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# Authoritarian Figures in U.S. Politics: How Joseph McCarthy Can Inform Our Understanding of Donald Trump

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AUTHORITARIAN FIGURES IN U.S. POLITICS: HOW JOSEPH MCCARTHY CAN INFORM OUR  
UNDERSTANDING OF DONALD TRUMP

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
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## Thesis Summary

Senator Joseph McCarthy rise and subsequent fall from power in the early 1950s provide some context for the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016. Both men used authoritarian tactics of stoking national fears, claiming to be the only people who wanted to protect the country, and shifting the grounds of debate to present themselves as truth-tellers faced with lying enemies. While McCarthy was ultimately stopped by common decency, Trump was not contained by the same force.

Trump and McCarthy both came to the forefront of national politics in moments of national doubt. McCarthy rose to power in the early stages of the Cold War when fear of communism and communists in the U.S. government was rampant, and Trump emerged in a time in which immigration, terrorism, and shifting national attitudes towards social issues were changing the country. They both played up these doubts to emphasize the need for a strong leader like themselves to save the American way of life.

Both politicians catapulted to national attention through provocative speeches and the media attention they generated. In Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy described the United States as losing the global battle against communism and falsely claimed to have the names of 205 communists in the State Department. While announcing his candidacy for president, Trump railed against incompetent leadership, depicted the U.S. as a weak country that he alone could turn around, and claimed immigrants were bringing crime, violence, and drugs into the country. Both speeches generated media attention that helped propel the two politicians to prominence.

McCarthy and Trump then capitalized on their increased national profile. McCarthy made further unfounded accusations against the State Department while escaping punishment by the

Trydings committee, and he then helped defeat Millard Tydings, who had led the investigation against him, in an election, creating an aura of invincibility about himself. Trump rode the wave of media attention and used authoritarian appeals to win the Republican nomination for president.

The politicians continued to rise, and McCarthy reached the peak of his power. McCarthy defeated the Benton resolution, which was designed to hurt him politically, and then helped defeat its author in an election, enhancing the perception of his power. Trump, using lessons learned from former McCarthy aide Roy Cohn, defeated Hillary Clinton in the General Election.

McCarthy's power, however, was then stripped from him through the Army-McCarthy hearings and the Senate's censure of him. He was brought down as the nation saw how he really operated, and the Senate decided it could not ignore him anymore when he crossed a moral line. Trump proved to be immune to that standard in the General Election when he survived a sexual assault scandal generated by an *Access Hollywood* tape of him. The two men's rise through authoritarian tactics and the fact that Trump endured such a scandal call into question the core of the United States' identity as a country, and these questions will endure in the years to come.

## Abstract

Senator Joseph McCarthy's career can help inform our understanding of the election of Donald Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Both men seized the opportunity provided by authoritarian moments in U.S. history in which part of the population felt their way of life was under attack by global and national forces and looked for strongmen who promised to protect them. In the 1950s, the U.S. was in the middle of the Cold War, and the fear of communism was

pervasive in the country. In 2016, immigration, terrorism, and cultural shifts in the United States were affecting the country, and the fragmented nature of the media magnified these threats for parts of the Republican Party. McCarthy and Trump took advantage of these moments by presenting themselves as strong leaders who would fight back on behalf of the United States to stop the tides of change. They magnified fears by describing a country in crisis, and they took advantage of these fears by presenting themselves as the only leaders strong enough to do what was needed to protect the United States and by distorting discourse so that they appeared to be the soul arbiters of truth to their followers. Both politicians surged onto the national scene with divisive speeches and capitalized on the subsequent media attention. McCarthy rose to power by fighting the Tydings Committee and the Benton Resolution and helping defeat political opponents in elections. Trump rose to power by winning first the Republican primaries and then the General Election against Hillary Clinton in 2016. McCarthy was then felled when he finally crossed lines the Senate and nation could not ignore. The Army-McCarthy hearings and his Senate censure stripped him of his power. Trump, however, evaded the repercussions of a sexual assault scandal in the run-up to the election. The political success these men experienced provoke questions about the core tenants of the United States' national identity.

## Introduction

While Donald Trump's ascendancy to the United States' presidency was a divergence from the norms of presidential politics, it was not without precedent. Yale scholar Timothy Snyder has turned to his expertise in 20<sup>th</sup> century European history to find examples to help explain the Trump phenomenon and where it might lead. In U.S. history, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) is an illuminating reference point for Trump's rise and roadblocks.<sup>i</sup>

Authoritarianism was an important aspect of both Trump and McCarthy's political appeal. It is a broad concept. The term 'authoritarian' can refer either to the leaders who stoke the fears of the people and use that fear as a political tool to gain and maintain power or to the citizens who look for leaders who will take harsh and decisive action to combat perceived physical or cultural threats. Physical threats include terrorism or war, and cultural threats are changing national attitudes towards issues such as race, immigration, or sexuality that are perceived as altering the foundation of these citizens way of life.<sup>ii</sup> Trump and McCarthy appealed to authoritarians in the American population by depicting the country as being in the midst of a civilizational struggle for its soul and by shifting the grounds of debate, presenting themselves as the arbiters of truth.

In the mid-twentieth century, the specter of communism and the Cold War dominated American politics, and in 2016, terrorism, immigration, and changing social values posed threats to the way of life for a segment of the population. McCarthy's political career provides a glimpse into how a politician can use authoritarian tactics to rise to prominence in the upper levels of United States politics and provides a lens through which Donald Trump can be examined. McCarthy and Trump came to national attention in moments of national doubt in which at least a portion of the population felt the country was part of a struggle between civilizations, and they

monopolized that uncertainty and bent it for their personal gain. They both burst onto the scene with a provocative speech that led to extensive news coverage and opened the door to their brand of political discourse. From their aggressive opening acts, both figures obscured debate and hurled accusations to dispatch political opponents even before they emerged as powerful counter-forces: McCarthy in the Tydings Committee and Trump in the Republican primaries. McCarthy then defeated the Benton resolution, helped defeat political opponents in elections, and chaired his own committee. Trump stormed to a surprising Electoral College victory over Hillary Clinton in the general election. McCarthy had reached his peak, however. The Army-McCarthy hearings and the Senate's censure greatly diminished his political power. Trump, on the other hand, proved resistant to repercussions from his own stepping over moral lines in shrugging off a sexual assault scandal revealed by the *Access Hollywood* tape. While McCarthy's fall from grace offers some lessons about the collapse of authoritarian leaders in the U.S., Trump's fate may not be limited by the same forces, and both narratives challenge the idea of the United States' national identity.

#### State of the Nation in the Mid-twentieth Century

The issue of anti-communism in the United States was not unique to Joseph McCarthy. He was part of a long line of politicians stretching back to before the Cold War who adopted it.<sup>iii</sup> However, global developments after World War II made the issue easier to capitalize on politically.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1917, the success of the Bolshevik Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union gave rise to the fear of communism in the United States. A decade and a half later, critics of the New Deal claimed that its programs were pushing the U.S. closer to communism. In 1938

the concept of communists in the federal government became a major national issue. Texas representative Martin Dies used the Special House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) to attack President Franklin Roosevelt's administration, and Dies and other members of committee used a variety of techniques that McCarthy would later adopt, especially championing the idea of guilt by association, having former Communists testify as key witnesses, and making accusations that they claimed they had evidence to back up but it was too sensitive to share or that an investigation would easily turn up the needed evidence. Gallup polls showed that the American people liked the work the committee was doing.<sup>v</sup>

After World War II, the Soviet Union was the United States primary geopolitical foe, and the issue of communists in the U.S. government gained steam again. A bipartisan effort made HUAC a permanent committee in 1945, and anti-communism was a key campaign issue for Republicans nationally in victorious 1946 congressional campaigns. They took control of both houses, and after sixteen years without power due to the successes of the New Deal and the American war effort, Republicans investigated every facet of Truman's Democratic administration. The State Department was one of the main targets.<sup>vi</sup>

Events later in the decade increased the focus on the State Department and the fear of communism in government. In September 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested their first atomic bomb, and in December of the same year, the Nationalist government left mainland China, ceding control of the country to Mao Zedong and allowing him to establish the People's Republic of China. There were also several high profile espionage cases in the winter of 1949-50. Julius Rosenberg, Ethel Rosenberg, and Klaus Fuchs were all accused of passing information to the Soviets, and Alger Hiss was convicted of perjury in January 1950.<sup>vii</sup> Hiss' conviction, although it was not for espionage, was a political victory for Republicans. He had been part of

the U.S. delegation at Yalta, and Republicans accused him of whispering into the ear of an enfeebled Franklin Roosevelt, convincing FDR to give up on East Germany, East Berlin, Poland, Iran, China, and Korea and letting the Soviet Union greatly expand its sphere of influence in the world.<sup>viii</sup> With communism spreading across the globe and seemingly into the United States government, U.S. citizens with authoritarian tendencies were primed for a strong leader who could capitalize on their fears by promising to save the country and their way of life.

### A Party Ready for a Trump

Prior to the 2016 election, communism was not the issue voters were concerned about, but significant shifts had taken place in the previous eight years. Immigration altered the demographics of the country and promised to continue doing so. During Barack Obama's administration, the federal government changed policies through its liberal approach to issues such as marriage, drug enforcement, and police brutality. Threats such as terrorism were fragmented in nature, and the fragmentation of media provided the means for individuals to surround themselves with the message that danger was omnipresent. The Republican Party, positioned as the party of traditional values reaped the electoral rewards of these shifts and threats, but these forces were driving greater reactionary changes than the GOP knew or wanted.<sup>ix</sup>

Under the nation's first African-American president, profound societal changes and tensions became more apparent. Conversations about gender roles and sexual orientation became more public. Same-sex marriage was legalized. Drug laws were not as stringently enforced federally, and some states legalized marijuana. Issues of racialized police violence sprung up

across the country. Immigration continued to alter the demographics of the country, and some people blamed immigrants for slow economic recovery after the financial crisis of 2008.<sup>x</sup>

Simultaneously, physical threats seemed to increase at home and abroad. High profile terrorist attacks took place from San Bernardino to Paris. ISIS appeared and expanded in the Middle East. Iran's nuclear program and the growing strength of Russia became major foreign policy issues. The perception of these threats was magnified for some residents of the United States. News was available from a variety of sources twenty-four hours a day. By watching television stations like Fox News, visiting websites like Breitbart, and InfoWars, and listening to radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Herman Cain, conservatives could constantly absorb right wing media, and these outlets told their viewers and subscribers that President Obama was not keeping the country safe and that the threat of terrorism was everywhere. With the self-selecting nature of news consumption and social media, people could easily be surrounded by nothing but the news they wanted to hear, potentially amplifying perceived threats.<sup>xi</sup>

Dating back to the 1960s, the Republican Party had positioned itself as the party of traditional values, and the Democrats became the party of social change. As a result, authoritarian leaning individuals filtered into the GOP, looking to maintain the status quo of the country. Confronted with the concurrent issues of societal shifts and physical threats, authoritarian leaning people, a population political scientists determine indirectly in surveys by asking questions about parenting values, searched for a strong leader who would promise to do what it took to stop and reverse the tides of change in the 2016 election. Donald Trump became the politician they wanted.<sup>xii</sup>

## McCarthy's Big Break

On February 9, 1950, Joseph McCarthy, who had been in the Senate for four years, began his rise to national prominence with a speech to the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia.<sup>xiii</sup> During the winter of 1949-50, he was one of many Republicans publicly denouncing Communism around the country, but McCarthy's showmanship and provocative claim that he had the names of 205 communists working in the State Department separated him from the pack.<sup>xiv</sup> McCarthy, who liked to be called "Tailgunner Joe," presented a global crisis: the struggle between Communism and Democracy.<sup>xv</sup> McCarthy accused the elites in the State Department of being traitors who created pro-communist policies, but he explicitly stated that minorities were not to blame for the country's issues. McCarthy concluded by saying the people would soon fulfill their responsibility to hold government accountable.<sup>xvi</sup>

McCarthy's speech began with a depiction of a world that should have been peaceful after victory in World War II. Instead, the world was once more embroiled in conflict, "a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity."<sup>xvii</sup> It was a struggle between right and wrong that pitted Christian society against a godless other. It was a clash of civilizations. To further raise the stakes and prove that a great battle was afoot, McCarthy invoked the words of Vladimir Lenin, the deceased founder of the Soviet Union who said, "One or the other must triumph in the end."<sup>xviii</sup> Having told the women of Wheeling that they were in the middle of a war of ideologies, McCarthy increased the urgency of the situation by declaring that the US was losing that conflict. While 180 million people had been in the Soviet sphere at the end of WWII and 1.625 billion people "on the anti-totalitarian side," McCarthy said that the Soviet Union had reached 800 million people and left the side of democracy with only 500 million people.<sup>xix</sup> He did not mention that this shift was a result of the establishment of the People's Republic of China the previous year and the assumption that everyone in China had become a communist.<sup>xx</sup>

McCarthy declared that the communists who were gaining strength and adding followers throughout the world were already in the United States, and like many authoritarian leaders, McCarthy proclaimed that these “enemies from within” were enemies of the people.<sup>xxi</sup> They were trying to radically alter the country’s way of life. While the US had the opportunity to be a shining example of civilization after the war, the traitors had prevented the nation from fulfilling its potential. These traitors fit a very specific profile. They were “those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer,” and they worked in the State Department.<sup>xxii</sup> This fact was critical because it meant communists had the ability to make foreign policy.

With a showman’s flair, McCarthy revealed to the crowd that this was not a localized infection. He told them that he had “a list of 205 – a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.”<sup>xxiii</sup> McCarthy claimed there was an enormous conspiracy within the government that went all the way up to cabinet members. To really drive the point home, McCarthy then told the assembled women that Secretary of State Dean Acheson had vouched for the character of Alger Hiss, the sneaking villain of Yalta.<sup>xxiv</sup> Although Hiss had been discovered, the remaining 205 communists in the State Department might gradually give the world to Stalin.

The silver lining McCarthy proclaimed, speaking for the people, was that the citizens of the United States were finally being jolted out of their post-war complacency.<sup>xxv</sup> Although McCarthy did not realize it, he would soon be leading an uprising of his own in government that would be characterized by the same grandiose statements and far-fetched accusations of the speech he delivered that night. In fact, he did not have a list of 205 names.<sup>xxvi</sup> He had a letter

from James Byrnes, the Secretary of State in 1946, recommending that 285 of 3,000 people who were to be transferred from wartime agencies to the State Department not be permanently employed though seventy-nine of them were no longer working in the government when the letter was sent. With a bit of rounding and subtraction, McCarthy ended up with the 205 he had used for dramatic effect, unaware of the firestorm it would create.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Other Republicans around the country making similar speeches, but McCarthy, by mere chance, was the one who eventually gained national attention. While most papers ignored the speech, the *Denver Post* featured the story on the front page. Coincidentally, McCarthy was flying through Denver to Salt Lake City to give another speech the next day. When he deplaned in Denver, he was accosted by reporters demanding to see the list. Always ready to work the press and never willing to admit he was wrong or had lied, McCarthy rummaged briefly in his briefcase before telling them the list was on the plane, so he would be unable to show them.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In Salt Lake City, the drama heightened when he started talking about a second list. The first was 205 “bad risks” in the State Department, but the second was fifty-seven “card-carrying communists” in the department, and a day later when he was in Reno, he told the press he had fifty-seven names.<sup>xxix</sup> In this dance between McCarthy and the press, he showed a tactic he would use frequently in the press and in the Senate in the coming years: muddying the waters of debate and changing the parameters. Additionally, the willingness to make false accusations and an unwillingness to back down became staples of the McCarthy playbook during his rise to Senatorial power. They would contribute to his fall as well.

## Trump's Opening Salvo

On June 16, 2015 at Trump Tower in New York, Donald Trump officially began his political career with an inflammatory speech declaring his candidacy for President of the United States. As he would throughout the campaign, Trump presented a dark view of the country; he blamed incompetent and out of touch leaders, and made clear that he saw the other Republican candidates as more of the same. He conveyed that he saw Americans as superior to people from other countries and that he saw himself as superior to other people in his ability to lead. Although these messages were scattered throughout his speech, his overarching theme was that the United States needed a strong leader to restore the lost glory from an unknown point in the past and save the nation, and he was the only man who could make that happen.<sup>xxx</sup> It was a message that would appeal to voters with authoritarian tendencies.

Trump described a “dying” country that could no longer serve the needs of its people, employing what he termed in *Art of the Deal* “truthful hyperbole” to make his point.<sup>xxx1</sup> Nothing was going well. The economy was in shambles. Eighteen trillion dollars of debt loomed over the country. Other nations were constantly taking advantage of the United States in a zero sum world. The American economy was in a dilapidated state because of global issues. Countries like China and Mexico were taking advantage of the United States, and global trade deals were partially to blame.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Furthermore, the country's safety was no longer guaranteed because the threat of terrorism was ever present. “Islamic terrorism is eating up large portions of the Middle East,” he told the crowd.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The threat of an amorphous other was crystalizing and expanding in ISIS, but the U.S. was woefully unprepared to understand the issue, let alone confront it. “We have no protection.... We don't know what's happening.... And it's got to stop fast,” he declared.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Having built this sense of urgency, Trump decried the state of the military as a whole and the state of the nuclear arsenal.

In addition to the country's economy and safety, its programs to protect its citizens' welfare were failing as well. The Affordable Care Act, known as Obamacare, and Social Security were both major issues, but Trump presented different solutions for them. In a characteristically vague yet hopeful declaration, Trump announced that he wanted to repeal and replace Obamacare with something "much better and much less expensive for people and for the government" before it could be too destructive economically.<sup>xxxv</sup> Trump promised not to touch Social Security, on the other hand. Despite other Republicans' interest in entitlement reform, he vowed he was "not going to cut it at all" because economic growth during his presidency would be so dynamic that he would not need to slice benefits.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

While depicting a country in crisis, Trump laid the blame entirely on the shoulders of the country's "all talk, no action" political leaders and noted that the other Republicans running for president suffered from some of the same problems. Incompetence and looking out for special interests held many politicians back in Trump's eyes. They were doing whatever they were told to do by lobbyists and their donors. These attacks were paired with the charge that politicians were completely disconnected from their constituents' concerns. He accused his fellow Republican candidates of neither caring about nor talking about the real issues the U.S. faced, saying China was "devaluing their currency to a level that you wouldn't believe. It makes it impossible for our companies to compete... But you don't hear that from anybody else."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Trump then elaborated on how out of touch his primary opponents were. He hit them for describing an optimistic state of the union only to have people say, "What's going on? I just want a job. Just get me a job. I don't need the rhetoric. I want a job."<sup>xxxviii</sup> This idea of economic

simplicity coming from an elite who seemed to care about the masses would resonate with voters.

Trump's appeal in his opening speech went beyond haranguing the nation's politicians. He also hit out at foreigners and foreign countries. Unlike McCarthy, Trump had no problem demonizing minorities. Instead of identifying the United States as a nation of immigrants, he referred to it as "a dumping ground for everybody else's problems."<sup>xxxix</sup> Trump positioned the U.S. and the people he considered to be worthy of its citizenship as his group, and his people were great people. "These are the best and the finest," he said about his supporters at Trump Tower that day, and then directly contrasted them with immigrants. Mexico, he contended, was a prime culprit of dumping its problems in the U.S. "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you," he declared, expanding on his othering of immigrants. In the most inflammatory and prejudiced part of the speech, he continued his thought on Mexican immigrants, saying "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."<sup>xl</sup> Having defined Mexican immigrants as a different group than his supporters, he degraded them, defining them as a component of a perceived crime problem, and in this process, he appealed to his supporters fear of social change. Appealing to this fear of differences and change was a foundational component of his campaign.

The final component of Trump's announcement was his portrayal of himself as the only leader strong enough to return the U.S. to its previous glory. He presented himself as a foreign policy prophet, falsely claiming that he had opposed the invasion of Iraq from the beginning, and he told the audience that economic experts were not entirely to be trusted.<sup>xli</sup> But he could be. He told them he would build "a great, great wall on our southern border" that Mexico would pay for because of his negotiating prowess, which he said was enough – when combined with additional

taxes – to keep companies from taking manufacturing jobs abroad. Trump said he alone could defeat ISIS, revitalize the military, prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons, and bring back jobs. In the final line of the speech, he boldly declared, “Sadly the American dream is dead. But if I get elected president, I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again.”<sup>xliii</sup> Trump built his campaign on similarly authoritarian claims, asserting that he alone could save the nation from a bleak fate.

Predictably, this provocative speech generated enormous press coverage, much of it critical. Trump’s response established the style of his campaign by refusing to back down even from his statement about Mexican immigrants, instead portraying himself as the rare kind of politician who was not afraid to tell the truth even if it was unpopular. In an appearance on the Fox News show *MediaBuzz* two weeks later, Trump was asked about his comments and played the role of the victim. He told the host that the border was “one of the most dangerous places on earth. And I bring that up all of a sudden I’m a bad person.”<sup>xliiii</sup> He then defended himself as a truth teller, saying, “I don’t mind apologizing for things. I can’t apologize for the truth.”<sup>xliiv</sup> Cable news outlets loved the viewers that Trump attracted to their show with his unfiltered comments and brash refusal to apologize. CNN soon aired entire Trump rallies, and the man who proclaimed in *The Art of the Deal* that “the benefits” of being covered by tabloids and newspapers “have far outweighed the drawbacks” throughout his career was given an enormous amount of free advertising to kick start his campaign.<sup>xliv</sup> Expanding the messages in his opening speech, the political outsider and businessman continued to tap into the economic distress and the fears of many Americans. He made populist appeals, blaming the problems of the common people on the elites and people from other countries. Trump cudgeled the more experienced politicians he faced throughout the campaign with this line of attack.

## McCarthy's Return to the Senate and Growing Influence

Describing Joseph McCarthy as a poker player, one of his friends from Wisconsin said, "He raises on the poor hands and always comes out the winner."<sup>xlvi</sup> As the story of the Wheeling speech spread, McCarthy raised on a poor hand, and in the short term, he came out a winner. In the year following the speech, McCarthy went from being an unremarkable Senator to being seen as almost invincible.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Eleven days after the speech, McCarthy expanded on his accusations on the Senate floor. Using an old list from a House investigation but claiming it came from the State Department, McCarthy read out the results of some investigations and improvised the results of others, twisting findings and exaggerating the truth as he pleased. From one case that concluded an application was "very sketchy," McCarthy told the Senate that the man was "a known Communist," adding, "I am not evaluating the information myself. I am merely giving what is in the file."<sup>xlviii</sup> McCarthy had aroused enough interest in his lists that the Senate wanted to know more, so a subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee led by Maryland Senator Millard Tydings was tasked with investigating the claims.<sup>xlix</sup>

With no original list of communists in government, McCarthy produced only weak accusations of membership in communist front groups during the first few weeks of the proceedings, but the intense press coverage of the open hearings kept the investigation going.<sup>1</sup> The heavy coverage churned up popular support for McCarthy and his crusade, and letters and postcards from people who appreciated his work poured in from across the country.<sup>li</sup>

The Tydings Committee investigation heated up with McCarthy's accusations against Owen Lattimore. Lattimore was only tangentially related to the State Department as a part of the

Institute of Pacific Relations, but he had accompanied Vice President Henry Wallace to China in 1944. As the 1940s progressed, Lattimore became critical of Chiang Kai-shek and more sympathetic to communists, and in 1949, he voiced his opinion that the United States should leave South Korea to its own devices. McCarthy claimed that Lattimore was “one of the principal architects of our Far Eastern policy.” Additionally, McCarthy bestowed the title of “top Russian espionage agent” in the United States on Lattimore in his typically dramatic fashion.<sup>lii</sup> McCarthy first told reporters he had the name of the Russian agent, and Tydings immediately called a closed meeting of the subcommittee for McCarthy to share the name. McCarthy had no evidence, but he told the subcommittee he knew of sources where it might be found.<sup>liii</sup> Due to the severity of the charge, Attorney General Howard McGrath showed Lattimore’s Executive Branch’s loyalty file to four members of the committee, and Tydings announced that there was no evidence supporting McCarthy’s accusation.<sup>liv</sup> Frustrated with McCarthy, Tydings declared, “We don’t want opinion evidence here. We want facts, f-a-c-t-s. We are getting few of them.”<sup>lv</sup> The controversy McCarthy had created was not based in facts, and facts would not be enough to end it.<sup>lvi</sup>

The subcommittee’s investigation continued, and McCarthy’s accusations continued unabated as well. His next target was *Amerasia*, a magazine on Far Eastern affairs that he contended was passing information to the Soviets. The magazine had previously been investigated, but McCarthy used his usual devices of obfuscation. In one instance, McCarthy got one OSS officer who had investigated the case previously to testify that he remembered a document marked ‘A bomb’ from the raid on the *Amerasia* office even though he had not mentioned it in previous congressional testimony.<sup>lvii</sup> This part of the investigation also yielded no results to support McCarthy’s claims. North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, and a

few weeks later, the Tydings Committee issued its report on July 14. The report said McCarthy's accusations were "a fraud and a hoax," but a Republican member of the committee issued his own report declaring that he did not agree with the committee's findings.<sup>lviii</sup>

The Tydings Committee's investigation increased McCarthy's national profile, but it did not earn him the respect of all of his Republican colleagues. A group of seven GOP senators led by Margaret Smith of Maine, the only woman in the Senate, issued a Declaration of Conscience, in which they called upon McCarthy, although not by name, to stop using "totalitarian techniques" and to remember that he was an American before he was a Republican.<sup>lix</sup> The expression of disapproval did little to slow McCarthy. The next day he told the press that his "attempt to expose and neutralize the efforts of those who are attempting to betray this country" would be stopped by neither the reactions of the administration nor those of his colleagues.<sup>lx</sup> Few members of the GOP shared Smith's consternation, and the party moved closer to McCarthy as the 1950 midterm elections approached to take advantage of the issue of communism's political power. McCarthy campaigned in fifteen states for Republicans, helping to defeat Tydings in Maryland and Scott Lucas, who was also on the Tydings Committee, in Illinois. Tydings was running for a fifth term with a strong legislative record, but the issues of the campaign became communism and his committee. The defeat of the entrenched Tydings lent an air of political invincibility to McCarthy amongst his colleagues in the Senate.<sup>lxi</sup> McCarthy had raised on his bad hand in February, and by November, he had won big.

## 2016 GOP Primaries

Feeding off of the free press coverage his controversial campaign created, Trump gradually gained momentum in the days after announcing his candidacy. By early September, he

had surged ahead in national polls, and he did relinquish his lead.<sup>lxii</sup> The group of sixteen candidates narrowed gradually in late 2015 and early 2016, and eleven candidates had endured seven debates to compete in the Iowa caucus on February 1, 2016.<sup>lxiii</sup> Throughout the race, Trump's main targets were his competitors who targeted him. Early on, Rand Paul and Jeb Bush attacked him, but Paul dropped out on February 3, and Bush dropped out February 20.<sup>lxiv</sup> From that point, Trump had to hold off Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz. Cruz won Iowa, but Trump won the vast majority of the contests after that.<sup>lxv</sup> Rubio dropped out March 15. Cruz bowed out May 3, and when John Kasich left the race the next day, Trump's path to the nomination was unobstructed.<sup>lxvi</sup> Trump accepted the nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland on July 21, 2016, having cleared the hurdle of 1,237 delegates needed to win and finishing with 1,447 pledged delegates.<sup>lxvii</sup> Trump's attacks during the campaign were highly successful. He railed against the media, and he called for a ban on Muslim immigration. He dispatched Paul and Bush with calls for authoritarian action, and against Rubio and Cruz, he constantly obscured the debate to neutralize their attacks while maintaining his calls for a strong government.

Early on in his campaign, Trump built on the idea that he was the most honest source of information, which he had established to some voters in his candidacy announcement and subsequent appearance on *MediaBuzz*. In response to a question at the first debate on August 6, 2015 about his comments on Mexico, Trump attacked the media, claiming reporters were "a very dishonest lot" and had misrepresented his comments. He added that drugs and immigrants were still crossing the border although the media preferred to talk about him rather than the substance of his comments.<sup>lxviii</sup> His positioning himself as the sole authority of truth and his insistence that

the media could not be trusted would be constantly revisited throughout the primaries and general election.

Another key component of Trump's campaign was his call for a ban on Muslim immigration in December 2015. Much like McCarthy, Trump claimed the United States was in a clash of civilizations, but his enemy for the United States was Islam – sometimes of the radical variety but not always – rather than Communism. He claimed that “the hatred” Muslims had for the United States was “beyond comprehension,” but he also made a weak attempt to make his clash of civilizations more palatable to moderates by claiming the ban had “nothing to with religion” but was “about safety.”<sup>lxxix</sup> No matter what reason he used to justify the ban, it was a proposal that appealed to the desire for safety felt by Republicans who wanted to protect their way of life and saw Muslims as threatening it.

Early in the primary process, Rand Paul and Jeb Bush were the Republicans who attacked Trump's ideas the most, and consequently, they were the Republicans he attacked the most. While Trump made some personal attacks on the pair, saying Paul looked bad and Bush had no energy, the main way he responded to their criticisms was to make it clear that his solutions to problems like terrorism were more extreme than theirs.<sup>lxxx</sup> Trump's proposal to kill the families of terrorists revealed this divide. Bush insisted that this was not a serious answer to the problem, and Trump replied, “The problem is we need toughness.” Paul then jumped in saying that Trump's idea violated the Geneva Convention and went against American values. “So they can kill us, but we can't kill them?” Trump replied with incredulity.<sup>lxxxi</sup> While Paul and Bush thought the electorate wanted more humane answers to the issue of terrorism, many voters in the Republican party were actually looking for a strongman like Trump, who floated the idea of bringing back waterboarding and “a hell of a lot worse” to deal with terrorists.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

While Trump maintained his authoritarian positions after Paul and Bush were out of the race, he more often than not used accusation, obfuscation, and shifting the discussion to keep Rubio and Cruz from overtaking him. For example, when Rubio hit Trump for hiring illegal workers to work at his properties, Trump replied that he was “the only one on the stage that’s hired people” and that “the laws were totally different” as if the very nature of his career in business justified his practices and Rubio had no right to question him.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Similarly, when Cruz raised the point that Trump did not start the immigration debate as he frequently claimed because Cruz had been talking about it in the Senate while Trump was running *The Celebrity Apprentice*, Trump did not engage with the point. Instead, he told Cruz that he “should be ashamed” because he did not have the support of any of his Republican colleagues in the Senate in part because they did not like Cruz’s personality.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Trump’s attacks were not as authoritarian as he finished off his primary opponents, but he succeeded in shifting the grounds of the debate enough when he was attacked to avoid any major damage that might have cost him the nomination and the chance to face Hillary Clinton, against whom every Republican had been campaigning.

### The Apogee of McCarthy’s Power

After the Tydings Committee and the defeat of Senator Tydings in the 1950 election, McCarthy faced another challenge in the form of the Benton Resolution calling for an investigation with the potential for his expulsion from the Senate, but yet again, McCarthy met the obstacle with his brash style, overcame it, and emerged with more power. His influence continued to grow with the success of the Republican Party in the 1952 election, and he reached the height of his power when he chaired his own committee and subcommittee in 1953. McCarthy’s tactics of wild accusations and norm breaking continued to propel his rise.

In August 1951, Connecticut Senator William Benton called for an investigation into the question of whether McCarthy should be expelled from the Senate. Benton charged McCarthy with perjuring himself with regards to the number of names he told the Tydings Committee he said he had in Wheeling, distorting the record of General George Marshall, and using false evidence on the Senate floor. Benton did not expect McCarthy to be expelled, but he wanted to provide a platform for attacks on McCarthy to hurt McCarthy's chances of reelection in 1952.<sup>lxxv</sup>

McCarthy responded in the same fashion he always did. On Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now*, McCarthy claimed Benton was using the shield of congressional immunity "to smear McCarthy."<sup>lxxvi</sup> Benton responded that he would "waive any immunity which I may enjoy under the Constitution," and McCarthy pounced, filing a two million dollar libel suit against Benton. The threat of the lawsuit hung over Benton's head for two years, but McCarthy dropped it before the suit was scheduled to appear in court.<sup>lxxvii</sup> McCarthy also introduced a resolution to investigate Benton's time as Assistant Secretary of State and as a Senator. Because Benton was also up for reelection in 1952, he had to defend himself from every one of these attacks, keeping the story in the press. McCarthy claimed to have "sixty-two different exhibits" showing Benton, or the "Chameleon of Connecticut" as McCarthy termed him, was following the Communist line, but all McCarthy actually had was twenty-one creatively numbered exhibits that proved nothing.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Senator Tom Hennings of Missouri led the investigation into McCarthy, and his subcommittee released a report on January 2, 1953 – several months after McCarthy was reelected. The Hennings Report, which was written primarily with regards to the Senate's institutional norms and rules and included no recommendations, said McCarthy showed "a disdain and contempt for the rules and wishes of the entire Senate body" and that "Senator

McCarthy deliberately set out to thwart any investigation of him by obscuring the real issue.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The report itself had little impact, but McCarthy's censure would ultimately build on the foundation it provided after the balance of power in the Senate shifted.<sup>lxxx</sup>

During the Hennings investigation, McCarthy's prowess reached greater heights as a result of the 1952 election. McCarthy was completely identified with the issue of anti-communism at this point, and he was once again a popular campaign surrogate. Several prominent Democrats he campaigned against, including Benton and the Democratic Senate leader Ernest McFarland, lost their seats, expanding the legend of McCarthy's electoral influence. In reality, the election of President Dwight D. Eisenhower propelled Republicans to success nationally, and McCarthy finished with a smaller share of the vote than Eisenhower in Wisconsin.<sup>lxxxii</sup> However, perception created political power, and Democrats feared McCarthy.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The truth was that a rift was emerging in the Republican Party between extremists like McCarthy and moderates like Eisenhower, who disapproved of McCarthy's methods but was willing to put up with them, and Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft of Ohio was between the two groups.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

McCarthy reaped the rewards of his stature in 1953, chairing the Senate Committee on Government Operations and heading the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> 1953 was the only point in McCarthy's senatorial career in which he was entirely on the offensive, and he took advantage of the opportunity, hiring Roy Cohn as his chief counsel and investigating anywhere he caught a whiff of communism. The subcommittee opened 445 preliminary inquiries, 157 investigations, and held seventeen public hearings. The State Department and its information program, the Voices of America, were up first. Cohn and G. David Schine toured State's libraries overseas looking for communist content, and McCarthy investigated authors.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

The subcommittee also looked into the Government Printing Office and individuals in the Army Signal Corps Engineering Laboratories, even though the FBI and HUAC had already investigated and found nothing. McCarthy used his ability to sensationalize to try to connect the organizations to Julius Rosenberg and Alger Hiss, but he was unsuccessful. His power began to fade in the fall of 1953. In July, the Democrats assigned to him took leave of his subcommittee, and Republicans were less interested in being associated with his recent work.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> McCarthy had reached the peak of his influence, and his mystique and power began to decline.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

Roy Cohn

One direct connection between Trump and McCarthy was Roy Cohn. After serving as McCarthy's chief counsel, he mentored Trump in Trump's early days in Manhattan. He passed along some of the strategies he employed with McCarthy to Trump, and those same lessons were crucial to how Trump operated during the 2016 campaign.

Cohn, a child prodigy, graduated from Columbia Law School at the age of twenty, and when he was twenty-three, he was the lead prosecutor in the Rosenberg case. He got both Julius and Ethel Rosenberg convicted of atomic espionage, and when the judge called Cohn from a phone booth, he convinced the judge to give Ethel the same sentence as Julius: the death penalty. In 1953, he joined McCarthy as the chief counsel to the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. He worked for McCarthy at the height of his power, and he would be involved in some of the events that brought McCarthy's down. Cohn loved the work of investigating possible (if rarely probable) communists in government, and he would later write that he "never worked for a better man or a greater cause."<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Trump met the man he would later describe as “very tough” but “no Boy Scout” when he and his father were being sued by the Department of Justice for discrimination under the Civil Rights Act.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Trump’s lawyers wanted to settle, but Cohn’s advice was to “tell them to go to hell and fight the thing in court and let them prove that you discriminated.”<sup>xc</sup> Cohn took the case himself, and they settled without admitting guilt. Instead they had to put equal-opportunity vacancy ads in newspapers. Cohn became a mentor and advisor to Trump, who was unconcerned by the fact that Cohn “spent more than two thirds of his adult life under indictment for one charge or another” without Trump ever knowing if he was guilty.<sup>xc</sup> Cohn taught Trump the lesson that all press was advantageous and that he would sometimes call reporters himself to deliver a scoop.<sup>xcii</sup> Most importantly, he passed along McCarthy’s style: always attack and never back down.<sup>xciii</sup> The latter lesson would be critical to Trump’s success in the general election against Hillary Clinton in 2016.

## The General Election

Donald Trump’s Electoral College victory on November 8, 2016 shocked the nation. Virtually no one outside of his campaign and his loyal core of followers expected him to win, but he finished the evening with 304 electoral votes despite losing the popular vote.<sup>xciv</sup> Trump used his authoritarian appeals, ability to muddy the waters of debate, and ability to ignore facts with no repercussions to overcome long odds and video evidence of him admitting to sexual assault.

In the time between Ted Cruz and John Kasich dropping out of the GOP primary and the convention, several events in the U.S. provided more fuel for Trump’s call for a strong national leader who was willing to do what others might not in order to ensure order. On June 12, 2016, a gunman who had pledged allegiance to ISIS attacked the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida,

killing forty-nine people.<sup>xcv</sup> In his statement on the attack, Trump claimed credit for knowing that such an attack would happen, saying, “I said this was going to happen – and it is only going to get worse. I am trying to save lives and prevent the next terrorist attack. We can't afford to be politically correct anymore.”<sup>xcvi</sup> He presented himself as a prophet and built on the idea that he alone understood what was happening in the world and could keep the country safe. Trump also used the occasion to play up his vision of a clash of civilizations and tout his immigration policy, claiming that “Since 9/11, hundreds of migrants and their children have been implicated in terrorism in the United States,” but if they were not allowed into the country, the nation would be much safer.<sup>xcvii</sup> A month later, on June 7, 2016, a sniper in Dallas, Texas killed five police officers and injured two others.<sup>xcviii</sup> Trump dialed up the fear factor by referring to the deaths as “horrific execution-style shootings,” and he called for “strong leadership, love, and compassion.”<sup>xcix</sup> Two weeks later at the GOP convention, Trump drew on these events to describe a country at a “moment of crisis” facing threats to “our very way of life,” but he promised that despite what the dishonest media said he would win the race and restore safety to the nation.<sup>c</sup>

The final component of his authoritarian appeal was his threat to jail his political opponent, Hillary Clinton. Publically he typically called for a special prosecutor to investigate her use of a private email server while chants of “Lock Her Up” washed over him at rallies, but at the second debate in the general election, he directly threatened to imprison Clinton in response to her comment that it was a good thing he was not running the country. This was yet another example of Trump taking a situation farther than other politicians would go.<sup>ci</sup> Each event of violence activated the authoritarian leanings of more of the population and gave his message of extreme responses a deeper resonance with voters.<sup>cii</sup>

Trump's ability to escape scandal with less damage than another politician would have suffered by shifting the foundations of debate was key to him surviving the controversy created by the *Access Hollywood* tape. On October 7, the *Washington Post* broke the story that there was a recording of Trump bragging about sexually assaulting women while on the show *Access Hollywood*, and the *Post* released the tape. There was immediate uproar from across the political spectrum. Republican Speaker of the House Paul Ryan said he was "sickened" by Trump's comments, and many prominent Republicans, such as Reince Priebus and Mitch McConnell, expressed similar sentiments. Trump released a short video in response, saying he "was wrong" and, in a rare instance, apologizing. However, he immediately went on the attack, claiming in the video that Bill Clinton's actions were worse than Trump's words and accusing Hillary Clinton of having "intimidated" her husbands' "victims."<sup>ciii</sup> While Trump had to answer difficult questions about the tape despite his best efforts to pivot to talking about how he would "knock the hell out of ISIS" two days later at the second debate of the general election, his accusations against the Clintons' changed the public discussion of the issue.<sup>civ</sup> In the third debate, moderator Chris Wallace asked Trump to defend himself, but in the interest of fairness, he also asked Hillary Clinton to defend Bill's actions.<sup>cv</sup> Trump's attack succeeded in shifting the questions his opponent was expected to answer and deflect attention from his history of sexual assault.

The third component of the general election that helped Trump win was his ability, like McCarthy, to not let facts stop his narrative. Even on clear cut issues, such as the fact that Trump tweeted that climate change was a Chinese hoax, he challenged Clinton and told her she was wrong.<sup>cvi</sup> This dynamic was borne out in an extended exchange on taxes and regulations in the first debate. Trump accused Clinton of suggesting measures that would "regulate these businesses out of existence" and drastically increase taxes. Clinton responded that she knew

Trump would make similar accusations, so her website was serving as a fact-checker during the debate.<sup>cvii</sup> Trump immediately moved the conversation away from the existence of facts and attacked Clinton's website, saying he did not "think General Douglas MacArthur would like" that she had her plan to fight ISIS online.<sup>cviii</sup> Clinton responded with the line "Please, fact checkers, get to work."<sup>cix</sup> On the next question, Trump said that Republicans and Democrats alike were responsible for the huge amounts of red tape and high taxes that pushed businesses to keep money overseas, saying, "We have no leadership. And honestly, that starts with Secretary Clinton."<sup>cx</sup> "I have a feeling that by the end of this evening, I'm going to be blamed for everything that's ever happened," Clinton replied, and Trump hit her back with the question "why not?"<sup>cxii</sup> This formula was repeated time and time again in their debates. Trump would make an accusation; Clinton would respond with a fact-check, and Trump would side-step the fact-check and make another accusation, unconstrained by reality. The strategy worked for Trump when combined with his authoritarian appeals and economic populism, and he got enough votes in the right states to be elected the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States on November 8, 2016.

### McCarthy's Fall

McCarthy's fall from grace came quickly in 1954. As the U.S. saw more of his work on television public opinion shifted against him. He ultimately crossed a line of decency that would not be forgiven, and the balance of power in the Senate turned against him and stood up for its institution against him. He quickly lost his power.

Edward R. Murrow's March 9, 1954 *See It Now* special on McCarthy did not directly bring about McCarthy's downfall, but it was emblematic of what would happen to him in the

following months. Throughout his rise to power, television news programs had enjoyed the drama of McCarthy's late afternoon accusations of communist activities and the subsequent denials and investigations without taking any responsibility for McCarthy's use of them to spread fear, but the *See It Now* segment that was developed for a year before it was shown adjusted the mediums' relationship with the man.<sup>cxii</sup> Murrow attempted to answer the question of whether McCarthy was protecting the country or working to destroy a political party, which would create a one-party state that could destroy the country. He identified "the investigation protected by immunity and the half-truth" as the "two staples of" McCarthy's "diet."<sup>cxiii</sup> Murrow examined McCarthy's accusations against Adlai Stevenson and the ACLU. McCarthy had revealed a small amount of information to link Stevenson to Alger Hiss and to link the ACLU to communist groups without revealing that the same sources he used showed that Stevenson did not have a connection to Hiss and that no government agency listed the ACLU as a communist group. Murrow sought to restore the evidentiary standards of the country, reminding his viewers that "we must remember always that accusation is not proof and that conviction depends upon evidence and due process of law."<sup>cxiv</sup> A month later, McCarthy used the same show, as Murrow had offered, to respond, and he accused Murrow of being a communist sympathizer and a fellow traveler. McCarthy deemed Murrow "the cleverest of the jackal pack which is always found at the throat of anyone who dares to expose individual communists and traitors" and one of the "glib, clever men" who can be found across the world indoctrinating children with ideas from Moscow. He closed the program by revisiting how urgent he considered the fight against communism and promised he would not be stopped.<sup>cxv</sup> While Murrow's show did not turn public opinion against McCarthy, it began to reveal his methods to a wider section of the population and foreshadowed the revealing effect of television in the Army-McCarthy hearings.

The Army-McCarthy hearings, which stretched from April to June 1954, would hurt McCarthy's standing amongst moderate Republicans and continue their move away from him.<sup>cxvi</sup> The clash was actually two conflicts rolled into one. McCarthy was looking into the Army's vetting of Irving Peress, a dentist who had been a member of the American Labor party. Peress was promoted to major in November 1953 but was to be discharged because he refused to answer questions about his political views. McCarthy heard about it and had Peress come before the subcommittee. Peress pled the Fifth with regard to his political beliefs. McCarthy wanted him court-martialed for it. The Army, on the other hand, took umbrage with McCarthy and Cohn trying to secure special treatment for Schine, who had been drafted into the Army in July 1953.<sup>cxvii</sup> A Senate subcommittee investigated exclusively these two issues, holding public hearings in front of TV cameras.<sup>cxviii</sup> Only ABC and Dumont showed more than two days of the hearings live because, unlike other networks, they did not have programming to fill their morning and afternoon timeslots.<sup>cxix</sup> The hearings put McCarthy's style of attack on display for the nation. He went after senators on the subcommittee and attacked a young member of Joseph Welch's Boston law firm, which represented the Army, for his involvement in the National Lawyers' Guild at Harvard which was said to have communist sympathy. Welch responded with an impassioned plea to the country's better nature, asking, "Have you no sense of decency, sir?" to the applause of the onlookers.<sup>cxx</sup> The hearings ended without a clear resolution to the issues they were meant to address, but they had major political ramifications for McCarthy. Republican leaders from across the country told the White House that the party needed to create distance between it and McCarthy to have a chance in the mid-terms. McCarthy still had the support of eight to ten hardliners in the Senate, and the rest of the Senate and the administration were not

yet willing to upset the balance that had begun to waver with a full on confrontation. The balance did not last much longer.<sup>cxxi</sup>

On July 16, 1954, Vermont Senator Ralph Flanders, a moderate Republican, modified a previous resolution he had introduced to call for a censure of Joseph McCarthy for his conduct. Flanders had been reelected in 1952 and knew he would not run again, so he was immune to McCarthy's political wrath.<sup>cxxii</sup> The matter was investigated by the Watkins Committee, a bipartisan select committee of six Senators led by Utah's Arthur Watkins. The members were all moderates from the South and the West where McCarthyism was not a major electoral issue.<sup>cxxiii</sup> The investigation was one sided. McCarthy had no opponent. The hearings were open, but no television cameras were allowed. McCarthy let his lawyer do most of the talking when the hearings began on August 31, but he grabbed the microphone at the end of the first day and said, "Just a minute, Mr. Chairman, just one minute." Watkins responded by banging his gavel thrice and saying, "The Senator is out of order... We are not going to be interrupted by those diversions and sidelines. We are going straight down the line." From that point forward, the hearings were drama free, an impressive achievement for hearings featuring McCarthy.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

After deliberation, the committee reported back to the Senate, suggesting censure on two counts: contempt for the Senate and McCarthy's treatment of General Ralph Zwicker when Zwicker appeared before McCarthy's subcommittee in 1953. The report was written so that the vote could be in support of the Senate as an institution more than a vote directly against McCarthy. The vote was delayed until after midterm elections in 1954. Unlike in previous years, Republicans did not want McCarthy to campaign for them, and Democrats took back the House and the Senate.<sup>cxxv</sup> Republican moderates and hardliners were divided when the censure was debated in late November, but it passed with support from moderate Republicans. McCarthy had

little political power after the censure, and he lashed out at Eisenhower in the press on December 7, 1954. That incident was the final straw for many of his allies; he was essentially devoid of power, and the Senate mostly ignored him going forward.<sup>cxxvi</sup> After four years in the spotlight, McCarthy found himself devoid of power.

### What Comes Next?

Donald Trump's career in office may diverge from the path of Joseph McCarthy's despite the similarities through November. Trump's rise to power was remarkably similar to McCarthy's, but in the general election, Trump proved immune to the standard of publically exposed indecency that tripped up McCarthy. Notably, Trump's obscene actions were far more objectionable than those that helped end McCarthy. The evolution of media and the voters involved may explain this difference. The role Trump will play in government is also a key difference between the men. As a Senator McCarthy was able to identify himself with a single issue, Trump is responsible for a far greater portfolio than McCarthy was, and as he pointed out in *The Art of the Deal* in 1987, he will have to deliver on his promises. Furthermore, McCarthy was supported by a precarious balance of power in the Republican Party, but he lost power when that balance collapsed. The rise of authoritarians in the GOP today may pose a similar challenge for Trump. However, none of these possibilities answer the burning question of if Trump, and McCarthy before him, are truly representative of the United States.

Although McCarthy was stopped in part by the Army-McCarthy hearings, Trump survived the *Access Hollywood* scandal. The segmentation of the media today and the fact that the general population was choosing between him and Hillary Clinton while the Senate was choosing to support its own institutions in McCarthy's censure vote may account for this

difference. News and social media today are increasingly creating divergent realities. Right wing media demonized both Obama and Clinton for years, and the constant bombardment of that message insulated many people against the possibility of ever voting for Hillary Clinton. Kellyanne Conway was mostly correct after the election when she said, “There’s a difference for voters between what offends you and what affects you.”<sup>cxvii</sup> The key caveat when dealing with authoritarian voters is that there is a difference between what offends them and what they perceive as affecting them. Donald Trump managed to burnish conservative enough credentials that many Republicans did not see a reason to abandon their party, perhaps in part because watching Fox News requires ignoring the culture of sexual harassment.<sup>cxviii</sup> The combination of that willingness to push past sexual harassment and Trump’s ability to drag Clinton into the swamp of sexual harassment with his charges against her husband may have helped create a permission structure to allow voters to put aside their qualms on the subject. They might have been offended by his words and actions, but they believed he was going to bring back jobs, make the country safer, and protect what they saw as the threatened manner of American life.

Additionally, the Senate’s vote to censure McCarthy in 1954 was a vote to restore faith in the very place of power the Senators occupied. It was a vote to defend themselves and their institution. While it was a vote in part based on the issue of communists in government, they did not have to factor larger forces like finding a job in the economic climate into their decision making process like voters did in November 2016. Simply put, there was less personally at stake for the senators than for many voters in the election.

Trump now has to deliver on his big promises to those who voted for him. In *The Art of the Deal*, he wrote, “You can’t con people, at least not for long.... You can do wonderful promotion and get all kinds of press.... But if you don’t deliver the goods, people will eventually

catch on.”<sup>cxix</sup> To illustrate the point, he talks about presidential politics specifically, saying Jimmy Carter was elected for his audacity, but “the American people caught on pretty quickly that Carter couldn’t do the job.”<sup>cxx</sup> It remains to be seen if Trump will be able to do the job more successfully in the eyes of his voters than Carter did in his eyes, but it also remains to be seen if those voters will catch on quickly if he does not deliver when right wing media is there to reassure them at every moment.

Trump will also have to contend with the shifting balance of power within his party. Authoritarians within the Republican Party pushed Trump to the presidency, but the GOP has two factions within it: the establishment and the authoritarians.<sup>cxixi</sup> McCarthy was held up by a similar coalition in 1953, but when he shattered it, he quickly lost power. It remains to be seen if Trump can keep the coalition’s support within the GOP.

Finally, the biggest question that must be answered now and in the future is one that Edward R. Murrow and Hillary Clinton both asked. Signing off on the night *See It Now* broadcast its feature on McCarthy, Murrow told the nation, “He didn’t create this situation of fear; he merely exploited it – and rather successfully. Cassius was right. ‘The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.’”<sup>cxixii</sup> Similarly, in the second debate of the general election when talking about the *Access Hollywood* tape, Hillary Clinton declared, “This is who Donald Trump is. And the question for us, the question our country must answer is that this is not who we are.”<sup>cxixiii</sup> The country did not prove that that was not who we are in November 2016. With Trump in power and given that he and McCarthy were able to come to power using the same tactics sixty-six years apart, is this who the United States is as a country? Will this manifestation of authoritarianism die out as quickly as it did in the 1950s? And if it does, will the same phenomenon emerge again after it has faded from most people’s memory?

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- <sup>iii</sup> Griffith, Robert. *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, 30.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Ibid*, 47.
- <sup>v</sup> *Ibid*, 30-32.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid*, 34, 38-40.
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid*, 46-48.
- <sup>viii</sup> McCarthy, Joseph. “Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Speech on Communists in the State Department (excerpts).” Digital History Project, University of Houston. Last updated 2016. [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3633](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3633).
- <sup>ix</sup> Taub, “The Rise of American Authoritarianism.”
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Griffith. *The Politics of Fear*, 12, 48.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*, 47, 50.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid*, 6.
- <sup>xvi</sup> McCarthy. “Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Speech on Communists in the State Department (excerpts).”
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xix</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xx</sup> Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, 47.
- <sup>xxi</sup> McCarthy. “Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Speech on Communists in the State Department (excerpts).”
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, 49.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> McCarthy. “Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Speech on Communists in the State Department (excerpts).”
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Griffith. *The Politics of Fear*, 50.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid*, 50.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid*, 50.
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