

Donald Trump's Assault on Democracy and Civil Rights in the United States

Donald Trump's return to power as the American President in January 2025 is posing threats far graver than the enormous damage he inflicted on civil rights during his first term from 2017 to 2021. During that first term Trump focused on remaking American policy, but in the first eight months of his second term he has focused on remaking American governance, all with an apparent goal of concentrating power in his own hands. It is not hyperbole to say that we in the United States now are veering away from democracy toward dictatorship, a charge I do not make lightly.

The current Trump assault can be traced back to just before Joseph Biden became President when, on January 6, 2021, a mob emboldened by Trump stormed the United States Capitol in an effort to physically prevent official certification of Biden's November 2024 election victory over Trump. That violent attack on American democracy was an omen of things to come, and in this essay I focus on several areas where we have seen important developments: presidential immunity from criminal prosecutions, diminished judicial authority, presidential control over independent agencies, deployment of military troops in American cities, summary expulsions from the United States, and stripped American citizenship. Before turning to these areas, however, it is worth reviewing the basics of the American system of governance that is under siege.

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