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## **The situation in the USA**

Part I: Checks and balances or deep state? To what extent could civil war-like conditions or fascism be imminent in the USA?

by NORBERT F. TOFALL

### Abstract

For Trump, the Deep State is the enemy of MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN. If MAGA is to succeed this time, the Deep State must be destroyed. People in the judiciary and politics who oppose Trump and MAGA should therefore be removed.

### Zusammenfassung

Für Trump ist der Deep State der Feind von MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN. Soll MAGA diesmal gelingen, muß der Deep State vernichtet werden. Personen in Justiz und Politik, die sich gegen Trump und MAGA stellen, sollen deshalb entfernt werden.



## I.

US President Joe Biden has not come close to reducing political and social polarisation in the US during his time in office. And former President Donald Trump, despite his election defeat in November 2020, despite the storming of the Capitol in January 2021 and despite criminal charges, has not yet been politically disenchanted and appears to have a stronger grip on the Republican Party than ever before. His constantly repeated claim that his 2020 election victory was stolen from him has not only further fuelled polarisation in the US, but has also weakened and damaged the trust of many Americans in the stability of US political institutions. Sooner or later, damaged trust in political institutions always has consequences for the economy.

In recent years, the incumbent US President Joe Biden has pursued a debt-financed economic policy programme in which many supporters of the Republican Party already see socialism at work, but which does not go far enough for many supporters of the Democratic Party. In addition, the culture war fronts in the USA, which are characterised by right-wing and left-wing identity politics, have an impact on economic policy. This is because the culture war fronts prevent the formulation of an economic and political programme that could gain sufficient support across party lines and is also suitable for ending political and economic procrastination and policy blockades.

As the institutional political structures in the USA are not designed for unilateral directional decisions - on the contrary, these are supposed to be prevented by checks and balances - political polarisation in the USA regularly leads to political blockades and procrastination. Political blockades and procrastination then increase political and social polarisation once again.

It is unlikely that this vicious circle can be broken by the US elections in November 2024. Although the nomination of Nikki Haley as the Republican Party's presidential candidate could slow down the pace of this vicious circle, it does not currently look likely that Nikki Haley will prevail against Donald Trump in the Republican primaries. Unless Trump is excluded from the presidential election by court order, a repeat of the Biden v Trump duel remains likely at present.

On the one hand, it is to be feared that if Joe Biden wins the election again, a defeated Donald Trump and his supporters will again claim that Trump's victory was stolen from him. A new storming of the Capitol or other forms of civil war-like action could be the result. But even if Donald Trump wins the election, especially if it is by a narrow margin, civil war-like actions from his opponents' camp cannot be ruled out.



On the other hand, Donald Trump's election victory threatens to systematically undermine the "checks and balances", i.e. a restructuring of the US constitutional order, on the grounds that the "Deep State" had already massively obstructed Donald Trump's policies during his first term in office and even stole his election victory in November 2020. Joe Biden and his supporters are therefore warning of deliberate damage to democracy by Donald Trump after his possible re-election and of a rising fascism in the USA.

Donald Trump is certainly not an ideological fascist<sup>1</sup> like Mussolini or Hitler or even a follower of the intellectual world of the so-called "Conservative Revolution"<sup>2</sup> in Germany from 1918 to 1932, which was not conservative but fascist.<sup>3</sup> Comparisons with General Franco and the Spanish Falange are also misleading. And the aesthetics of Gabriele D'Annunzio, who occupied Fiume in 1919 and cultivated many forms of fascist rule in this commune and anticipated forms of life of the later left-wing 1968 movement,<sup>4</sup> do not suit Trump either. Although Donald Trump, like D'Annunzio, is a master of "fiction, politics and populism"<sup>5</sup>, he completely lacks the literary education and grandeur of D'Annunzio. In order to recognise that Donald Trump's abysmal self-absorption and his preference for orders and directives, which goes hand in hand with an enormous lack of scruples and demagogic crudeness, damages democratic institutions and can therefore certainly lead to fascism, a different approach must be taken.

## II.

Months before Donald Trump was first chosen as the Republican Party's presidential candidate in the USA, the Flossbach von Storch Research Institute had already characterised Donald Trump as the Clodius Pulcher of the USA in March 2016 and warned that "we should take the great game he has been playing since 16 June 2015 very seriously":<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the manifestations and ideology of fascism still worth living ERNST NOLTE: *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche. Action française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (1963), new edition 1984, 8th edition, Munich (Piper) 1990.

<sup>2</sup> See ARMIN MOHLER: *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932. Ein Handbuch*, 4th edition, Darmstadt (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Armin Mohler himself explained this in an interview with the Leipziger Volkszeitung newspaper on 25/26 November 1995: "For me, fascism is when disappointed liberals and disappointed socialists come together to form something new. The result is what is called a conservative revolution."

<sup>4</sup> See KERSTEN KIPP: *The Commune of the Fascists. Gabriele D'Annunzio, the Republic of Fiume and the extremes of the 20th century*, Wiesbaden (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 2018.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.* chapter 9 "Demagogic legacy. Fiction, politics, populism", p. 234 f.

<sup>6</sup> See NORBERT F. TOFALL: *Donald Trump - the Clodius Pulcher of the USA*, economic policy commentary by the FLOSSBACH VON STORCH RESEARCH INSTITUTE, 4 March 2016.



Publius Claudius Pulcher (92 BC - 52 BC) was a politician during the period of decay of the Roman Republic. He came from the patrician family of the Claudians. He adopted the plebeian-sounding name Clodius after being adopted by a plebeian in order to become tribune of the people in 59 BC. One of his first official acts as tribune of the people was to propose a law providing for the free distribution of grain to the people. Three years earlier, Clodius had escaped conviction for *incestum* because he had successfully bribed the jury. Clodius relied on the Roman plebs to enforce his policies and used violence and street fighting to destroy public order and political institutions.

But the Roman plebs loved and adored Clodius. For Clodius Pulcher fought against the established elites, who in their view were enriching themselves without restraint, exploiting the Roman polity and not adhering to the traditional customs and rules that were held in such high esteem in public. Although Clodius also came from this establishment and enriched himself even more unrestrainedly than his peers, he openly admitted this without shame. His success consisted precisely in having elevated this shamelessness and contempt for traditional customs and rules to a principle.

Clodius Pulcher and Donald Trump and other popular entertainment stars with political ambitions deliberately aim to reinforce and remove the boundaries of a human defect that is part of the *human condition* and represents a negative basic anthropological constant. In his book "*I saw Satan fall from the sky like lightning*", René Girard describes the human defect as "mimetic rivalry", which can increase through "mimetic contagion" to "mimetic furore".<sup>7</sup>

If rules and systems of rules are deliberately and permanently violated for whatever supposedly good reasons, and above all violated by those who by virtue of their office have a duty to observe them, then the mimetic rivalries between people in a society can no longer be civilised with reference to morality, decency, traditional customs and rules. The argument that morality and decency, traditional customs and rules ensure prosperity for all is no longer believed. The established elites in

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<sup>7</sup> See RENÉ GIRARD: *Ich sah den Satan vom Himmel fallen wie einen Blitz. Eine kritische Apologie des Christentums*, translated from the French by Elisabeth Mainberger-Ruth, with an epilogue by Peter Sloterdijk, Frankfurt a. M. and Leipzig (Verlag der Weltreligionen im Insel Verlag) 2008. Mimetic rivalries are understood as the rivalries between people that arise from "imitation" (mimesis): Precisely because my neighbour covets the concrete house that I also covet, my desire increases even more, the coveted object becomes even more desirable. I imitate the other person's desire for an object and they imitate mine, which is why imitative desire can quickly escalate into furore. Even small children find a toy most interesting when other children are playing with it. A fight in the sandpit is often the result. In order to minimise this war or furore, we try to teach even small children what is mine and what is yours, what is property. Attempts are made to enforce rules and systems of rules. Furthermore, we try to teach children not to orientate themselves towards others. Attempts are made to break through mimetic rivalry or at least to civilise it: "You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, manservant, maidservant, ox, donkey or anything else your neighbour has" (Exodus 20:17).



business, the media, politics and academia are losing trust because they have often participated in the enforcement of special interests at the expense of others, but do not admit this failure and even pretend that they are complying with the applicable rules and regulatory systems.

As the mimetic rivalries between people can no longer be civilised in such social crisis situations, they are out in the open and are increasingly being played out. Now they just need to be fuelled to create a furore through mimetic contagion that will shake the existing order and regulatory systems. More and more people are infected, which escalates into a mimetic furore. Increased friend-foe polarisation gives the mimetic rivalries a target towards which the unleashed aggression of individuals can be directed. The resulting political and social polarisation is deliberately not minimised, but maximised and carried into all political and social areas.

To set this process in motion, someone has to cast the first stone. And only those throw the first stone who don't care that they are not without sin, and who know full well that it is precisely by publicly displaying their own wickedness and shamelessness that they reap the applause of the angry masses. Because the angry masses are thirsting for someone to confirm to them that things are just as wicked up there as they have always suspected. And who can do this more credibly than someone who is even more wicked than his peers, who is, as it were, the high priest of human darkness.

Thanks to his many years of experience as a media entrepreneur and popular entertainment star, Donald Trump knew exactly how to act in 2015/2016 in order to set such a social and political process towards a mimetic furore in motion. He had successfully staged such processes playfully in his TV shows for years. His statement that he could shoot someone in the street and still not lose popularity is instructive.

Trump therefore had no qualms about claiming weeks before the presidential election in November 2020 that if he lost the election, the Deep State would have stolen it from him. By constantly repeating this lie that the Deep State stole the 2020 election victory from him, Trump has kept the social and political furore in the country on the boil. The social pacification function of democratic elections has been purposefully destroyed as a result. On the other hand, this lie serves as a means of differentiation and discipline within the Republican Party. Anyone who does not support this lie or even openly opposes it is a traitor and will be persecuted and ostracised by Trump and his supporters.



Trump is thus using the same means that *Action française* used in the course of the Dreyfus affair. "The Action française is the first political grouping of influence and intellectual standing to have unmistakable fascist traits."<sup>8</sup> Here too, a lie - that the French officer and Jew Alfred Dreyfus was a German spy and traitor to state secrets - was used as a mechanism of distinction and discipline in the sense that those who oppose this lie are enemies of France.<sup>9</sup> For Trump and his supporters, all those who oppose the lie that Trump's 2020 election victory was stolen are enemies of "MAGA" - enemies of "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN".

In this view, the "checks and balances" of the US Constitution, which are also intended to limit the political options of an elected president, are denounced as part of the "Deep State", a Deep State that opposes MAGA. If MAGA is to succeed this time, the Deep State must be destroyed. That is why Donald Trump has announced that if he wins the election in November 2024, he will replace all those in the judiciary and politics who have stood in his way. It is unlikely that this can be realised without damaging the independence of the courts and without undermining the checks and balances.

### III.

With his aggressive and ruthless Clodius-Pulcher style of politics, Donald Trump may be the biggest beneficiary of political and social polarisation in the USA, but he did not cause this polarisation. Without the increasing polarisation in the USA over the past two and a half decades, a character like Donald Trump would not have had the slightest chance of becoming President of the United States of America in 2016. And without the polarisation that already existed before 2016, Donald Trump would not have succeeded in having the Republican Party under his control more than ever in 2024 after his election defeat in November 2020, after the storming of the Capitol in January 2021 and, above all, in view of his many criminal proceedings.

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<sup>8</sup> ERNST NOLTE, *OP. CIT.* p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> See ERNST NOLTE, *OP. CIT.*, p. 90: "The history of Action française begins with the Dreyfus affair." The founder of the Action française, Charles Maurras, sided with Dreyfus' accusers in an article and, in the name of protecting the French nation, took part in the increasingly obvious lie that the French officer and Jew Alfred Dreyfus was a German spy and traitor to state secrets: "Until his death, he will have to justify the article in which he always claimed to see 'the best and in every case most useful deed' of his life. For there can be no doubt that this article was a lie and that Maurras was under no illusion about it. (...) But he was seriously enough convinced that France's existence was threatened from within and without and that the army was in every way the ultimate guarantee of its existence. And in this respect, the Dreyfusards were dangerous enemies, especially *if* Dreyfus was innocent" (p. 93).



As early as 1999, Gertrude Himmelfarb, a follower of the political philosopher Leo Strauss and wife of the neo-conservative Irving Kristol, wrote in her pamphlet "One Nation, Two Cultures":

"The cultural divide helps explain the peculiar, almost schizoid nature of our present condition: the evidence of moral disarray on the one hand and of a religious-cum-moral revival on the other. This disjunction is apparent in small matters and large... The polarisation is most conspicuous in such hotly disputed issues as abortion, gay marriage, school vouchers, and prayers in public schools. But it has larger ramifications, affecting beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices on a host of subjects ranging from private morality to public policy, from popular culture to high culture, from crime to education, welfare, and the family. In some respects, it is even more divisive than the class polarisation that Karl Marx saw as the crucial fact of life under capitalism."<sup>10</sup>

*Firstly*, it is remarkable that the polarisation issues identified by Gertrude Himmelfarb back in 1999 seem to be even more relevant today than they were 25 years ago. It is no coincidence that the issues of abortion and gender identity will play a major role in the upcoming election campaign of 2024. Over the years, supporters of right-wing identity politics have rallied behind the MAGA label and supporters of left-wing identity politics have rallied behind the LGBTQ label, accusing each other of bringing about the downfall of the nation and the destruction of freedom. *Secondly*, Himmelfarb's observation that these cultural fronts have an impact on all areas of society and politics has been reinforced.

The issue of migration is so important for the 2024 election campaign that Donald Trump is currently doing everything he can to ensure that the issue of migration is not removed as a campaign issue by a budget compromise between the Republican and Democratic parties on funding for border protection, Ukraine and Israel. The culture war behind the migration issue is seen by Trump as more important for mobilising voters than pragmatic steps to improve the migration problem. Pragmatic steps to improve the migration problem are being deliberately blocked and the solution to the problem is being further delayed. And the issue of migration is just one example of this Clodius-Pulcher style of politics.

Every politician in the USA and every US citizen who is only halfway informed knows about the need to reach compromises in the face of checks and balances. However, the fact that the deliberate torpedoing of compromises, which leads to policy blockades and protraction of problems, is no longer regarded as a vice in the USA, but as destructive and therefore disqualifying for office, shows that the cultural fronts and

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<sup>10</sup> GERTRUDE HIMMELFARB: *One Nation, Two Cultures. A Searching Examination of American Society in the Aftermath of Our Cultural Revolution*, New York (Random House) 1999, pp. 117 - 118.



the culture war in the USA are no longer a problem, that the cultural front lines and the culture war in the USA undermine the general recognition of and respect for checks and balances and override a cross-party constitutional patriotism based on these rules - in the sense of the commonality of all citizens of a liberal community, which is reflected in respect for the common rules. And it is precisely for this reason that it is to be feared that if Donald Trump wins the election in November 2024, subsequent attempts to undermine the checks and balances in order to destroy the Deep State will not be met with the necessary cross-party resistance. Leveraging the checks and balances to destroy the Deep State is likely to be cheered by many MAGA supporters. Whether LGBTQ supporters and other anti-Trumpists will put up with the destruction of the alleged "Deep State" without resistance is by no means certain.

In other words, the danger that US democracy could be damaged and a new form of fascism could emerge does not follow from the fact that Trump is an ideological fascist, which he is not. The danger of damage to US democracy follows from the fact that the dominant cultural struggle between MAGA and LGBTQ in the USA forms the ideal social constellation for a character like Donald Trump to succeed politically, even at the expense of democracy, through his abysmal self-absorption and his preference for orders and directives, which goes hand in hand with an enormous lack of scruples and demagogic crudeness. All he has to do is keep the mimetic furore boiling with his Clodius-Pulcher style of politics.

#### IV.

Unlike in 2016, when Donald Trump was left without a formulated government programme and without sufficient personnel after his election victory, Trump is prepared in 2024 in terms of his programme and personnel. After winning the election in November 2024 and assuming power in January 2025, Trump could immediately fill government posts and formulate and sign executive orders without major delays. There is a "government in waiting" that could quickly take up its work.

The *America First Policy Institute (AFPI)*<sup>11</sup> and the *Heritage Foundation* have done extensive preparatory work. With its "Project 2025. Presidential Transition Project", the Heritage Foundation has not only had a possible government programme formulated on over 900 pages,<sup>12</sup> but has also set up a personnel pool called the

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://americafirstpolicy.com/>

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.project2025.org/policy/>





"Presidential Personnel Database"<sup>13</sup> and also offers corresponding training courses in a "Presidential Administration Academy".<sup>14</sup>

In Part II on the situation in the USA, we will compare the ideas on economic and trade policy and on foreign and security policy of Donald Trump's Republican camp with those of Joe Biden's Democratic camp and analyse the potential geopolitical impact of each. Due to the cultural fronts in the USA and their impact on all other policy areas described in detail in this Part I, the following points should be noted here:

*Firstly*, the extensive programme proposals and personnel preparations for Donald Trump are a strong indication that Donald Trump will be able to get started quickly if he wins the election. However, he needs the approval of both the House of Representatives and the Senate for any legislation, which is only likely if the Republican Party wins a majority in both houses of Congress in the November elections. If this is not the case, he will have to rely on cross-party compromises. Due to the culture war that he himself has fuelled, compromises on many issues are not very likely, which will lead to further policy blockades and procrastination. Trump may then be tempted to govern increasingly through executive orders and to explore and expand their limits, giving the courts a decisive role. This is where his statements that he will be dictator, but only for a day, become significant. He has announced that he wants to destroy the so-called Deep State. However, this is likely to be difficult to realise without violating the checks and balances. This means that a government programme, no matter how comprehensive and already formulated, could be thwarted by the checks and balances, but this is precisely what increases the temptation for Trump to undermine the checks and balances.

*Secondly*, it is not at all clear to what extent a character like Donald Trump feels bound by the programme ideas of his supporters and the personnel they have selected. Before his election victory in 2016, Trump promised to introduce the Taylor Rule for monetary policy. After his election victory, he no longer wanted to know anything about it. A character like Trump doesn't think much of rule-based policy. Although he promises to make things easier for the economy, he has no interest in regulatory policy in the sense of general and abstract rules due to his preference for orders and directives. This is probably also the reason why Trump does not have the undivided support of the US economy. It is difficult to determine whether the majority of the US business community is behind Trump. For example, the Koch brothers have always been against Trump and support Nikki Haley with considerable financial resources. The fact that Nikki Haley will probably not prevail against Trump in the current primaries has nothing to do with a lack of support from

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.project2025.org/personnel/>

<sup>14</sup> See h <https://www.project2025.org/training/presidential-administration-academy/>



business circles. Despite considerable financial support from business circles, Nikki Haley is currently unable to prevail against Trump because cultural fronts and culture wars dominate and extend into all areas of politics.

*Thirdly*, Nikki Haley probably only has a chance of becoming the Republican Party's presidential candidate if the ongoing legal proceedings against Donald Trump for attempted electoral fraud or involvement in the storming of the Capitol result in Donald Trump not being allowed to run as a presidential candidate in November. Whether Trump's supporters will peacefully accept a court-ordered exclusion of Trump from the election is unlikely. Trump will certainly characterise such a decision as a targeted intrigue by the Deep State and call for resistance. Civil war-like actions cannot then be ruled out.

*Fourthly*: If Donald Trump is not excluded from the presidential election by court order, a renewed duel between Trump and Biden is likely as things stand today (7 February 2024). Biden is 81, Trump is 77, and both have already had age-related failures on the public stage, Biden more often than Trump. Both could drop out before November for health reasons. For this reason alone, no one should place bets on the outcome of the election. A nation like the USA with over 330 million inhabitants does not seem to be in a position to send younger candidates into the race at the moment. The underlying reasons for this may lie in the polarisation of US society and the increasingly fierce culture war. But even younger candidates are no guarantee of overcoming polarisation. So far, no politician in the USA has presented a programme for overcoming polarisation. Damage to democracy in the USA and the danger of a new form of fascism are not the result of Donald Trump's self-indulgent behaviour, but of the fact that no effective political movement to overcome polarisation has yet emerged in the USA.



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