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USA

Trump, Trumpism, and the Great Backlash

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV567 - April 2022 -

Publication date: Sunday 24 April 2022

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Despite a House investigation into the January 6, 2021 insurrection and criminal investigations in several states, former president Donald Trump remains the leader of the Republican Party and a powerful influence on its politics. For the coming November 2022 primary election Trump has endorsed 130 Republican candidates for the House and Senate as well as others for state governors or other offices. His most important criteria in choosing them is that they support him and his claim that he, not Biden, was elected president in 2020, though of course they must also back his rightwing “Make America Great Again” politics. But, if congressional investigations or criminal cases should eliminate Trump, other Trump-like candidates, such as Ron DeSantis, governor of Florida, stand ready to run for president in 2024 with the same political agenda.

Meanwhile Republican governors and state legislatures are preparing for the coming primary by putting issues of race and gender at the center of political legislation and public discussion. Republicans have introduced laws restricting or virtually eliminating abortion in thirty states so far this year and have already passed in six, though these could be overturned by the courts. The Oklahoma state law would make performing an abortion a felony punishable by ten years in prison. Many of these laws are based on the assumption that the U.S. Supreme Court will soon overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the federal law protecting women’s abortion rights. In response, Democrats has introduced legislation protecting abortion rights in many other states. Both parties see abortion issues as a way to mobilize their potential voters.

Republican legislators have also introduced 238 anti-LGBTQ+ laws this year, half of them aimed at transgender people. These laws bar or criminalize gender-affirming healthcare for trans youth, bar access to restrooms, restrict trans students’ participation in school and sports, allow for religiously-based discrimination against trans people, or make it harder for them to get identification documents with their name and gender. Republicans claim that these laws will protect children, parental rights, and religious freedom. Florida and several other states have passed “Don’t say gay,” supposedly to protect children from public school teachers’ gay indoctrination. The laws prohibit discussion of gender issues with elementary or high school public school students.

The third major area of Republican legislation meant to agitate the electorate is banning the teaching of critical race theory in the public schools. In fact, critical race theory is a sophisticated legal theory about racism that has never been taught in schools, but for Republicans it has meant opposition to reaching about racism. They claim that CRT is being used to indoctrinate students with the idea that all whites are racist and to make white children them feel “ashamed.” Sixteen states have already passed such laws and another 19 are considering such a law.

The Republicans’ anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ+, and anti-CRT legislation represent part of a continuing backlash among white people of all social classes against the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s that brought about progressive legislation for Black and Latino people, women and LGBTQ people. Racism and sexism are at the core of Republican politics.

Of course, the Republicans will also run against President Joseph Biden and the Democrats on economic issues—the current rate of inflation is 8.5%—which appeals to less ideological independents. But they are counting on their attack on women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, and black rights to mobilize their voters and give them control of Congress in 2022 and put Trump or someone like him back in the presidency in 2024. For the last several months these issues have roiled local school board meetings, state legislatures, and dominated the media. The backlash continues to grow.

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