

One Single Day. That's All It Took for the World to Look Away From Us.

 [nytimes.com/2022/01/05/opinion/jan-6-global-democracy.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/opinion/jan-6-global-democracy.html)

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Up until Jan. 6, one might have seen these developments through the lens of ordinary American politics, with its disagreements on issues like trade, immigration and abortion. But the uprising marked the moment when a significant minority of Americans showed themselves willing to turn against American democracy itself and to use violence to achieve their ends. What has made Jan. 6 a particularly alarming stain (and strain) on U.S. democracy is the fact that the Republican Party, far from repudiating those who initiated and participated in the uprising, has sought to normalize it and purge from its own ranks those who were willing to tell the truth about the 2020 election as it looks ahead to 2024, when Mr. Trump might seek a restoration.

The impact of this event is still playing out on the global stage. Over the years, authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin of Russia and Aleksandr Lukashenko of Belarus have sought to manipulate election results and deny popular will. Conversely, losing candidates in elections in new democracies have often charged voter fraud in the face of largely free and fair elections. This happened last year in Peru, when Keiko Fujimori contested her loss to Pedro Castillo in the second round of the country's presidential election. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has been laying the grounds for contesting this year's presidential election by attacking the functioning of Brazil's voting system, just as Mr. Trump spent the lead-up to the 2020 election undermining confidence in mail-in ballots.

Before Jan. 6, these kinds of antics would have been seen as the behavior of young and incompletely consolidated democracies, and the United States would have wagged its finger in condemnation. But it has now happened in the United States itself. America's credibility in upholding a model of good democratic practice has been shredded.

This precedent is bad enough, but there are potentially even more dangerous consequences of Jan. 6. The global rollback of democracy has been led by two rising authoritarian countries, Russia and China. Both powers have irredentist claims on other people's territory. President Putin has stated openly that he does not believe Ukraine to be a legitimately independent country but rather part of a much larger Russia. He has massed troops on Ukraine's borders and has been testing Western responses to potential aggression. President Xi of China has asserted that Taiwan must eventually return to China, and Chinese leaders have not excluded the use of military force, if necessary.

A key factor in any future military aggression by either country will be the potential role of the United States, which has not extended clear security guarantees to either Ukraine or Taiwan but has been supportively militarily and ideologically aligned with those countries' efforts to become real democracies.

If momentum had built in the Republican Party to renounce the events of Jan. 6 the way it ultimately abandoned Richard Nixon in 1974, we might have hoped that the country might move on from the Trump era. But this has not happened, and foreign adversaries like Russia and China are watching this situation with unconstrained glee. If issues like vaccinations and mask-wearing have become politicized and divisive, consider how a future decision to extend military support — or to deny such support — to either Ukraine or Taiwan would be greeted. Mr. Trump undermined the bipartisan consensus that existed since the late 1940s over America's strong support for a liberal international role, and President Biden has not yet been able to re-establish it.

The single greatest weakness of the United States today lies in its internal divisions. Conservative pundits have traveled to illiberal Hungary to seek an alternative model, and a dismaying number of Republicans see the Democrats as a greater threat than Russia.

The United States retains a huge amount of economic and military power, but that power is not usable in the absence of domestic political consensus over the country's international role. If Americans cease to believe in an open, tolerant and liberal society, our capacity to innovate and lead as the world's foremost economic power will also diminish. Jan. 6 sealed and deepened the country's divisions, and for that reason it will have consequences echoing across the globe in the years to come.

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