

# The Left Contributes More Than Its Share to Disunity

COMMENTARY

By [Peter Berkowitz](#) - RCP Contributor  
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“It’s all your fault”—whether addressed to co-workers, friends, or spouse—are words that rarely pave the way to mutual understanding, compromise, and reconciliation. Since fault is seldom the monopoly of one side alone, the accused will often take justifiable umbrage.

It is regrettable, therefore, that several of the nation’s leading political commentators—long associated with the conservative perspective—have hurled the “it’s all your fault” charge at right-of-center America.

It is to be expected, for example, that progressive and dependably partisan New York Times columnist Michelle Goldberg would treat the left as entirely virtuous and the right as thoroughly disreputable. In her recent [opinion piece](#) about House Progressive Caucus leader Pramila Jayapal, Goldberg describes President Biden’s “giant social spending bill” as unambiguously urgent and devoid of any downside. Congratulating the left wing of the Democratic Party for its uncompromising stance on enacting “progressive policies on climate, health care, childcare and taxes,” she portrays those who oppose Biden’s \$3.5 trillion agenda as posing an “existential” threat to America.

It is unsettling, however, to witness former-Secretary of State George Shultz speech writer Robert Kagan, former-President George W. Bush speech writer Michael Gerson, and former Weekly

Standard senior writer David Brooks paint with broad brush strokes to depict conservatives as beyond the pale and progressives as innocent bystanders.

In late September, in a feature-length [essay](#) in the Washington Post, Kagan argued that “[t]he United States is heading into its greatest political and constitutional crisis since the Civil War, with a reasonable chance over the next three to four years of incidents of mass violence, a breakdown of federal authority, and the division of the country into warring red and blue enclaves.” The cause of the constitutional crisis, according to Kagan, is simple: Republicans will stop at nothing to gain political power.

In his Post [column](#) a few days later, Gerson asserted that “American politics...is already conducted in the shadow of violence.” That violence, he argued, derives from a single source. Whereas “the political party of the left remains committed to liberal democracy,” the GOP is “unfit” to govern, or even share power, owing to its “philosophic embrace of unconstitutional bad-loserism.” The only alternative for those who would promote the public interest, contends Gerson, is to ensure that Democrats maintain control of both houses of Congress and the presidency.

Following fast on the heels of Gerson, New York Times columnist Brooks [agreed](#) that only the Democratic Party can save the nation. By his own account mild-mannered, Brooks had “spent the past few weeks in a controlled fury” because of fellow citizens’ “indifference” to “arguably the most consequential legislative package in a generation.” Brooks endorsed Kagan’s judgment that Donald Trump supporters—not a few outliers but rank-and-file GOP voters—“are willing to torch our institutions because they are so resentful against the people who run them.”

It’s true that many on the right have exhibited worrisome behavior beyond the shameful Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol riot. Loose talk of stolen elections, insinuations that Joe Biden is an illegitimate president,

and scornful characterizations of wide swathes of the citizenry as un-American fan the flames of extremism.

But while recoiling from these disturbing trends, Kagan, Gerson, and Brooks commit their own excesses—and do their part to drive Americans farther apart. They foster the myth that it is only Republicans who commit political violence, refuse to accept the outcome of elections, and play dirty politics. And they nourish the delusion that those who decline to join them in the effort to defeat the Republicans—roughly half the country—are complicit in tearing down American constitutional government.

### **Progressives' Track Record**

The left has indulged political violence. In response to the May 2020 murder of George Floyd, protesters took to the streets in some 140 American cities. While the majority engaged in peaceful efforts to counter racism, some committed over the course of several months a multitude of criminal acts involving arson, vandalism, and looting—including of government buildings. In dozens of cities, police officers were pelted with bricks, water bottles, fireworks, and other projectiles, injuring more than 2,000 member of law enforcement. To a considerable extent, the left—including pundits, professors, and elected officials—stood by in silence or provided moral support. Axios estimated the cost of the total damage across the country at \$1 billion to \$2 billion.

By contrast, Republican officials for the most part promptly and unequivocally condemned the hundreds of Trump supporters who, on Jan. 6, unlawfully entered the Capitol and disrupted the counting of electoral votes. Law enforcement restored order within a matter of hours and Congress completed its business late that night. The rioters' criminal conduct did not ripple through Washington, let alone spread to other cities. According to U.S. prosecutors, rioters caused \$1.5 million in damage to the Capitol—roughly 0.1% of the cost of the previous summer's riots.

The left has made major contributions to legitimating the delegitimization of elections. Yes, Trump continues to proclaim that he was robbed of victory last year owing to skullduggery in closely contested states and some Republicans echo him. For their part, following the U.S. Supreme Court's December 2000 decision in *Bush v. Gore*, large numbers of progressive journalists, law professors, and politicians accused the Republican-appointed justices of permanently staining the high court by stealing the election for their preferred candidate. Furthermore, for the entire four years of Donald Trump's presidency, Democratic Party leaders and progressive intellectuals and media figures encouraged the belief that Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton was illegitimate—either because foreign powers swung the election in his favor or because his belligerent demeanor, rude remarks, and mean tweets disqualified him from holding the highest office in the land.

And the left has played dirty. It championed the Russia-collusion accusation, which is likely to rank among the most brazen and consequential political scandals in American history. In the summer of 2016, Director James Comey's FBI launched operation Crossfire Hurricane, a dubiously predicated investigation of the Trump campaign. In October 2016, based on the phony Steele dossier, the FISA court issued the first of four warrants for surveillance of part-time Trump campaign foreign-policy adviser Carter Page; after a 2019 inspector general [report](#) severely criticized the FBI's procedures for authorizing wiretap applications, the Justice Department admitted that two of the warrants were improperly granted. In January 2017, the Obama Department of Justice relied on the dead-letter, 1799 Logan Act to entrap Trump National Security Adviser Mike Flynn. In May 2017, shortly after Trump fired him as FBI director, Comey successfully maneuvered to trigger a special-counsel investigation of the Trump campaign by improperly leaking confidential government documents to the New York Times. In May 2019, following a two-year investigation, Special Counsel Robert Mueller issued a lengthy and highly critical report but no indictment of any Trump official for unlawfully cooperating with Russians. And Rep. Adam Schiff—first as the ranking Democrat and then as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee—falsely [assured](#) the public that he was privy to ample evidence demonstrating that Trump was a Russian stooge. To this day, no member of the

Trump campaign has been charged with conspiring with Russians to unlawfully interfere in the 2016 election.

Meanwhile, Andrew McCabe—who served as FBI deputy director under Comey and shared responsibility for overseeing the Crossfire Hurricane investigation—was fired in March 2018 after another inspector general [report](#) found that he made false statements concerning his leak of information to the press during the 2016 presidential campaign about his role in overseeing a Clinton Foundation investigation. Former FBI lawyer Kevin Clinesmith [pled](#) guilty in August 2020 to altering an email used to secure surveillance warrants for Page. And former Perkins Coie attorney Michael Sussman was recently [indicted](#) for lying to the FBI in the fall of 2016—while he was also allegedly working for the Clinton campaign—regarding alleged communications between the Trump organization and the Alfa Bank of Russia. Special Counsel John Durham’s lengthy and detailed indictment suggests that additional indictments are to come.

Those on the right have hardly been angels. But the nation’s disunity is not remotely all their fault. The least that responsible political commentators can say about those on the left is that they have contributed more than their share to fomenting distrust for government and dividing the nation.

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