

# Centrism: A Losing Strategy for Democrats

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*Version 1.3 (posted on 6 August 2019)*  
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In the current, completely dysfunctional state of American national politics, a narrative war is being waged between “centrism” and “moderation,” on the one hand, and supposedly radical revolution, on the other. The conflict is about change. The arguments offered by proponents of each side of this conflict boil down to which approach to change we will take: gradual, incremental reform, which lobbies for a slow and cautious strategy — versus a more fundamental restructuring of the norms and systems of society — essentially promoting the urgent need to alter the status quo. This conflict has a longstanding history in America dating back to the 19th century.

Politically, all the Republican candidates and half the Democrats, whether incumbents in office or first-time aspirants, plus the majority of careerists in both party hierarchies — consultants, operatives, and pundits — as well as government bureaucrats (who are hired rather than elected) — are on the side of the centrist preservationists. All these people comprise a majority of the permanent political class. They try to tar those on the other side of the argument by painting them as bomb-throwing anarchists.

The whole thing is a steaming pile of bullshit. What it’s really about is the narratives we are told about the status quo and business-as-usual “normalcy.” Curiously, the status quo is not centrist at all. It is extreme in America (as it has been in nearly every society since civilization began), its structures and practices designed and implemented to serve the interests of a slim percentage of the population, namely, the elites — those who own and run the corporations, along with the multi-generational dynastic families that control nearly all the wealth. And yet, this perversity is seen as “normal,” since it has been in place for so long. It’s the modern American equivalent of the Divine Right of Kings.

Most of the elites in Democratic Party politics now resemble the walking dead. God forbid that they should even consider giving up the strategy of “centrism” that has lost the Democrats national elections ever since 1972. George McGovern got whacked so completely in the 1972 election by Nixon’s law and order strategy that the Democratic Party lost its mind and has never recovered. In every Presidential election since, those who wield power among Democrats have been terrified of being called radical.

Since 1980, Democrats have won the White House only twice. Bill Clinton got elected only because Ross Perot split the Republican vote, but Clinton was barely a Democrat. His "triangulation" approach to politics made him a good Republican President. Clinton ended welfare, failed utterly at national health care, removed the guardrails protecting us from outright financial corruption, and initiated the surge in minority incarceration — all of which came straight from the Republican wish list.

Barack Obama rode to the Presidency on the wave of disgust about George W. Bush, his endless War on Terror, and the quagmire of America's nation-building fiasco of invading Iraq and deposing Saddam Hussein. Obama used his inspirational Baptist-minister-like speechifying skills to promise "hope and change" (which, for reasons completely unknown to me, Democrats actually believed). Did he deliver? Nope. The Affordable Care Act (i.e., Obamacare) was a painful compromise. Wall Street got bailed out, and no big bank executive was held to account for the 2008 financial meltdown. Obama continued Bush's war policy and added drone warfare. Three million illegal immigrants were deported during his administration. Meanwhile, income inequality grew to staggering proportions, the middle class shrank, the working Americans didn't benefit at all from the economic "recovery."

Before the 2008 election, I studied Obama's voting record in the Illinois Senate. He was not only a moderate, but a right-leaning one. Then, after his election, when he appointed Wall Street insiders to his Cabinet, I knew that our goose was cooked. So much for centrism.

"Centrist" and "moderate" are political code words for serving corporate interests. In addition, those two words mean "acceptance of the status quo" and a belief in government and society of, by, and for the wealthy and powerful. Centrism and moderation are concepts meant to fool a gullible, fearful public that is woefully misinformed by constant exposure to hypnotic but false narratives, and thus guarantee acquiescence toward the plutocracy and the oligarchy.

One example will suffice: At the most recent "debate" of Democratic Presidential Candidates, the initial hour was taken up discussing health care. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren were lined up opposite the "centrist moderates" and the moderators from CNN. Medicare for All was lambasted as too radical, too expensive, unworkable, and not giving Americans their precious illusion of choice. "How can we pay for Medicare for All?" the attackers asked, protesting that private health companies must not be cut out of the loop. Well, how about we slash the bloated military budget? The nearly trillion dollars a year we give to the Pentagon is not to guarantee the safety of regular Americans, but rather for state security, the empire, and the continuation of the status quo. All the accusations leveled at Sanders and Warren about health care were all essentially Republican narratives and talking points, which are, in fact, as radical and extreme as it gets, but which were presented by these presumably Democratic candidates and liberal moderators as "reasonable."

Then there's the Trump dilemma. Far too many Democratic operatives believe that if America can just rid itself of Donald Trump and win back the White House, then everything will be OK again, and we can go back to normal. That's roughly analogous to thinking about remodeling the kitchen when your house is burning down and already completely engulfed in flames.

Normal is *gone*, dear friends, and it's gone forever. Having died at the end of the 20th century after a long illness that steadily worsened during its most recent 50-year run, normal is now so thoroughly dead that its rotting corpse stinks to high heaven. Not only can the vaunted center no longer hold, it doesn't even exist anymore.

Civilization has always been composed of "winners" and "losers." The winners run things, call the shots, and enjoy the lion's share of the goodies, while the losers struggle to survive. That's not new at all. What's different now is that civilization threatens not only a significant percentage of people, but the very future of humanity and perhaps all life on the planet. In the Orwellian double-speak of our times, radical extremism (i.e., predatory capitalism and government of, by, and for the wealthy) masquerades as centrist moderation. As a result, fighting fire with fire has become necessary.

If the Democrats cling to the illusion of centrism and moderation, and if they insist on talking about the impossible fantasy of re-uniting the country, they run the risk of giving Trump another four years. Our collective goose might already be cooked no matter what we do, but a second term for Trump and his Republican minions would pretty much seal the deal.

I don't support the insanity of the status quo. That makes me a radical in other people's eyes, although in my own estimation it just makes me one who longs for sanity. We need to rescue ourselves from our own worst impulses. That may be beyond our power and wisdom, but we have to try anyway.

Also, I believe that most revolutions fail miserably, either outright or later on. Ideologues are notoriously unfit for governing. Severe blowback, especially from violence, is inevitable. On the other hand, the gradual incrementalism of the centrist moderates doesn't work worth a damn, either. So, to my way of seeing, we're between a rock and a hard place. Yes, to everything there is a season, with a time and place for each purpose, but centrism is not generally the way, and never for very long. We've now reached a point where I see only one possibly viable path forward.

We need a revolution — in politics, in society, in culture, and in how we humans live on this planet. We needed it back in 2016, but the Democrats couldn't see that, so we got Trump's fake revolution instead. In 2020, the Democrats had damn well better open their eyes.