American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP) explicitly work toward replacing democracy with a Catholic monarchy. Members of President
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		Trump’s inner circle have ties to these and other anti-democratic Catholic organizations. Vice-President Vance, a recent, zealous convert, aligns with the Catholic “postliberal movement” that combines social conservatism with a belief in using state power to promote their narrow brand of “Christian values.” And Trump advisor Steve Bannon worked with the conservative Catholic Dignitatis Humanae Institute to develop courses to train right-wing politicians (Rivera 2019). f) Catholic advocacy groups, such as Opus Dei and Leonard Leo’s groups, including Marble Freedom Trust and Concord Fund, have funneled tens of millions of dollars into appointing conservative Catholics to the Supreme Court, in which six of the nine seats are occupied by Catholics, five of whom regularly support the most conservative opinions. ➤ By supporting divisive issues, such as anti-abortion, in order to stoke fervor, religious pressure groups exacerbate political wedges dividing the public, a.k.a. “culture wars.” Religious activist judges support radical legal stances, overruling precedents and undermining democratic values. ➤ A range of different strident religious sects, congregations, and cults serve as a model for autocracy. ➤ They attempt to project their authoritarian doctrines into the political sphere, attempting to saddle the general population with their extremist doctrines.
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		➤ Religious zealots inflame their followers into extreme, sometimes violent, actions in pursuit of their missions. 8 Foreign autocrats use dark money to influence government officials. Foreign autocratic regimes undermine the integrity of US governmental institutions (Applebaum 2024) by: a) Hiring US lobbyists (often former govt. officials) to whitewash the reputations of their heinous regimes. b) Their lobbyists give political contributions to congressional campaigns in exchange for access (ergo, the lobbyists serve as “cutoffs” for dirty \$ payments). c) They subvert non-profits (e.g. Clinton Foundation) with major donations, betting on which will have influence in the next administration. d) They recruit universities through huge donations in an attempt to influence research directions and to curry favorable treatment by faculty (Applebaum 2024). e) They take advantage of the greediness of American financial institutions to build connections and draw them into their malicious web (Applebaum 2024). ➤ Foreign potentates, who are supposed to be excluded from US governmental influence, hire front groups to represent their interests, often bending or breaking financial laws in order to magnify their influence over legislation and rulemaking. 9 American militia movement. Anti-government groups that take the form of paramilitary units have increased dramatically since the election of Obama in 2008, although prohibited in all 50 states. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identified 334 militia groups at a peak in 2011, since then, numbers have gone up and down, hovering around 200 groups (SPLC 2016). These groups have been
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		emboldened since Trump’s first election. Some recent examples of their activities: a) Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, and other white supremacist groups converged on Charlottesville in 2017 chanting racist slogans and using the Nazi salute. b) The investigations arising from the January 6, 2021, insurrection exposed the key role played by paramilitary groups (notably the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers) in the attack on the U.S. Capitol. ➤ Some paramilitary groups conduct constant training to prepare for armed intervention in support of a coup d’état. ➤ At a minimum, the threat of violence by paramilitary groups can chill participation in democratic processes by forcing individuals to consider their personal safety when making their voices heard. 10 Republican operatives attempted after the 2020 presidential election to substitute fake electors for those duly elected—a clear, felonious attack on the foundations of democratic government (The 2020 Fake Electors Scheme n.d.). ➤ Sending false electors to the Electoral College would comprise an overthrow of the duly elected government. 11 General loss of faith in institutions. Polls show that most American institutions currently suffer from an unprecedented decline in their approval—especially the Presidency, Congress, and Supreme Court (Chemerinsky 2024) (Jones 2022). Contributing factors include: a) Gridlock, as parties are forced by base voters to abandon any attempt at compromise. b) Perceived futility of voting—“my vote doesn’t matter”—due to gerrymandering and general “tyranny of the minority.”
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		c) Scandals that have exposed the human frailty of government officials at all levels, in all branches of government. ➤ Loss of faith means diminished commitment to standing up to support legitimate democratic government interests. 12 Public opinion is shaped by lived experience, not objective data. In the 2010s, a majority of respondents felt the country was “headed in the wrong direction” and not doing well economically, despite many positive economic indicators. Voters seem to be “voting against their own interests,” whereas they merely wanted to send a message that their lives were difficult: a) Rising costs for essential goods and services, including housing, healthcare, and education b) Falling behind—a feeling that others are thriving while the middle class and working class are left in the lurch. c) Dissatisfaction with the performance and policies of elected officials; the country is not being led effectively. d) Conflicts over issues such as abortion, immigration, and gun control contribute to a sense of social division and unrest. ➤ People are dissatisfied with their own personal condition, yet even when they vote for “change,” nothing improves; this leads to a fatalism about the prospects for improvement under democracy. 13 Demographic peril. The US Census projects that the US will become 'minority White' by 2045. People generally want themselves and their “blood” to survive, thus groups centering their white identity are becoming more militant (Walter 2023) (Hochschild 2018). a) Their fear of slipping lower on the ladder elevates their desperation, hence propensity to resort to
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		violence. b) The racial threat symbolized by the election of Obama in 2008 accelerated the rise of militant hate groups (Wilkerson 2020). ➤ As “white minority” status becomes more imminent, people whose “whiteness” is central to their identity become more desperate and more prone to violence. 14 Migration peril. There is an ongoing domestic migration from rural areas into metropolitan centers—both North and South. This puts (conservative) rural counties at risk of losing dominance in their state—getting outvoted by urban centers. Hence, the struggle to maintain rural dominance leads to increasingly polarized and bitter partisan competition. ➤ People who feel beleaguered and on the verge of losing hegemony can act in desperate, and even violent, ways. 15 The legal system alienates minorities. Historically, the law enforcement and justice systems have disproportionately targeted and penalized minorities. ➤ This legal discrimination undercuts minorities’ trust in the justice system, weakening minorities’ support of government generally. 16 New social media environment. Social media platforms and podcasts have replaced journalistic news media as most people’s sources for news. This makes the dissemination of dis- and mis-information faster and cheaper. <i>Daily Wire</i>, for example, operates podcasts, websites, a streaming service, social media, YouTube channels, and theatrical films, providing ‘content’ reaching 220 million/month with divisive far-right propaganda. The effects of immersion in social media include:
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		a) People’s lived experience plus their perceptions based on media consumption—not economic data—controls their vote. b) Formation of “alternative reality”; people can hold onto a different set of “facts,” which makes communication with “outsiders” impossible. That is, “truth” no longer matters. c) Unregulated “free speech” allows dissemination of hate speech as well as false, defamatory claims (e.g. about immigrants’ behavior). d) Some false rumors (or “conspiracy theories”) originate from foreign adversaries aiming to divide Americans. e) Social media platforms derive revenue from advertisers, who pay for clicks. Thus, algorithms intentionally support sensational and salacious claims because they propagate more clicks. f) Anonymity and inflammatory language encourage more and more extreme reactions, exacerbating hatred and division. g) Advances in AI make “deepfakes” easier and more common, adding visual fuel to verbal deceptions; currently unregulated. ➤ By facilitating the spread of mis- and dis-information and microtargeting of voters with tailored messages, social media allow for the manipulation of public discourse by malicious foreign and domestic actors. ➤ Social media algorithms can create echo chambers, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and undermining informed decision-making. 17 Immersion in virtual relationships rather than face-to-face relationships leads to anomie. The replacement of broadcast and cable TV viewing with engagement in online social media or streaming services leads to reduced shared culture and shared reality. Similarly, immersion in a virtual social media bubble is replacing engagement in
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		face-to-face organizations, such as church or civic service associations. This leads to: ➤ Anomie, including for young men looking to militant groups for meaning in their lives ➤ Loss of a common basis for logical debate. 18 Entertainment dominates our media consumption. As termed by Postman (2006), we are “amusing ourselves to death.” As our attention is devoted increasingly to screens—TV, movies, Internet, and social media—we have become conditioned to expect mediated experiences to be entertaining. Thus, we expect news, politics, science, education, commerce, and even religion, to entertain us. a) Diverts public attention from real-world issues. b) Leads public discourse to be less serious, less logical, less factual, and requiring less critical thinking (e.g., presidential debates are about gaffes and emotional zingers rather than about policy differences). c) The entertainment business becomes the content of news (e.g. box office revenues of movies, lives of media personalities). d) TV celebrities can easily transition into politics, reducing political debate to drama and scandal. ➤ Overall, this results in a diversion of attention away from the real, hard work of democracy. 19 American Exceptionalism as a political ideology is deeply ingrained in national identity. Since 2012, has been a plank in the Republican platform. It impels Americans to disregard other models or foreign examples; at worst, it induces an arrogance, self-regard, and sense of moral infallibility in ‘patriots.’ ➤ Belief in Exceptionalism adds an element of virtuous certitude and validates emotional commitments to “patriotic” actions, even violence.
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		20 Right-wing attack on public education: Capitalist entrepreneurs want to replace public ownership of schools with private ownership to align with capitalistic ideology. They view schooling as a vast new profitable sector to exploit. This effort is manifested in many different ways: a) Voucher and charter programs allow private, including religious, schools to siphon off public funds. b) Extremist rhetoric inflames parents against public schools by claiming that their children are being “poisoned,” “groomed,” or even subjected to sex-change operations in school. c) Partisan efforts to politicize school board elections: i. Castigating board members for decisions made on educational grounds. ii. Demonizing opponents so that citizens fear to run for or serve on school boards. iii. Attacking “progressive” curricula (e.g. “Wit & Wisdom” reading program, SEL, and the like). iv. Attacking “progressive” administrative practices (e.g., DEI). d) Attacks are motivated by a range of ideologies, often racially based, i.e., white supremacy and/or antisemitism; for example, the Sovereign Citizen movement claims that federal government is totally illegitimate; instead, individuals hold sovereignty and decide which laws to obey (Schaller and Waldman 2024). ➤ Public schools will no longer be able to play the role of social leveler, helping both rich and poor to prosper. ➤ A poorly informed electorate is detrimental to the maintenance of a democracy. Public schools have strengthened US democracy for two centuries. 21 Stochastic terrorism. Lone-wolf and semi-organized
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		attacks (e.g., 1960s racial riots, Charlottesville rally, and Jan. 6 insurrection) are often fueled by radical propaganda. This includes loosely organized groups, both neo-fascist and anti-fascist, such as Antifa, which can come into conflict even without planning. Young men are more attracted to the “macho” values of the Right as opposed to the more “adult” values of progressive groups. Many are resentful and angry, potentially explosive. See the Proud Boys and similar neo-fascist groups. ➤ Such groups upset the social order, adding fuel to the fire of authoritarians, who advocate sacrificing democratic values to “restore law and order.” 22 “Rural white rage.” Lower-SES people, particularly in rural areas, fear falling behind other racial and economic groups (Schaller and Waldman 2024) (Hochschild 2018), a fear that is fanned by media imagery that leads them to compare their condition to that of the rich. In addition, they see themselves left out of government programs—such as Pell Grants, the Strengthening HBCU Program, the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), Office of Minority Health (OMH), and Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH)—that benefit the racial and ethnic groups they perceive as their competitors. Those anxieties are further inflamed by regressive economic policies that make their economic struggle harder. All this creates a reservoir of resentment that can be tapped by demagogues. Self-proclaimed populists encourage the disaffected to blame “out groups”—women, minorities, immigrants, and “elites.” By punishing the demonized “out groups,” the resentful ones gain the solace of knowing that others are suffering more. This punishment can take the form of withdrawal of financial benefits, limitations on voting rights, social restrictions, or even violence. Dollard &
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		Miller’s frustration-aggression hypothesis (1939) asserts that aggression is commonly the product of frustration. ➤ Thus, the grievances of financially struggling rural white males and others who share their plight can be channeled into a political program of repression of the “out groups.” ➤ The punishment of “out groups” can rise—and often has risen—to violent actions (e.g. the January 6 Capitol attack), and even stochastic terrorism. 23 Russian disinformation campaign. False news and conspiracy theories are flooding into US social media through Russian “political technology” knowingly passed along by rightist media organizations, such as Fox News, Breitbart, and Cambridge Analytica (Richardson 2023). ➤ The malicious manipulation by Russian “political technology” degrades trust in government and fuels political radicalization (McQuade 2024). 24 American conservative alliances with foreign autocrats. Autocratic and hard-right regimes have been gaining support over centrist and more democratic parties in Europe. Such groups are viewed as exemplars by similarly motivated American “alt-right” groups. For example, Hungary’s Orban regime, which is classified as an electoral autocracy—a hybrid political system that injects authoritarian methods into supposedly democratic institutions and structures—is celebrated by MAGA Republicans. By 2024 a strong alliance had been forged between the two movements. ➤ Autocratic parties in Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Poland, and Germany are now openly allied with the American MAGA Republican party. Those authoritarian regimes are seen as a model for conversion of a democracy to an autocracy.
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		25 Organized political extremism is growing. The Anti-Defamation League (2021) reports the growth of groups espousing positions that depart from socially acceptable norms. Extremists may fall anywhere on the right-left spectrum or not on that spectrum at all. Common characteristics include: a) Rejection of compromise (e.g. MAGA conservatives define compromise as betrayal of principles, causing legislative gridlock, increasing disdain for government.) b) Unshakeable confidence in their position c) Intolerance of internal dissent d) Demonize opponents e) Advocate violence to achieve their ends. ➤ These traits are all antithetical to the conduct of democratic political processes.
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