



IDEAS

Marjorie Taylor Greene's Civil War

The congresswoman is too influential within the GOP—and too representative of its views—for her calls for secession to be dismissed.

By Peter Wehner



Al Drago / Bloomberg / Getty; The Atlantic

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It was only a matter of time before Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene—a peddler of far-right conspiracy theories, a speaker at white-nationalist rallies, a supporter of political violence, and an all-around unhinged individual—would renew her call for secession.

On Presidents' Day, Greene tweeted:

We need a national divorce. We need to separate by red states and blue states and shrink the federal government. Everyone I talk to says this. From the sick and disgusting woke culture issues shoved down our throats to the Democrat's traitorous America Last policies, we are done.

The temptation of many people, eager to move past America's political freak show, will be to ignore her comments and dismiss her as an outcast, a fringe figure, deranged but isolated. The less said about her, the better.

That's unwise.

[From the January/February 2023 issue: Why is Marjorie Taylor Greene like this?](#)

Greene is not just a member of Congress, not just a member of its Committee on Homeland Security; she has become a confidante of Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy. He has “forged an ironclad bond” with Greene, according to *The New York Times*. She has “taken on an outside role as a policy adviser to Mr. McCarthy.” He has in turn lavished praise on her.

“If you’re going to be in a fight, you want Marjorie in your foxhole,” McCarthy told the *Times*. “When she picks a fight, she’s going to fight until the fight’s over. She reminds me of my friends from high school, that we’re going to stick together all the way through.” He’ll even stick together with those arguing for secession, apparently.

Greene is not alone in her views. She is giving voice to a widespread and growing sentiment in the Republican Party. Among Republicans in the South, for example, support for secession was 66 percent in June 2021, according to a [Bright Line Watch/YouGov poll](#). (The poll found support for secession growing among every partisan group in the months following the January 6 riot at the Capitol.)

Last summer, thousands of Texas Republicans [approved a platform](#) that called on the state legislature to authorize a referendum on secession from the United States. And shortly after Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, Rush Limbaugh, one of the most dominant figures on the American right, [said](#), “I actually think that we’re trending toward secession. I see more and more people asking, ‘What in the world do we have in common with the people who live in, say, New York?’”

Limbaugh, who died in early 2021, added that “a lot of bloggers have written extensively about how distant ... and how much more separated our culture is becoming politically and that it can’t go on this way. There cannot be a peaceful coexistence of two completely different theories of life, theories of government, theories of how we manage our affairs. We can’t be in this dire a conflict without something giving somewhere along the way.” (Limbaugh said of secession, “I myself haven’t made up my mind.”)

The Republican Party, forged a century and a half ago in the fight against secession, now finds the move worth contemplating.

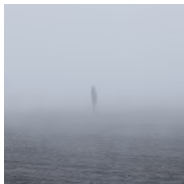
Civil War–like secession isn't going to happen in the United States, at least not anytime soon. But all of the emotions that are attached to a *desire* for secession—seething resentment, existential fear, an unforgiving spirit, contempt and hatred for those who disagree with you—are stoked by the kind of rhetoric employed by Greene and those who see the world as she does. Such language will further destroy America's political culture and could easily lead to extensive political violence.

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Don't expect a wave of Republican lawmakers and current and potential presidential candidates to get on the secession bandwagon. That is still too extreme for most of them, at least right now. But I doubt that many Republicans, aside from courageous

figures such as Utah Governor Spencer Cox and Liz Cheney, the former chair of the House Republican Conference, will call Greene out. (Senator Mitt Romney of Utah and former Maryland Governor Larry Hogan have shown integrity throughout the MAGA years as well.)

But by and large, *if* Republicans call Greene out, they will offer only gentle rebukes. Mostly, they'll want to ignore her comments, change the topic, and try to redirect attention to Democrats. During the past half a dozen years, Republicans have perfected whataboutism.

What the rest of us learned during the Trump era is that a party led by craven men and women—some of them cynical, others true believers, almost all afraid to speak out—will end up normalizing the transgressive, unethical, and moronic.

Trump did horrifying things at the end of his presidency, including attempting a coup and inciting a violent mob to attack the Capitol. The majority of Republicans tolerated what he did, to a degree that simply wouldn't have happened at the beginning of his presidency. It took time for the corruption to fully take hold, for the party—lawmakers and the right-wing media complex—to fall completely into line. But fall in line they did. Trump may be losing his grip on the Republican Party, and that is a good thing, but his nihilistic imprint remains all over it.

MAGA Republicans like Marjorie Taylor Greene have added calls for secession to their corrosive lies about the 2020 presidential election. More incendiary and treacherous claims will follow. Greene and McCarthy—one crazed, the other cowardly—embody a large swath of the modern-day GOP. Any party that makes room for seditionists and secessionists is sick and dangerous.

Peter Wehner is a contributing writer at *The Atlantic* and a senior fellow at the Trinity Forum.

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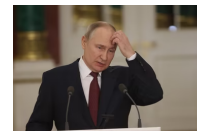
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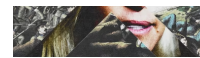
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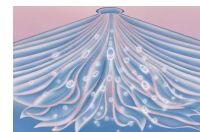
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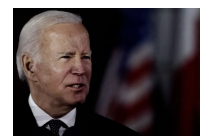
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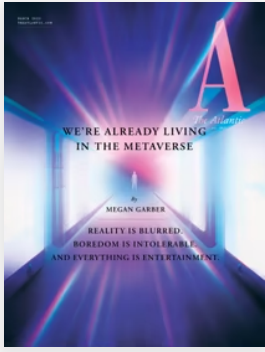


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