

The Republican Party Is Abusing America

My wife and I recently celebrated our first anniversary together. We had been together for over six years before we were married, so our marriage did not so much change the nature of our relationship as it elevated the stakes. Moments of bliss—from parties with friends to our Christmas honeymoon to Cancun to simple nights spent watching Netflix together—achieved dizzying heights I didn't expect. Likewise, moments of strife—from quarrels over bills and movies to the brutal, vulnerable confrontations that can only come from anger at someone who has your heart—were shattering. Because we were bound together now, trying to do together what neither of us could do alone.

My wife and I are individuals. We have different desires, backgrounds, thoughts, wants, and needs. When those needs don't align, we talk. Sometimes we fight. But the goal is always to hold onto our marriage, because it gives us something we can't get ourselves. Not just what we get from one another, but what we get from being an us. So we talk. We concede. We compromise. We cooperate.

But what if our marriage was different? What if one of us viewed it, not as a source of mutual strength to be worked on together, but as a resource to be mined, as a competition to be won? If one of us saw each concession by the other as ground gained, and each conflict as a moment to be exploited, rather than resolved?

Marriage is a partnership, as so much of life is. In our romantic partnerships, in our platonic ones, and in our professional ones, we come together to gain something we cannot gain alone. Whether that partnership is two people in a marriage, or ten people on construction crew, or a hundred people in a church, or 300 million people in a nation, it has a purpose. And if part of that partnership treats it as a sponge to be wrung of any value, than that partnership is abusive. Whether that's a husband abusing his wife, a boss abusing his employees, a leader his flock, or an entire political party strip-mining the institutions of America for selfish gain.

It is not hyperbole to call the recent track record of the Republican party abusive. Between their ongoing assault on the impartial credibility of our judicial system (most recently seen in their [rushed confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court](#), the latest in a string of such attacks), their refusal to commit to or execute even the most piecemeal reformation and restoration of the institutions of our country that would require the cooperation of the Democratic party ([the HEROES act has not yet been debated or voted upon in the Senate](#), in spite of having passed the House five months ago, and in spite of the Senate having time to confirm Barrett), and their continuous attempts to warp the machinery of free and fair elections to permanently entrench their power ([too many examples to count](#)), Republican leaders and lawmakers at every level of government (not least of all President Donald Trump) are expressing a profound disinterest in building a coalition government of any stripe.

This pattern of abuse is not the behavior of a partner willing to accept compromises and concessions to ensure the stable functioning of government. These are the acts of the power-hungry, desperate to win (and to entrench their winnings) at any cost. Their reasons are probably as varied as their membership, and may range from the ostensibly noble (in the case of members of the Christian right resorting to despicable means to oppose what they see as more despicable ends) to the nakedly selfish (the rank corruption of Trump, his family, his friends, and his cabinet) to the demonstrably evil (to prevent non-whites from an equal place in society). Those reasons are irrelevant. Democracy can only function if its participants are interested in maintaining and protecting its institutions, even if that means they lose some part of their power or influence. If Republicans do not wish to participate in a cooperative government based on compromise, then they do not wish to participate in America, but instead to destroy it and reshape it in their image. And if America is not democratic, than it is not America anymore.

America is a representative democracy. The people of the country choose representatives—from school boards to city councils to state legislatures to governors to senators to presidents—to serve our

interests. That is the nature of the partnership we have struck among our 300 million citizens. It is a system of government that has overseen atrocities—slavery, the Trail of Tears, Japanese-American internment camps, and many more. But it is also a system that has seen triumphs. It has seen a nation steadily expanding its franchise, and sharing its wealth and resources more broadly. It has seen a nation rise from the chaos of an unprecedented war to the apex of a global order. It is a system worth protecting.

But we cannot ignore the history of our country in determining its future, anymore than we can ignore our own history in determining our own relationships. Forgetting for a moment that this pattern of corruption and abuse is nothing that new—that starting with Nixon, Republican Presidents have been cavalier towards the exploitation of the average citizen by the rich and powerful, or willing to resort to corruption and tyranny to secure their dominance—we are still left with the rank fact of Republican malfeasance through at least the past five years. You need look no farther than the history of the Supreme Court to see this pattern play out.

In 2016, Merrick Garland was President Barack Obama's nominee to the Supreme Court. [He was never given so much as hearing, much less a vote](#)—all in the name of a precedent made-up whole-cloth by Senate Majority Leader McConnell—so that a seat was open in case of a Republican presidential victory. When Justice Kennedy retired, the Republican party crashed through Brett Kavanaugh's nomination in the face of some of the [ugliest allegations ever made against a Supreme Court nominee](#) rather than withdraw his nomination and seek a more suitable candidate. And when Ruth Bader Ginsburg died in an election year, the Republicans discarded even the pretense of integrity in order to secure their hold on the Supreme Court with Amy Coney Barrett's nomination. Integrity, morality, and the basic functioning of the Supreme Court are all unnecessary hindrances to a party with no interest in cooperative government, and they will use whatever means at their disposal to secure their interests.

If these were the act of a partner—whether of a friend, a spouse, or a professional associate—we would call them abuse. Making up moral reasons to deny one partner something they want; refusing to believe or countenance any counterargument against their own selfish desires; abandoning their moral principles the moment it is convenient to do so, and pretending that we are the ones acting hypocritical by expecting them to live up to their word. Manipulation, negligence, and gas-lighting do not a worthy partner make, whether that partnership is a marriage or a nation.

As complex as marriage is, a nation is more complicated still. There is no equivalent to divorce for America (its one attempt was fought in the name of slavery and is the bloodiest war ever fought on American soil). What the future of our country will look like, I cannot rightly say. But the first step to solving a problem is admitting there is one. And the problem we face is simple: by word and by deed, one of the political parties charged with protecting our nation is more interested in seizing power for itself than in building a nation that is truly one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. One part of our partnership is determined to abuse the other. And any partner that would abuse your relationship is not a partner worth respecting...or keeping.