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Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

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Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 16(1)

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Publication Date

2025-08-03

DOI

10.5070/T8.50541

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Times Of Great Insecurity

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In hindsight, it is clear that the United States has an insecurity problem. This became apparent during the 2024 elections, but it is by no means a new phenomenon, seeing as security—or lack thereof—has always played a significant role in presidential campaigns. As a motif in political rhetoric, the concept of security is one that is well-tried and tested; an easy-to-grab carrot to dangle before the proverbial donkey, one that is guaranteed to stir up not only fear but, more importantly, actions spurred on by said fear. The two major campaigns in the 2024 US presidential election attempted to grab on to the various fears of the American people and direct them to their interest, with varying levels of success.

While pinpointing a precise moment from which the insecurity of the US as a nation stems would be an arduous task, the 2016 elections served as a useful launching pad for this amplified narrative of fear in the past decade. During that first round, the "Make America Great Again" campaign latched onto the fears of the Republican base relentlessly, be it on issues such as the economy, foreign policy, cultural warfare, or immigration, and succeeded in transforming that fear and insecurity into a new branch of conservatism. Today, MAGA has far exceeded the boundaries of the old Republican party; the big tent of the GOP now houses a wide range of political and ideological interests, all of which, while often contradictory, are sufficiently tied together with the string of fear and insecurity.

The Democrats, on the other hand, have failed spectacularly in recognizing and utilizing the insecurity of the American people the way their Republican counterparts have done. By gaslighting their base and disregarding their doubts in Biden's ability to rerun for president up until it was no longer feasible, then replacing him with Harris—whose campaign took for granted the Democratic base's initial elation at having their fears recognized by their party, for once—the Democrats' attempt at directing that insecurity to the ballot came short. Not only were their voters already uneasy and distrustful when it came to the Biden administration and its various failures in addressing their problems in a coherent manner, they now had to rally behind a

candidate whose branding for the previous four years did nothing to stipulate her as a strong successor to the "wise statesman" Biden was promised to be.

The vote-blue-no-matter-who-crowd's unwillingness to look critically and seriously beyond the aesthetics of the momentum Harris garnered in the short weeks following her bid to replace Biden, and up until the Democratic National Convention, is symptomatic of the Democrats' inadequacy at framing the threat of fascism posed by Trump, seeing as no real measures were proposed to curb it beyond the ballot box, no effective solutions offered to the problems Harris's campaign chose to focus on. This summarizes the different strategies both campaigns utilized in their approach to fear as a vehicle towards political action. Because while the threat frames were there, they were neither resonant nor successfully communicated to the voters with the urgency they warranted. Harris's pledge to "ensure [that] America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world" was bound to fall on deaf ears when the majority of the American people call for an end to the various conflicts the US is involved in abroad, not the widening of said conflicts via grandstanding and posturing. This, juxtaposed with Trump's "peace dove" act, highlights the different views on what brand of insecurity Americans are experiencing at the moment; it is not one that seeks confrontation with enemies abroad, but rather demands reflection on the state of internal struggles Americans are facing, and requires exacting actions to see them through.

While the Republicans spoke of enemies from within and what they would do to rid the US of them, the Democrats ushered in other Republicans to their convention to speak of the dangers their old party is now capable of. The never-Trump Republican presence in the Harris campaign would have been labeled an infiltration by analysts, were it not for the warm welcome these repentant ex-Trump supporters received from the Democratic party. Liz Cheney and other such Republican household names took precedence over some of the Democrats' own representatives; their voices became louder than those protesting outside the DNC in demand of a ceasefire in Gaza. In the same vein, while Trump promised an end to all wars, Bill Clinton, who was sent to lecture the Democratic constituency in Dearborn on the history of the Middle East, could have easily been mistaken for a Republican when referring to the West Bank as Judea and Samaria in a blue city that has spent almost a year in protest against the Israeli genocide in Gaza. As Trump spoke of illegal aliens committing crimes, Harris told Anderson Cooper that she was "not afraid of good ideas" when pressed on her "compromise immigration policy" and Trump's wall. Trump rallied alongside tech billionaires and spoke of a great economic revival, and Harris spoke of her love for small businesses to crowds of working-class Americans living paycheck to paycheck. MAGA ran to the right, and liberals tried to follow under the guise of bipartisanship.

Shortsightedly, the Democrats offered Trump as the singular threat to American democracy and institutions. Trump, on the other hand, turned every aspect of modern American society into either a threat or an object of a threat; if it is not feared then you should fear losing it.

MAGA's unsavory methods in threat-framing were at least effective in communicating the danger behind the threats they spoke of. On the other hand, the Democrats dialed down their confrontational stance in favor of bipartisanship.

What good is a threat if its main defendants have no qualms shaking hands with the ones perpetrating it? The Democrats' obsession with civility beyond accountability marked their failure at drumming up fear of fascism and tyranny, or to even lean into the insecurity that manifested in the US post-January 6, in any meaningful way. Liberals can call Trump a fascist who should be seen as "the greatest threat to democracy" as many times as they want, it would still make no difference to the average American voter, who has been let down by the institutions the Democrats perpetually wish to protect but never improve. Presenting MAGA as a threat is further nullified when the vice-presidential picks for both campaigns can get on a debate stage and declare their agreement on the majority of the issues presented to them. Is Trump actually a fascist and a harbinger of doom if Biden and Harris are wishing him a speedy recovery? Is JD Vance truly dangerous if Tim Walz can offer him his thanks after a seemingly lighthearted verbal sparring session? If Project 2025 is the end of democracy, should the self-proclaimed defenders of institutions not show some grit in fighting against it?

The Democratic Party's reluctance to acknowledge the majority of the fears their constituency is facing, as well as their demure response to the fears they did acknowledge, has allowed MAGA to step in and offer comfort to the American people in the shape of bans, deportations, and tariffs. Those who were undecided prior to elections day found it easier to land on the Right side of the fence—or to not participate altogether—considering the certainty Trump projected; for while his methods may be volatile, he is at least willing to draw a red circle around whatever, or whoever, he deems to be causing insecurity and igniting fear in the American people. Unless the Democrats come to recognize the reasons as to why Bernie and AOC's Fighting Oligarchy rallies are successfully drawing in huge crowds, which seem to have sparked some of the fighting spirit that liberals had following Trump's first win, their failure at diagnosing this wave of insecurity will have repercussions that far outweigh the risks that the party leadership would have had to take had they chosen to push back instead.