

Introduction

Between November 3, 2020, and January 20, 2021, the United States experienced a combination of events that will be remembered as a tragic episode in American history. In the midst of a devastating pandemic, one president was soundly defeated and another sworn in; the first one refused to accept the results of the election while the second calmly took the reins of a government that was struggling to cope with the pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. In the midst of all this, the country was shaken by an attempted coup and by an attendant riot.¹ Although it may not be the case that this political and institutional shock “changed everything,” it certainly marked the peak – or the nadir – of what will surely be remembered as a “critical juncture”² in American history. But another “critical connection” that was exposed by the events of those two months was the enduring, but ever-changing, and often overlooked juncture between political parties and social movements. That critical connection is the subject of this book.

When Donald Trump lost the presidency on November 3, 2020, he claimed that the election had been “rigged” against him and that he had actually triumphed over his Democratic opponent, Joseph R. Biden. “Dead people” and individuals under the voting age had been dredged up to defeat him, Trump argued, and “voting by mail” (a method he himself had used to cast

¹ For a reading of what happened that day as the combination of a coup and a riot, see Jeff Goodwin, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Donald J. Trump.” www.pwsc.us/conflicted-the-pwsc-official-blog/blog/the-eighteenth-brumaire-of-donald-j-trump?fbclid=IwARoNuirjoSzaH7Dc_ZbsA4t-N-v2g2OCACYrug_YrAWUl-j3jkWkAXbwOMU

² The concept of “critical junctures” comes out of a tradition in comparative politics, first in the work of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) and then in that of David and Ruth Collier (1991). Working with Gerardo Munck, David Collier revived the study of critical junctures in their 2022 edited volume, *Critical Junctures and Historical Legacies: Insights and Methods for Comparative Social Science*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

his ballot in Florida) was used in many states to aid a massive electoral scam, even in states – like Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania – whose legislatures were in the hands of Republicans. Hundreds of Republican legislators – many of them elected in the same states that Trump was accusing of having rigged the presidential election – rose up to join a campaign that Trump and his supporters labeled “Stop the Steal.”

Over the next month, employing millions of dollars in donations from supporters and a tribe of apparently willing lawyers, Trump proceeded to take state election authorities to court over the electoral improprieties he had claimed were used against him. Supported by his personal lawyer and former New York City mayor, Rudolf Giuliani, the Trump campaign took more than eighty cases to court against six different states. They lost them all, spectacularly so in the Supreme Court, which did not even deign to consider his brief.³ So far-fetched was Trump’s legal campaign that it was bound to fail, but its real intent was to undermine the legitimacy of the election that Biden had won by more than seven million votes. In that goal, Trump succeeded: By mid-November, half of Republican voters believed that the election had been stolen;⁴ by early December, the proportion had actually increased to 77 percent.⁵ In response, and across the country, a social movement began to mobilize around the demand to “Stop the Steal!”⁶

The success of Trump’s campaign to convince Republican voters that Trump had won the election had a feedback effect on the party’s elite, which had long been terrified of what he could do to their political futures if he turned against them. On December 11, 126 Republican members of the House of Representatives signed an amicus brief in support of the State of Texas’ complaint that the votes of four other states should be declared invalid because of electoral irregularities. Although Texas’ suit was slapped down by the Supreme Court,⁷ the effect was to convince a number of Congress members to “object” to the certification of the election in a number of “swing states” that had voted Democratic. Led by presidential wannabees Josh Hawley of Missouri and Ted Cruz of Texas, the dissenters forced congressional leaders to schedule debates on the “objections” on January 6, 2021, in both houses of Congress.

That was the day when President Trump had called a “March to Save America” rally in Washington, DC, where he emerged from the White House to support his claim of election fraud. Encouraged by the president and by his sons, Don Jr. and Eric, and by his lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, the rally was organized

³ www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump/u-s-supreme-court-swiftly-ends-trump-backed-texas-bid-to-upend-election-results-idUSKBN28L2YY

⁴ www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-poll/half-of-republicans-say-biden-won-because-of-a-rigged-election-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKBN27Y1AJ

⁵ www.courant.com/politics/hc-pol-q-poll-republicans-believe-fraud-20201210-pcie3uqqrhyvnt7geohhsyep-story.html

⁶ On January 10, 2020, I found 427 million hits on Google for the phrase “stop the steal!”

⁷ www.nytimes.com/2020/12/11/us/politics/supreme-court-election-texas.html

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by a nonprofit group called “Women for America First,” which was headed by a former Tea Party leader, Kylie Jane Kremer, who tweeted, “The Cavalry Is Coming, Mr. President!”⁸ A number of other movement groups supported the initiative.

This was not just a movement-based event: Supporting the rally was a policy arm of the Republican Attorneys’ General Association and the Rule of Law Defense Fund, which sent out robocalls inviting recipients to “march to the Capitol building and call on Congress to stop the steal.”⁹ Parties and movements congealed behind the claims of a president who seemed intent on overturning the results of a repeatedly certified election.

As the “March to Save America” got underway, parallel events were mounted around the country. In Phoenix, a mysterious group brought a guillotine to a gathering outside the Capitol; in Sacramento, a right wing militia, the Three Percenters, and the street-fighting group, the Proud Boys, confronted counterprotesters in a violent melee; in Tallahassee, another Proud Boys detachment rallied outside the capitol in support of stopping the steal; in Georgia, which had just elected two Democrats to the US Senate, the leader of a right-wing group called American Patriots USA roamed the Capitol, looking for Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who had refused Trump’s demand that he “find 11,000 votes” to overturn the election; in St. Paul, more than 500 Trump supporters, many of them dressed in colonial-era costumes, cheered when they learned of the outcome of the protest in Washington.¹⁰

As the debate on the “objections” began in the Capitol, Trump addressed the demonstrators who had converged from around the country to support his claim that the election had been rigged. Warming up the crowd with his traditional diatribe against the media, he urged Vice President Mike Pence, who was presiding over the Senate debate, to overturn the election result. “We will never give up! We will never concede!” he told the cheering crowd, concluding with a rousing call for them to march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol to put pressure on Congress to support the objectors. “Now it is up to Congress to confront this egregious assault on our democracy,” Trump declared.

⁸ www.cnn.com/2021/01/09/pro-trump-dark-money-groups-organized-the-rally-that-led-to-deadly-capitol-hill-riot.html. Kremer had served as president of the Tea Party Express, a minor group in the spectrum of the Tea Party movement that was founded in 2009. Go to <http://teapartyexpress.org> for its self-presentation.

⁹ www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/republican-ags-group-sent-robocalls-urging-march-capitol-n1253581. Officials of both organizations denied that they had approved of the call to march on the Capitol. Members of the Trump campaign also supported the rally but, in its wake, took down their social media accounts and tried to disappear into the political woodwork. For a report ten days after the rally and the riot, see www.nytimes.com/2021/01/16/us/capitol-riot-funding.html.

¹⁰ These events are summarized from Fabiola Cineas, “The Insurrection is Happening at State Capitols Too,” on *Vox*, January 6, 2021. www.vox.com/2021/1/6/22217736/state-capitol-stop-the-steal-protests-rallies

We're going to walk down to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators, and congressmen and women You have to show strength, and you have to be strong But we're going to try and give our Republicans, the weak ones, because the strong ones don't need any of our help, we're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.¹¹

Trump's invitation to march on the Capitol would turn into one of the most explosive combinations of movement/party relations in American history, for among the demonstrators were organized groups that had come to Washington expressly to invade the Capitol, cause mayhem, influence the votes on the "objections," and do violence to congressional leaders like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and even the loyal vice president, who had told Trump he did not have the power to stop the certification of the election. Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi were marked as special targets of the invaders.

This was not the first time that a movement and a party had converged around an American election. Since the 1850s, where the accounts in this book will begin, the relationship between movements and parties has been both constant and changing. It has been constant because movements have repeatedly joined their forces with parties in elections and pressured them to make policy changes, sometimes aligning with these parties and often opposing them. All through American history, movements have been sometimes silent, often noisy participants at the gates of institutional politics (Tarrow 2012). In turn, movements have often been transformed by their encounters with parties, sometimes becoming what sociologists call "institutionalized" and sometimes becoming parties themselves.

At the same time, the relationship between parties and movements had also evolved. Compared to the plot to assassinate Lincoln as he made his way to Washington for his inauguration, movements today possess resources that could not have been imagined in 1861 or even when the labor movement rose to support Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1930s. The party system as an institution has been "hollowed out" even as the polarization between the two major parties has widened. These changes mean that we will have to examine two kinds of dynamics in this book: first, the changing dynamics *within* particular cycles of contention; and, second, *the long-term changes* that have led to our current conjuncture of parties and movements. These are the dynamics that I hope to understand through a comparative study of a number of key episodes in American history, beginning with the one that led to the Civil War and ending with the struggle between Trumpism and democracy today.

Political scientists have usually seen political participation operating along two registers: the articulation of interests/identities/ideologies and their aggregation to build electoral majorities. Analysts have sometimes assigned

¹¹ For the complete transcript of Trump's remarks, go to www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-speech-save-america-rally-transcript-january-6

these two functions to different types of political organizations (e.g., while movements and interest groups “articulate” interests, parties “aggregate” them). But as many of the cases in this book will show, this division of labor does not always map neatly into these two boxes. Particularly during cycles of contention like the one that peaked in January 2021, movements and parties engage in reciprocal relations, often cooperating – as congressional Republicans and the mob that invaded the Capitol did on January 6, 2021 – but sometimes clashing – as did the women who had demonstrated against Donald Trump four years earlier (Berry & Chenoweth 2018).

Although not all social movements are oriented toward electoral politics, when movements do turn to political engagement, the relationship is shaped in large part by their interactions with parties. Sometimes movements advance policy demands that can be integrated into parties or institutions, but movements can also champion transformative agendas, like the abolition of slavery or votes for women. Their success is shaped by both their ability to combine insider and outsider tactics and by the conditions of the parties themselves – whether they are vulnerable to outside influence, as the new Republican Party was in 1860, or are in need of new blood, as the same party was in 2016.

Whatever the situation of the party system at any given time, the impact of movement/party engagement is not limited to a particular election. This is why I will examine “long movements,” like the Civil Rights movement or the long Republican Right, as well as shorter cycles of contention. Over time, movements seek rule changes that increase their influence on the party system – like expanding access to the vote for black southerners in the 1960s – and party leaders try to capture new constituencies by responding to their demands and, at times, coopting the movements that placed these demands on the agenda. Movement insurgencies also trigger reactive sequences (Mahoney 2000) that generate durable forms of backlash politics – like the reactions against Reconstruction that led to the Ku Klux Klan and the Jim Crow South or the movement for civil rights in the 1960s that turned white southerners into the core electorate of the Republican Party. We will see that the interaction between movements and the countermovements they trigger is one of the driving forces of American political development.

Of course, most episodes of movement/party interaction lacked the drama and the danger to democracy of what happened in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021. When we examine movement/party relations in the broad sweep of American history, we will find long periods of relative stability and shorter episodes in which these dynamics have profound influences on the party system and the fate of future movements. In these historical moments, interactions sped up, new alliances and new axes of conflict developed, old institutions were threatened, and new ones were created; the very shape of the regime was often profoundly affected.

Sometimes these moments exploded – as in 1861, when the South seceded after the election of an abolitionist-backed Republican president – but more often, they were embedded in broader periods of contention. What Charles Tilly writes of revolutions is true of such periods of contention: “They do not resemble eclipses of the sun,” he wrote, but “resemble traffic jams, which vary greatly in form and severity, merge imperceptibly into routine vehicular flows, develop from those flows, and happen in different circumstances for a number of different reasons” (1993: 7).

WHAT CAN THESE REFLECTIONS TELL US ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOVEMENTS AND PARTIES TODAY?

First, we are living in what David Meyer and I called, in a book by the same title, a “social movement society,” in which the lines between movements and other actors are more blurred than they once were (Meyer & Tarrow (eds.) 1998).

Second, we are now living in a country in which the parties have been “hollowed out” (Schlozman & Rosenfeld 2019). Although this occurred in other industrial countries as well (Mair 2013), in America, the decline was accompanied by institutional changes like the universalization of the direct primary and changes in campaign finance laws.

Third, this combination has opened spaces for new hybrid forms of activism to be created both within and on the boundaries of the traditional parties (see Chapters 5–7). These new forms of activism can provide candidates with an infrastructure during electoral campaigns – as they did during the Trump campaign of 2016 – but they operate independently of the parties and, to some extent, have impinged on their territory.

Fourth, these interactions have been increasingly influenced by the growing partisan coloration of the state – and particularly, of the executive. Although the antebellum state was so sparse that the Lincoln administration had to create new mechanisms with which to support the war (Bensel 1990), the national state has become the major site of both partisan and movement activity (Milkis & Tichenor 2019).

Finally, these changes in relative power and position have led to an intensification of movement/party relations over time. In 1860, observers would not have considered the young Wide-Awake movement that mobilized to support the Lincoln campaign as part of Lincoln’s “base” (Grinspan 2016), but President Trump went into the 2020 elections with a support base that had essentially fused with the Republican Party (see Chapter 7). It was a part of that support base that produced the attempted coup and the riot at the Capitol in January 2021.

Taken together, these changes have led to a partial “movementization” of parties in which political polarization has reached down from the summit of the political system to meet insurgents from the grassroots. The evidence for this double movement will be seen in a number of ways. The participation of social

movements in elections is the most obvious one (McAdam & Tarrow 2010), but it is not alone. As I hope to show in this book, the dynamics of movement/party relations have taken five major forms over the last century and a half:

- In the short run, movements *introduce new forms of contentious collective action* to influence election campaigns.
- Also in the short run, they can join electoral coalitions.
- In the slightly longer run, movements trigger *the formation of countermovements*, which can produce profound reactive sequences.
- In the longer run, *movements and parties affect each other*.
- They also affect the future of political institutions and of the regime itself.

Though some of the movement/party linkages we will examine – like Reconstruction and the extension of the vote to women – “bent toward justice,” others led in the opposite direction – toward the creation of authoritarian enclaves, the embedding of white supremacy in the South, and the disenfranchisement of vast sectors of the citizenry (Bateman 2018). The broadest question I will raise in this book is whether and how, by entering, challenging, or altering parties, movements have helped to reconstruct key features of the American political regime.

In Chapter 1, aimed mainly at specialists on parties and movements, I will examine a number of traditions of research on parties, movements, and on their interactions before turning to a series of studies of these relationships during crucial periods of American history. In Chapter 2, I will examine the Civil War juncture, beginning with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and ending with the collapse of Reconstruction. In Chapter 3, I will turn to the farmers’ insurgency in the South and West in the 1880s and 1890s, which ended with their failed effort to enter national politics as the Populist Party in 1896. In Chapter 4, I will turn to the women’s movement and to the franchise campaign that succeeded in 1920 but failed to put a female stamp on national politics in the years that followed.

That period was followed by the decades from the Great Depression to the 1960s, when both the labor movement and civil rights entered a new phase of relations with the party system, relations that I will examine in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 turns to the “long” New Right and its relationship to the Republican Party between the failed Goldwater campaign of 1964 and its conquest of power under Ronald Reagan. Chapter 7 shifts to an examination of the “hybrid” forms of organization that have both seconded and challenged the party system since the 1960s before turning, in Chapter 8, to the interaction between Trumpism and the anti-Trump movement. In Chapter 9, I will draw on my experiences as a comparativist to examine three countries in which movement/party relations also intervened in threats to and in transitions to democracy: Italy after World War I; South Korea during the 1980s; and Chile in the thirty years that followed the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship. Although

these three cases are very different than the United States, they each hold lessons for the defense of democracy in this country. The conclusions recapitulate the findings of the study and reflect on their implications for the defense of democracy in America today.

There have always been threats to American democracy, but they did not randomly occur. “Rather,” write Suzanne Mettler and Robert Lieberman, “they developed in the presence of four specific threats: *political polarization, conflict over who belongs in the political community, high and growing economic inequality, and excessive executive power*” (2020: 5–6, italics added).¹² America finds itself today in a situation in which “all four threats to democracy loom large simultaneously What’s more,” these authors warn, “they have begun to combine with each other in ways that intensify their destructive power” (pp. 237–38), which is what we saw in the events of November 2020 to January 2021. Mettler and Lieberman conclude their book by pointing out that deliberate choices by political leaders either promoted or opposed each of the four threats they detail.

Mettler and Lieberman are not wrong, but this book should add an important element to their analysis – social movements. Just as particular configurations of parties and movements have sometimes advanced “the arc of history” toward democracy, different configurations of movements and parties have taken the country in the opposite direction – as we saw on January 6, 2021. Beginning with the abolitionist/Republican alliance of 1860 and ending with the Trumpian/Republican collusion of 2020–21, this book will seek to deconstruct important episodes of movement/party interactions in American political development and construct “superior stories” that both reveal their dynamics and their outcomes for democracy.

¹² I am grateful to Professors Lieberman, Mettler, and their colleagues in the *American Democracy Collaborative* (<https://americandemocracycollaborative.org>) for including me in their deliberations. In addition to Mettler and Lieberman’s *Four Threats*, see Robert Lieberman, Suzanne Mettler, and Kenneth Roberts (eds.). *Democratic Resilience: Can the United States Withstand Rising Polarization?* (2021).