# Trump, Personalism, and US Administrative Capacity

**Donald Moynihan, McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University**

This paper considers personalism in the context of the US federal government, focusing on Donald Trump. I argue that Trump represents an extraordinary degree of personalism in the Presidency, one that is all the more remarkable given the traditional power and capacity of the Republican Party. Trumpism did not offer a coherent ideological agenda, and was associated with modest legislative achievements, centering on Trump himself. The holding of office did not temper Trump's tendencies towards personalism. Indeed, the lesson he drew from his first term is that he needed to better institutionalize mechanisms of personal loyalty, to deal with perceived betrayals by both political appointees and career officials. Out of office, Trump supporters continued this project, seeking to rebuild governing institutions around personalist criteria, centered on loyalty. Both traditional party and aligned institutions, such as think tanks, as well as new and explicitly Trumpist organizations coalesced around Trump, enabling and encouraging his personalist leadership style as the template for future leaders. I argue that this process has a series of effects on American institutions, whether or not Trump returns to office. Trump's model of personalism centered on a) elevating conspiracist messaging where he played a central role, such as QAnon, or claims about the 2020 election, b) were anti-statist in nature, particularly toward public institutions, framing them as corrupt in a way that undermined public trust and c) mainstreamed new strategies for governing, such as the politicization of the public service.

**Introduction**
This paper considers personalism in the context of the US federal government, focusing on Donald Trump. I argue that Trump represents an extraordinary degree of personalism in the Presidency, one that is all the more remarkable given the traditional power and capacity of the Republican Party. Trumpism did not offer a coherent ideological agenda, and was associated with modest legislative achievements, centering on Trump himself.

A fundamental question is how a non-politician asserted control over the oldest political party in the oldest and most powerful democracy in the world, despite engaging in disqualifying behavior such as election denialism and being impeached twice. The paper is largely descriptive in nature, providing detailed information about Trump's means of exerting personalist control. It errs on the side of presenting the factual case and contemporaneous accounts rather than engaging in deeper theorizing or posing causal questions. But without such factual accounts, we are unable to truly understand the processes of personalism in the Trump era. Central to Trump's success was his ability to communicate, but the nature of this communication was often grounded in conspiracies rather than reality, ones that were deeply damaging to public institutions.

The holding of office did not temper Trump's tendencies towards personalism. Indeed, the lesson he drew from his first term is that he needed to better institutionalize mechanisms of personal loyalty, to deal with perceived betrayals by both political appointees and career officials. Out of office, Trump supporters continued this project, seeking to rebuild governing institutions around personalist criteria, centered on loyalty. Both traditional party and aligned institutions, such as think tanks, as well as new and explicitly Trumpist organizations coalesced around Trump, enabling and encouraging his personalist leadership style as the template for future leaders.

I argue that this process has a series of effects on American institutions, whether or not Trump returns to office. Trump's model of personalism centered on a) elevating conspiracist messaging where he played a central role, such as Qanon, or claims about the 2020 election, b) promoting anti-statism, particularly toward public institutions, framing them as corrupt in a way that undermined public trust and c) mainstreaming new strategies for governing, such as the politicization of the public service.


**Trump as a Personalist Politician**
In this section I consider Trump as a personalist politician and the Republican Party as a personalist party. Personalism often occurs in the context of politicians creating or capturing a party in their own image (Kostadinova and Levitt 2014), or as Li and Wright (2023, 4) put it, "as parties that leaders create or control as vehicles to advance their personal political careers…As such, personalist parties are those where the leader has more control over the party than do other senior party elites."

Trump was not a professional politician. His business background, in real estate, had little organizational structure or constraint, relying instead on Trump as the central star in the orbit with family members or loyalists surrounding him. His other career, in entertainment, helped to build his image. He therefore did not enter politics with a sense of loyalty to the party or its members. His ascendance in Republican Party politics was not the result of carefully cultivating

constituencies, but of violating taboos that party leaders sought to avoid, such as casting doubt on President Obama's birth or discussing immigration in explicitly racist terms. Trump's primary political conviction was less a policy agenda than about the importance of Trump.

The US system seemingly offered little prospect for such outsider candidates. Trump had flirted with the far-right Reform Party in 2000. Trump, unofficially in 2012, and then officially in 2015, pursued the leadership of the Republican Party as a presidential candidate. The "Grand Old Party" seemed like an unlikely vehicle for personalism, given its longevity and strength in American politics. But it was ultimately unable to resist Trump.

The "party of Lincoln" does not seem to meet the definition of a personalized party, though it has moved in that direction since 2016. Let us consider some indicators. Even as a candidate in a crowded field, Trump was able to ignore standard practices. He skipped some primary debates in 2016, saw none at all in 2020, and has skipped them again in 2023. Trump refused to accept a pledge to support a Republican candidate that might defeat him and routinely publicly berates Republicans he deems to be insufficiently loyal to him and his cause.

Even in the 2024 race, most of the declared candidates, and all of those with realistic chances of winning, have proven reluctant to criticize the person they are campaigning to displace. Another measure of personalism might be the ability of Trump to rally the party to support him in both the first, and then second impeachment trial. Trump currently faces 91 indictments, and yet the party remains largely in support of him. The majority of the House Republican Party voted to not accept the results of the 2020 election, an extraordinary action. In these actions and others, the evidence shows Trump in the wrong, or relying on falsehoods, and a party going along with him. In private some may grumble, but those who oppose him publicly and consistently have been largely pushed out of the party. Of the 10 Republicans who did vote to impeach Trump after the January 6th attack on the Capitol, only two remain in office, the rest either retiring or losing to a primary challenger. While there are no shortage of charismatic figures contesting the American Presidency, none have drawn the accusations of cult of personality that Trump does.

Personalism is driven by "mainly by loyalty to that leader rather than, for example, organizational rules, ideological affinities, or programmatic commitments" (Kostadinova and Levitt 2014, 492). Again, this description feels apt for Trump. He has some populist policy achievements. He achieved most in the domain of immigration, reflecting an anti-immigration stance and delegation to the president in this area. On the domestic front, his main achievement was a tax reduction that could have come from any Republican President. Beyond that, the policy agenda is less than coherent and evolving, one that is reactionary to events. Trumpism is less about a stable set of policy goals than about Trump himself.


**Trump Elevated Conspiracist Messaging**
Trump at various times entertained or encouraged conspiracist messaging. By 2011, Republicans who embraced birtherism rated Trump nearly 40 percentage points more favorably than Republican leaders who rejected the conspiracy theory (Tesler 2021). Obama's birth was just the beginning. The paranoid style that Richard Hofstadter described in the 1960s has moved from the fringes to the heart of the Republican Party (Romano 2020). This worldview has been given a

contemporary spin with conspiracy theories such as Qanon (the claim that major institutions and the Democratic Party are secretly run by child traffickers) (Scott et al. 2020), the Big Lie (denying the 2020 election outcome), and Great Replacement Theory (the idea that whites are being deliberately replaced by elites who are relying on immigrants to take control). Trump has at various times offered support for these theories, with varying degrees of explicitness. He has the greatest enthusiasm for the Big Lie, reflecting how closely it matters to his political survival, and his denial that he lost an election.

These theories have become dangerously popular. About half of Republicans believe in the tenets of Great Replacement Theory (Bump 2022). Polls have found that about half of Trump supporters believe in the core tents of QANON (Bote 2020). About 69% of Republicans believe that Biden's win in 2020 was illegitimate, and 39% believe that there is clear evidence of election fraud (Agiesta and Edwards-Levy 2023). There is, quite simply, no basis for these beliefs. They have clear consequences. The public has become increasingly polarized on immigration. Public officials, including school teachers and librarians, are apt to be labeled as "groomers" if they oppose new educational laws that restrict classroom texts or library books. After the 2020 election, about one-third of election officials reported feeling unsafe, with about one in five saying they were concerned about their life being threatened (Brennan Center for Justice 2021). It is also difficult to maintain broad faith in democracy if one party believes they have been unfairly denied an electoral win.

Conspiracies are a long-time feature of American politics, especially on the right. But Trump helped to mainstream not just specific conspiracies, but the art of conspiracy-mongering as a legitimate political strategy. Previously, ambitious Republican politicians would have distanced themselves from being associated with such theories. Now, they see it as a path to maintaining credibility with Trump.

In a previous era, the professional class of the Republican Party, the people who end up becoming political appointees running our government, devoted some measure of effort to developing expertise that would enable them to run those institutions. Now, their path to influence is to embrace conspiracy theories and culture war tropes.

Russ Vought is a good example. He ran Trump's Office of Management and Budget. Out of government, he set up his own pro-Trump organization, the Center for Renewing America, where he developed the theme that federal agencies were "weaponized." Trump supporters in Congress took this theme to create a new Selection Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government. The trope, and the committee, serves a core aspect of Trump's messaging, which is that public organizations are irredeemably corrupt.

**Trump's Messaging Targeted Public Institutions as Corrupt**
There is a deep tradition of anti-statism in Republican politics, but Trump has taken it in a different direction. It is less philosophical, and more personal than the libertarianism of Goldwater or Reagan. This is in no small part because of Trump's frustrations with the "deep state" that was not sufficiently obedient to him, and his various legal and political troubles – related to tax avoidance and business fraud in private life, as well as legal violations as President, including withholding aid to Ukraine, refusing to return classified documents, instigating an

attack on the Capitol in order to overturn the election, and engaging in election interference in Georgia.

In seeking to reduce the scale of regulations, Trump was similar to other Republican Presidents. But in arguing that the state actors were unfairly using their power to target him, Trump was different. The effigy of the "deep state" he burned in his speeches served to explain both the failures of his administration, and why he was unfairly subject to prosecution that would have been disqualifying for any previous generation of American political leaders.

The Republican response to Trump's embrace of deep state conspiratorial language revealed a conservative movement that had evolved from a skepticism of government to embrace a peculiar brand of anti-statism. Trump-era anti-statists are not libertarians. They portray the "deep state" as something to be controlled rather than minimized. The political philosophy underpinning this support for Trump holds that state power is corrupt, and this corruption in turn justifies abuses of state power that Trump and supporters are promising in the future. *Our victimhood necessitates our extremes.* As an approach to governing, it is deeply destructive to a pluralistic democracy where parties exchange power on a routine basis.

For example, with the raids of Trump's Mar-A-Lago club, Trump and Senator Rand Paul proposed that FBI agents may have planted evidence. For this logic to hold you have to believe that, in this instance, the investigations of Trump were not a function of his actions, but that he was unfairly targeted. This requires both extraordinary faith in Trump and extraordinary lack of faith in multiple law enforcement and judicial actors. Republicans have become willing to denounce not just government in general, but conservative institutions, like the FBI, and even Republican officials associated with those institutions, like Robert Mueller, James Comey and now Christopher Wray. For example, in hearings, Republicans accused Wray of personally working to "weaponize the FBI against conservatives," covering up the origins of Covid-19, and of hiding the FBI's role in orchestrating the January 6th attack on the Capitol by Trump supporters (Milbank 2023). Republicans have called for defunding the FBI.

The version of anti-statism comes with three consequences.


*Justifying real abuse of state power*

Anti-statist rhetoric is encoded with a promise: that once we return to power, we will use this power to punish the wicked. As the next section discussions, Trump supporters have built a plan to better control the administrative state, especially the national security and justice systems needed to protect Trump from legal risk. In these terms, the "deconstruction" of the administrative state does not mean a reduction of state power, but the politicization of that power.

A political philosophy that is both anti-statist and promises to use state power will inevitably struggle with contradictions and hypocrisies. It holds others to account while denying such accountability applies to them. Trump has used the mishandling of classified information as one of his primary political weapons. It was a key theme in his campaign against Clinton and other political opponents (Lima 2017).

The blatant nature of Trump's misdeeds represents a radical stance to reject even minimal attempts to hold him to account. *All state actors are corrupt, and the only solution is to take control and use that power for one's own ends.* This is less discomfort with state power, but with the idea that state power used without favor will be power that is sometimes used against us, and is therefore illegitimate.

By denying the possibility that the state can play any legitimate role, it justifies obvious abuses of power by our side. *We can't trust the state, but we do trust ourselves.* In doing so, it aborts the idea of the state as an evenhanded actor designed to serve a pluralistic public and multiple factions, one that can be controlled by formal democratic processes. Legitimate processes of democratic accountability become the justification for anti-democratic abuses of state power.

*Undermining trust in government*

Governments need trust to function. Criticism and scrutiny are warranted, but the conservative narrative about the state has lost its bearing. In such a context, collective action becomes impossible; power is only legitimate when it is held by your tribe. As long as this anti-statist philosophy holds, it makes it more difficult to gain support for investments in state institutions (Moynihan 2022).

For example, a number of Republicans connected two things that objectively have little to do with each other: an investigation into Trump's mishandling of classified information, and new investments in the IRS. This act of political imagination relied partly on a false statistic that Biden will be hiring 87,000 new IRS agents (Cortellessa 2022), but was made possible by an anti-statist mindset that can transform competent performance of a core function of government into a threatening emblem of a banana republic.

There are other ways that the anti-statist philosophy will hurt state capacity. In the aftermath of the FBI raid on Trump's Mar-A-Lago complex, a Trump supporter wrote on Trump's social media app, Truth Social, that "Violence is not (all) terrorism. Kill the F.B.I. on sight" before attempting to do precisely that at an FBI field office. This barely made a ripple in the flow of anti-government rhetoric. It also did not stop Breitbart from publishing the names of the FBI officials who were involved in the search warrant (Tesfaye 2022).

Violent far-right attacks are the main source of domestic terrorism in the US, and have dramatically increased since Trump became a candidate (Doxsee et al. 2022). These are cultivated by a rhetoric that identifies political opponents as existential threats, preaches victimhood, and encourages extremist action (Feuer 2022). Actual violence is the most extreme outcome of threats against public officials. Threatening political rhetoric, personal threats and intimidation have become more common. Violent threats to Congress increased tenfold since Trump was elected (Edmondson 2022), but researchers have only just created a database of threats to less visible public officials (Bridging Divides Initiative n.d.). Educators, tax collectors, election administrators, and public health officials must now worry that they will be subject to harassment or worse (Beauchamp 2021). A few data points and anecdotes get at the dire situation:

- Turnover in election administration work has almost doubled in recent years, and one-third of election administrators say they know a colleague who has left an election post, at least in part because of safety concerns (Wines 2023).
- Nearly one in eight public health officials reported job-related threats in 2021, and nearly one in four reported feeling bullied, harassed, or threatened (Bryant-Genevier et al. 2021)
- Across America, a wave of legislation has restricted what teachers and, in some cases, professors can say in their classrooms (Young and Friedman 2022). While 77 percent of teachers said they felt respected by the public in 2011, that number has dropped to 46 percent today, during a national teacher shortage (Will 2022).
- False accusations that public schools and community public libraries are peddling pornography have triggered book bans (Friedman and Johnson 2022; Harris and Alter 2023). Librarians have been forced to pull books from the shelves, especially those relating to the experiences of historically marginalized groups. Many librarians have quit or lost their jobs for resisting the bans.

The negative construal of public employment and harassment will make it harder to recruit good people to public work. The anti-statist moment comes at an especially bad time for the US public sector. The US has an aging federal workforce — almost one in five is eligible to retire (Partnership for Public Service 2019). Just 7 percent of the federal workforce is under 30, compared to almost 20 percent of the broader US labor force (Partnership for Public Service 2022).

**Trump Has Pursued a Personalist Strategy for Governing**

Trump trafficked in stereotypes and conspiracy theories about government did little to translate these espoused beliefs into a coherent strategy for much of his first term (Moynihan and Roberts 2021). In part, this was because Trump lacked a team who could effectively turn his vague notions into policy practice. Presidents typically draw on a constellation of experts, associates, campaign officials and hangers-on to populate their office. Much of this is built up via political associates over time, or from the broader constellation of party associates and supporters. Trump did not have this, and has acknowledged as much: "When I went there, I didn't know a lot of people; I had to rely on, in some cases, RINOs and others to give me some recommendations, but I know them all now. I know the good ones, I know the bad ones, I know the weak ones, I know the strong ones."

Trump did face resistance that limited his ability to govern. But it is important to understand the nature of this resistance. Much of it came, as the political scientist James Pfiffner argues, from his own political appointees (Pfiffner 2022). And much of it centered in stopping Trump from breaking the law, such as Bill Barr refusing to use the DOJ to go along with false claims or election fraud, or Chief of Staff John Kelly pushing back against using the government to investigate Trump's political enemies (Schmidt 2022).

Though the first Trump administration might be seen as a marriage of convenience between Trump and traditional Republicans, this coalition largely no longer exists. A second Trump administration would be populated by supporters personally loyal to Trump and his vision. Moreover, it would be one with a clearer blueprint for how to govern. This process was driven

by a couple of processes. First, Trump became hostile to anyone who did not pass his criteria for loyalty, and loyalty became a more important quality as he violated more and more governing norms. Second, Trump had a real constituency that were willing to serve him, though it took time to find them. Third, there was a process of learning from the perceived missteps of his first administration, which centered on not going far enough in imposing Trump's control.

While Trump did not have a broad constellation of party officials to support him in 2016, this has changed. Trump officials who exited the administration created a whole new array of political organizations centered on loyalty to Trump. This includes Johnny McEntee, James Sherk, Russ Vought, and Stephen Miller, a senior Trump advisor on immigration. Other Trump staffers, such as Paul Dans, joined the powerful Heritage foundation. All of this emerged without Trump himself becoming more organized or disciplined, or making any concerted effort to restructure the Republican Party. Nevertheless, the Republican Party has largely come to organize itself around Trump.

The emerging elites surrounding Trump fit very much with Li and Wright's (2023) description of the category of loyalists who undermine state capacity: their power and influence is closely tied to the leader, and they do not value an impersonal bureaucracy. Indeed, in this case, Trump loyalists have made opposition to an impersonal bureaucracy a central theme of their goals for power. Trumpworld has developed a plan for a second administration, one where personal loyalty to Trump is paramount. This includes a three-fold strategy that involves hiring loyalists as political appointees, removing job protections from career civil servants, and building a legal infrastructure that allows for extreme action.

*Hiring loyalists as political appointees*

In the aftermath of his first impeachment, Trump went from a President who complained about the deep state to one who seemed to firmly believe it. He recalled a young aide, Johnny McEntee, who had been fired for not revealing his gambling debts. McEntee was made Director of the Presidential Personnel Office. McEntee had no real qualifications for the job, except for the one that he sought in those hired: absolute loyalty to Trump. The office controlled political appointment positions. McEntee started to interview appointees to verify their loyalty, including checking their social media. The loyalty tests were often bizarre (Diamond et al. 2020). EPA officials were asked about their views on Afghanistan policy for example, and embedded a culture of fear amidst the surging pandemic, where officials felt unwilling to challenge the President's rosy prognostications. McEntee is playing a similar role as part of a broader effort to screen Trump appointees for a second administration.

The Heritage Foundation and about 50 other conservative organizations are leading the effort to find 20,000 screened appointees-in-waiting who will serve Trump (Moynihan 2023). John Kelly, Trump's former Chief of Staff said, "The lesson the former president learned from his first term is don't put guys like me…in those jobs. The lesson he learned was to find sycophants" (Arnsdorf, Dawsey, and Barrett 2023).  A key player in building the personnel database is James Bacon, a college senior when he supported McEntee's loyalty tests.

In the New York Times, Kevin Roberts, the President of Heritage summed it up: "In 2016, the conservative movement was not prepared to flood the zone with conservative personnel. On Jan. 20, 2025, things will be very different. This database will prepare an army of vetted, trained staff to begin dismantling the administrative state from Day 1" (Swan and Haberman 2023).

The screening of appointees is part of a broader project to prepare for the next Republican administration, called "Mandate for Leadership" (The Heritage Foundation 2023). Heritage has performed this role for GOP candidates since the Reagan administration. The Heritage-led project is, in theory, there for any Republican President. But it is built to serve the needs of Trump. Paul Dans leads the newest iteration of Heritage's "Mandate for Leadership" project. Dans reflects the emergence of the Trump loyalist. Prior to working in the Trump administration, Dans worked in commercial law, without experience either in running public organizations or public personnel law. Dans was a White House liaison to Office of Personnel Management under Trump, appointed by McEntee, and was given charge of the Presidential Personnel Office. He was imposed on the head of Office of Personnel Management, Dale Cabaniss, who quit after she was told she now answered to Dans (Swan 2020). In the closing days of the Trump administration, Dans was being lined up to take over OPM, and implement Schedule F (Wagner 2020), discussed in the next section. In short, his position of influence in the world of politics is entirely based on his loyalty to Trump, and his actions are very much aligned with repaying that loyalty.

*Remove job protections from career civil servants*
In October 2020, Trump signed an executive order that had been in play since early in his administration: Schedule F (Moynihan 2022). Schedule F would allow Trump to convert any official in a policymaking or policy advisory role into a political appointee, thereby removing the civil service protections intended to stop the politicization of the public service, and allowing them to be fired by Trump's appointees without cause. The order was rescinded by the Biden administration.

In speeches, Trump has left little doubt about the purpose of Schedule F and his intent to revive it: "We will pass critical reforms making every executive branch employee fireable by the president of the United States. The deep state must and will be brought to heel" (Katz 2022). Former Trump appointees reportedly have lists of career civil servants they plan to fire if they return to office (Arnsdorf, Dawsey, and Barrett 2023). James Sherk, the Trump official who authored the order, has said he expects Schedule F will be reinstalled on day one of a second Trump administration, and about 50,000 career officials will be involuntarily converted to political appointees.

As OMB Director, Russ Vought tried to covert 88% of career officials into political appointees he could fire, but ran out of time as the Trump administration ended. According to Vought: "I think Schedule F is basically doctrine now on the right…Schedule F is getting to the point where I cannot see anyone who runs on the Republican side who doesn't put this into play" (Smith 2023).

*Build a legal infrastructure that will allow extreme action*

The actions of radical political appointees can be checked by government lawyers who raise objections. Trump supporters have focused on finding loyalist lawyers that would allow them to build a legal infrastructure to allow Trump to pursue goals that previous lawyers would have categorized as illegal (Swan et al. 2023; Arnsdorf, Dawsey and Barrett 2023).

The effort is led by Stephen Miller and Johnny McEntee. While Trump co-opted the Heritage Foundation, he appears to have rejected another major Republican source of power, the Federalist Society. Over decades, the Federalist Society cultivated a set of lawyers dedicated to a more conservative interpretation of the Constitution that aligned with Republican business and cultural values. The majority of the Supreme Court now features Judges who have engaged with the Federalist Society, three of whom were appointed by Trump. But Trump and his supporters have regarded the Federalist Society as unreliable in their support for his use of legal authority. In particular, he was angry at lawyers who did not facilitate his effort to overturn the 2020 election, those who allowed investigations of him to move forward, and who did not investigate his political enemies aggressively enough.

For example, Trump fired his Attorney General Jeff Sessions for allowing the Mueller investigation into Trump's ties with Russia to move forward (Baker et al. 2020),and installed a loyalist to oversee the investigation. When the Mueller report was released, Bill Barr, Sessions' replacement, then withheld information in crafting a misleading announcement that the investigation had cleared Trump (The Associated Press 2022).

A model for the type of lawyer Trump is seeking is Mark Paoletta, the former General Counsel at the Office of Management and Budget under Russ Vought. When Trump ordered the withholding of aid to Ukraine, Paoletta rejected the OMB and Pentagon career staff objections about the illegality of such actions (Werner et al. 2020). Paoletta is also accused of misleading investigations about what actually happened (Brannen 2020). The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office concluded that withholding funds was, contrary to Paoletta's legal advice, clearly illegal (Government Accountability Office 2020). All of this was done to enable Trump to blackmail Ukraine for damaging information on his political opponents.

Another example of a Trump lawyer expected to play a major role in a second term is Jeffery Clark, who became acting Attorney General after Bill Barr and then Jeffery Rosen refused to act on Trump's claims of a stolen election. Clark is assumed to be one of the six co-conspirators in a Department of Justice indictment of Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election.
Clark pushed false claims that the DOJ had evidence of voter fraud that affected the outcome of the Georgia election, giving local officials a basis to overturn the outcome (Grabenstein 2023). He has defended his actions by saying that "extraordinary times call for extraordinary, responsive legal creativity." Part of Clark's legal creativity is advancing the unitary executive theory, which, in short, holds that the President has extraordinary powers when it comes to running the executive branch. Clark has used this theory in a brief for expanding presidential control of the Department of Justice, which would effectively shield Trump from legal accountability. Clark has proposed the use of the Insurrection Act to allow Trump to use the military for domestic law enforcement, and invoked the use of the Insurrection Act when Justice Department colleagues pointed out that Trump illegally staying in office would lead to riots (Arnsdorf, Dawsey and Barrett 2023).

**Conclusion**

Li and Wright (2023) note how personalist parties undermine state capacity. Rhodes-Purdy and Madrid (2020) also offer evidence that personalism undermines democracy. Trump illustrates how the two factors are correlated. In seeking a loyalist administrative state, one willing to use state power to ignore wrongdoing by Trump, including overturning elections, Trump also sought an administrative state that is shorn of basic democratic qualities: transparent, loyal to the constitution and rule of law, and one based on rationality. Trump loyalists willing to depart from these qualities have been, thus far, not ones largely concerned with values such as the public interest.

If the Trumpian version of anti-statism is self-serving as a political philosophy, it is broadly damaging as a governing philosophy. As citizens see a government engage in real abuses of power, and unable to perform core tasks, anti-statism becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, leaving the public little reason to trust the state.

While this paper describes the process of personalization, it does not answer the fundamental question. Why was Trump able to do this? Why was the Republican Party so vulnerable? Trump's peculiar skills as a communicator certainly play a role. But a salesman needs a willing buyer, and Trump found that rank and file Republicans were far more receptive to his message than Republican leadership had previously acknowledged.

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