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Institutions under Siege

Much of the research on institutional change shows how systems shift slowly and incrementally. Yet, in the case of former President Donald Trump, change was rapid and radical. In *Institutions Under Siege*, leading political sociologist John L. Campbell offers new insights for understanding the legacy of the Trump presidency. The book examines Trump's attack on the "deep state" through the lens of institutional change theory, and demonstrates how he capitalized on tipping points and distinct leadership tactics to inspire, make deals with, and threaten people to get what he wanted. The book also assesses where the damage caused by the Trump administration is most likely to endure and where long-lasting damage was prevented. Sharp and insightful, *Institutions Under Siege* contrasts existing social science literature to draw attention to the unique significance of tipping points and the characteristics of particular leaders.

JOHN L. CAMPBELL is Class of 1925 Professor and Professor of Sociology Emeritus at Dartmouth College. He is a leading scholar on how institutions and politics affect policymaking and economic performance in advanced capitalist countries. He is the author of several books including *American Discontent: The Rise of Donald Trump and Decline of the Golden Age* (2018) and *What Capitalism Needs: Forgotten Lessons of Great Economists* (2021).

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Donald Trump's Attack on the Deep State

JOHN L. CAMPBELL
Dartmouth College

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To Kathy, Jessie, John, Ian, Elinore and Alex

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Preface

When Donald Trump was elected president in 2016 by the Electoral College despite losing the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by nearly 3 million votes, many Americans were shocked that a political novice – he had never held public office in his life – had won the presidency. And they worried that, combined with his inflammatory rhetoric and sometimes rash behavior, his inexperience would lead to bad judgment and poor policymaking. I worried too as I explained in my book *American Discontent: The Rise of Donald Trump and Decline of the Golden Age*, written shortly after the election. However, nobody, including me, expected Trump to lay siege to America's political institutions as he did. Nor did anybody expect things to go as badly as they did in terms of the damage he caused. That's what this book was originally going to be about.

However, as I began writing, my editor warned me that there would soon be a slew of books appearing that chronicled what had happened on Trump's watch. She urged me to bring a more analytical perspective to the story. She was right. These books have provided a wealth of descriptive information about the unprecedented nature of Trump's presidency. What they don't do, however, is identify either the full extent of the damage he caused to America's political institutions or, more importantly, the factors that enabled him to inflict that damage in the first place. So, this book tackles two questions: How bad was the damage Trump caused? And how did he manage to cause it?

This is a story of good news and bad news. The bad news is that Trump has done a lot of harm to some of our most valuable political institutions – harm with which we will have to live for years if not decades. The good news is that Trump's ability to damage America's institutions is, with one exception, over now that he is no longer president. But even this good news must be tempered with a strong dose of caution. For one thing, Trump is threatening to run for the presidency again in 2024. For another thing, how much of the damage the Biden administration or its successors can repair, and how long it will take,

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remain open questions. Finally, and this is the exception, although a few Republican politicians like Liz Cheney, Adam Kinzinger, Lisa Murkowski, and Mitt Romney have stood up to Trump and condemned his rhetoric and behavior, particularly his refusal to admit that he lost the 2020 election to Biden, many others – not to mention millions of Republican voters – still take their cues from Trump as some sort of political Messiah.

The darkest days of the Trump administration were during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been a disaster. But the lockdown-induced solitude it provided, like it or not, gave me a chance to write this book. And it gave some very generous colleagues time to read an early draft of the manuscript and offer their comments, criticisms, and advice on how to improve it. Among them is John Hall, with whom I have been discussing and writing about politics for years; Francesco Duina, a long-time source of constructive criticism; and Marc Dixon, Eddie Ashbee, and Alex Hicks, three astute observers of American politics. Others either read individual chapters or discussed some of the ideas in the book with me, including Lev Grinberg, Bob Jenkins, Peter Katzenstein, Ove Pedersen, and Sven Steinmo, all of whom helped me think more carefully about conceptual issues. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Richard Samuels, whom I have never met, but who years ago sent me a copy of his marvelous book *Machiavelli's Children*, which inspired me, as I was writing this book, to think about the importance of political leadership as a source of political change. Mike Allen wisely advised me to pare back the book's initially overly ambitious empirical scope. So did Sara Doskow, my first editor at Cambridge University Press, who expressed an early interest in this book and, as noted, convinced me that it needed an analytical frame. Two anonymous reviewers provided invaluable suggestions for improvement. Rachel Blaifeder, my second editor at the press, offered sage advice on how to revise the book once the reviews were in hand. I am grateful to them all.

I discussed some of the ideas in this book with my compatriots at "choir practice" and "prayer group," each held weekly at a local tavern. They continue to remind me that facts matter in debates about politics and many other subjects. More important, they prove week after week that people can use those facts in vigorous yet respectful debate without vilifying one another. I hope that those who read this book will keep that lesson in mind.

Finally, I thank my wife, Kathy Sherrieb, a Harvard-trained social epidemiologist, who has been holed up with me during the pandemic, tracking its morbidity and mortality statistics daily. She has been a source of support, comfort, inspiration, and love for over forty years. As a registered nurse, community health expert, and public health researcher, she devoted her entire professional life to helping others. Since then, she has done all sorts of volunteer and philanthropic work in our town, including starting a food pantry to help those suffering economically from the pandemic and other misfortunes. Donald Trump could learn a lot from her, just as I have.

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