

Wake Up, America!

— Summary —

Chapter I: “One-Man Show”

Donald Trump’s behavior can be understood as a logical outcome of his upbringing. Lacking affection from his parents, he compensated by seeking his father’s approval, striving to meet his expectations: being aggressive, obsessively focused on “winning,” and adopting a zero-sum worldview. In this mindset, for him to win, others must lose—and if those he sees as opponents lose, he considers himself victorious. This also means he is ultimately comfortable with everyone, including himself, being worse off, as long as those he compares himself to lose more.

These early impressions were never meaningfully challenged, as Trump was largely insulated from the kinds of reality checks that typically guide people toward maturity. He never held a conventional job, never worked under a boss, and never had to follow standard workplace rules—experiences that often teach accountability, empathy, and cooperation. As a result, childlike traits such as impulsiveness, attention-seeking, aversion to criticism, and black-and-white thinking remained unchecked. Whenever he got into trouble, his father stepped in to bail him out, reinforcing a fantasy world in which performance matters more than facts.

Trump’s fixation on “winning” also leads to a deeply short-term mindset. To feel that he has won, the outcome must be immediate and clear-cut. Long-term goals—especially those rooted in values or any kind of principle—even if ultimately in his own interest, feel too abstract, lack black-and-white clarity, and don’t identify a clear loser. Combined with a childlike need for instant gratification, this creates a deeply transactional way of operating: one focused on immediate gains rather than lasting consequences. Among the values sacrificed is friendship—Trump doesn’t have true friends; the people around him are merely tools to help him “win.”

In the 1990s, Trump faced a major challenge: his craving for recognition and need to be seen as a “winner” stood in sharp contrast to the reality of his repeated business failures. He went bankrupt six times, reported losses every year from 1985 to 1995, squandered a substantial inheritance from his father, and became widely regarded as a reckless rather than savvy businessman. His solution, true to form, was to stage a show. *The Apprentice* flipped the narrative, rebranding him as a decisive, high-powered executive presiding over a booming empire.

Chapter II: “The Greatest Con Man of All Time?”

Lacking other meaningful skills, Trump doubled down on his one outstanding talent: showmanship. He amplified his unshakable confidence—often mistaken for competence—and used it to great effect. His disregard for truth allows him to craft whatever narrative he desires, tailored to what people want to hear. Operating almost entirely on emotion and instinct, he connects directly with people’s feelings. His use of stark contrasts and sensational language creates a dramatic effect that captivates audiences. His clear, simple, black-and-white messaging appeals to those who struggle with nuance or complexity. And his readiness to scapegoat

minorities offers his followers an outlet for their frustration, turning diffuse anger into a seemingly righteous mission.

Trump exploits people's belief in his performance to con them for maximum personal gain—whether by profiting from his presidency through merchandise sales, using campaign funds to pay personal legal bills, or launching gifts like NFTs and his own cryptocurrency. He has also set up dubious ventures such as Trump University, the Trump Foundation, the so-called “Election Defense Fund,” and the recently passed “Big Beautiful Bill,” which represents the largest wealth transfer from the poor to the rich in modern history. While he primarily cons those who trust him most, his reach extends beyond the gullible: veteran politicians, banks, insurers, and other sophisticated institutions—experts in assessing risk—have also fallen for his schemes again and again.

Trump's ability to con people is not conscious or intellectual—it's instinctive, emotional, and rooted in the subconscious. This instinctive style is poorly understood by many, which is why he continues to be underestimated. He uses nearly every trick from the con man's playbook—not deliberately, but intuitively: flipping the script, gaslighting, flooding the zone, distraction tactics, and more. And like many successful con men, he is remarkably resilient and almost never held accountable.

Compared to other con men in history, Trump operates in a league of his own. He is unmatched in the number of cons executed, the scale and duration of his deception, the severity of its consequences, and the sheer number of people affected. He's been active for decades, has faced countless legal cases without spending a single day in prison, and continues to be trusted by millions despite overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing. The range of tactics he employs, the money he's extracted, and the power he's wielded—up to holding the most powerful office in the world—put him in a category all his own. While his claims of being the best at many things are laughable, there is one title he may actually deserve: the *GCOAT*—the greatest con man of all time.

Chapter III: Feasting on Unhappiness

A key reason for Trump's success is his appeal to people driven by emotion—especially negative emotion—which clouds rational thinking and makes them more susceptible to the con. This dynamic became particularly potent because Trump found unusually fertile ground. Overall happiness in the U.S. has been declining, with rising levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and unresolved trauma. Contributing to this trend are widespread financial pressures—from healthcare, housing, inflation, and student debt to a widening wealth gap—increasing loneliness, and a deepening erosion of trust in institutions and experts.

When people get hurt, they want to hit back—often without thinking carefully about where they aim. They just want relief, and they'll reach for anything that promises it quickly. Trump offers that promise—boldly and with unshakable confidence. It's not about actually solving problems, but about making people *feel* better about them. For example, when someone struggles in life due to their own mistakes or shortcomings, it feels good to be told that the real blame lies with immigrants, foreign countries, political enemies, or a corrupt elite.

When Trump proposes solutions, the primary criteria are whether they're simple to understand and emotionally appealing. Reducing illegal immigration, for instance, might require sophisticated strategies involving data, diplomacy, and advanced enforcement—but that's too complex for many. A "wall," on the other hand, is simple and instantly graspable. As for funding it, people want to hear "Mexico will pay for it!"—not just because it's free, but because it punishes the perceived enemy. Whether the idea is rational becomes irrelevant; what matters is whether people like how it sounds.

When Trump does invoke rational arguments, they're heavily simplified, often inaccurate, and steeped in black-and-white thinking. He promises "change"—a message that resonates with many who are dissatisfied—while glossing over the fact that not all change is good, and that more than two paths forward always exist. This binary mindset is reinforced by the U.S. two-party system, which encourages people to think: "*I wasn't happy under Party A, so I must vote for Party B.*" Trump exploits this fallacy to the fullest, focusing not on real solutions but on slandering, vilifying, and demonizing the other side—a game in which the most ruthless player always wins.

As Trump feasts on unhappiness, he also has a strong incentive to keep people unhappy. While damaging the economy or increasing social misery might hurt his approval ratings in the short term, in the long run it can actually bolster his support—by channeling people's anger in the direction he chooses. At the same time, Trump offers short-term emotional rewards: he entertains with spectacle, alleviates loneliness by giving people a sense of belonging, and offers hope that brings immediate psychological relief. He delivers all this quickly and effectively—which makes it understandable why so many people are drawn to him.

Chapter IV: Becoming a Cult

Because emotion is at the core of his appeal, many people revere Trump not for rational reasons—such as gratitude for what he's done or hope for what he might do—but unconditionally, in a way that borders on the religious. In doing so, he has achieved the ultimate goal of any con man: his followers willingly set aside reason, granting him the freedom to say anything, demand anything, and exploit them endlessly for personal gain.

With many of his followers, Trump has succeeded completely. He can tell blatant, easily disprovable lies—about stolen elections, inauguration crowd sizes, climate change being a hoax, and more—and still be believed. Many also embrace more elaborate falsehoods: complex narratives untethered from any evidence, such as "Pizzagate," the "deep state" conspiracy, and similar constructs. Studies have shown that even when Trump's statements are fact-checked and proven false, it has no measurable effect on his supporters' views. Many believe he genuinely cares about their lives and struggles—and, as research has shown, an overwhelming majority of Republicans trust him more than they trust their own friends or family.

One factor that makes this loyalty possible is a cultural tendency—deeply embedded in parts of American life—to prioritize personal conviction over empirical evidence. Another is the psychological comfort of following a leader, which relieves individuals of the burden of

independent thinking and personal responsibility (“I was just following him”). But perhaps the most powerful force is *identification*: rooted in evolutionary psychology, people are drawn to those they perceive as similar to themselves. Trump’s rambling speeches—filled with half-finished thoughts, simplistic slogans, gut instincts instead of facts, insults, exaggerations, and raw anger—may be mocked by rational observers, but they resonate deeply with his loyal base. He makes them feel that “he’s one of us.” He also reinforces traditional identities against perceived cultural threats—such as efforts to redefine gender roles or gender itself. To many, he embodies the “strong man” figure: someone young men admire and identify with, and whom even many women support because they associate strength with protection or stability.

Especially striking is the strong support Trump receives from many Christians, despite the fact that he is not religious and often behaves in ways that directly contradict core Christian values: vindictiveness instead of forgiveness, self-praise instead of humility, dishonesty instead of integrity—and the list goes on. He has violated multiple commandments, misused sacred symbols, spoken dismissively of religious people, and even asked, “Can you believe that people believe that bullshit?” Yet many Christians continue to support him. Part of the reason is transactional: he delivers what they want—such as appointing conservative Supreme Court justices, which led to the overturning of the constitutional right to abortion—and he positions himself as a defender of religion amid its real and accelerating decline in American public life. But more importantly, it’s once again about identification. There are deep structural parallels between Trump’s worldview and the outlook held by many religious conservatives. He embodies hierarchy and authority, which can resonate strongly with traditional religious values. His black-and-white framework closely mirrors evangelical theology: good versus evil, saved versus unsaved, light versus darkness. And above all, Trump is a believer—not in God, but in himself. For many, that unwavering belief is what matters most. It’s less important *what* one believes, than *that* one believes—with total conviction. This reflects a particular view of the world, one that elevates certainty above doubt and conviction above complexity.

Chapter V: The *Conquering* of a Party

Trump is not alone in exploiting the public. He is joined by a group of “co-conspirators”—those who, unlike his devoted followers, know exactly what is happening but choose to ride the Trump wave anyway: transactionally, without scruples, and for personal gain. Chief among them is the Republican Party, which initially saw Trump as a vehicle to energize voters and win elections. In reality, it was the party that became the vehicle—for Trump.

Several conditions allowed Trump to take control of the Republican Party. First, the party was weak and ripe for a hostile takeover. By the early 2010s, it was facing an identity crisis in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse and Barack Obama’s election. This created fertile ground for a new kind of politics—less focused on policy, more driven by emotion, identity, nationalism, and resentment. It also opened the door to outsiders who could “tell it like it is.” The Tea Party movement tapped into this energy, but lacked one essential ingredient: a leader. That absence left a perfect void—one that Trump stepped in to fill.

Second, the party was ideologically fractured. For decades, the Republican coalition had been split between traditional conservatives, libertarians, and evangelicals—an ideological stalemate

that eroded cohesion and blurred the party's identity. This internal fragmentation created fertile ground for an outsider like Trump to break the traditional framework and reshape the party around a new, populist dynamic.

Third, many Republican leaders were personally weak. Once Trump gained momentum, they feared that opposing him would cost them their political careers—since he demands total loyalty, obedience, and submission. As a result, they chose to fall in line, even if it meant abandoning their core values.

Trump has transformed the Republican Party into something fundamentally different from what it was in previous decades. Once marked by optimistic, unifying rhetoric and a sense of civic responsibility, the party now echoes a darker, more divisive tone. Its foreign policy—formerly pro-globalization and staunchly pro-NATO—has taken on an isolationist streak. Trump openly admires authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin—a longtime American adversary whom the GOP once viewed as a threat to freedom and democracy—and has reshaped the party in ways that increasingly resemble Putin's model, both in tone and in its disregard for democratic norms. The GOP still pays lip service to balanced budgets and fiscal restraint, but in practice, those principles have largely disappeared. Where it once championed free trade, it now embraces protectionism, tariffs, and economic nationalism. At this point, it's more accurate to speak of a "Trump Party." The old GOP, as it once existed, is gone.

Chapter VI: The Dangers of Trump

Trump poses a serious threat to the well-being of America in multiple ways. The first is rooted in his fundamental lack of qualifications and knowledge in the realm of governance. Before his presidency, he had never held elected office, served in the military, or worked in public service. He doesn't understand the job, shows no interest in learning it, and refuses to listen to those who do—resulting in a wide range of policy mistakes.

This is compounded by Trump's refusal to admit error. He insists on always being right, even in absurd cases like the "Sharpiegate" scandal. His problem-solving approach relies almost entirely on aggression. He lashes out, destroys, hits, and even considers "nuking" problems. It's bold, unilateral, poorly planned, and chaotic—aimed only at symbolic, short-term victories. Effective leadership demands the opposite: strategic, measured, and long-term thinking, rooted in facts, ethics, and a willingness to listen. But his only tool is a hammer, making every problem look like a nail.

Another danger Trump presents lies in a basic but critical fact: his goals are not aligned with the core purpose of a democratically elected president—serving the people. Instead, Trump is focused entirely on maximizing his own personal gain. It's government of Trump, by Trump, for Trump—driven with a level of intensity and ruthlessness unmatched by any previous U.S. president. He's willing to exploit anyone: America, foreign allies, adversaries, and even—perhaps especially—his most loyal supporters.

While Trump's flaws in knowledge, character, and intent are deeply damaging, they are naturally limited. He is, after all, just one person—with only 24 hours in a day and capable of making one

decision at a time. What exponentially increases the danger is the team he surrounds himself with. Trump doesn't hire based on merit; he hires based on loyalty. In doing so, incompetence becomes institutionalized. It's a direct extension of how he operated in business, where loyalty consistently trumped competence. As some have put it, "Stormy Daniels is the only true professional Trump has ever hired."

Trump multiplies harm in another way: by serving as a highly visible role model—of the most destructive kind. We teach our children to be kind, tolerant, loving, forgiving, humble, thoughtful, polite, respectful, compassionate, honest, generous, cautious, warm, rational, and well-informed. But how can we credibly promote those values when the exact opposites are rewarded with the highest office in the land? Multiple studies have shown that Trump's behavior has a deeply negative impact on public conduct. Under the spotlight of his example, people feel emboldened to let their worst sides out.

Chapter VII: Seeking the Endless Con

While many of these developments are serious and damaging, some could—at least in theory—be reversed relatively quickly. But a different, more dangerous kind of damage occurs when the changes become permanent: when the people's ability to choose is taken away, granting those in power unchecked control and making the con irreversible. This raises a critical question: is talk of dictatorship just fear-mongering—or is there a real risk?

First, there's little doubt that Trump wants authoritarian power. He looks up to criminals and dictators like Vladimir Putin—who hold influence over him, which is itself a danger—because they've achieved what he hasn't: complete control. It would be Trump's ultimate "win": dominance over everyone else. The alternative—stepping away from politics—would mean surrendering the spotlight and fading from public attention, something his psychological wiring finds intolerable. But it's not just something he may *want*—it may be something he *needs*. If his presidency ends in January 2029, many legal cases currently paused under presidential immunity could resume. Like any con man's story, his is one of constant escalation—never retreat, only attack. And because Trump is wired for short-term wins, he may see upside either way: even a failed attempt to consolidate power would still flood him with what he craves most—attention. Given his fixation on spectacle, a dramatic, headline-grabbing exit would always be preferable to quietly fading away.

What's even more worrisome is that it's not just Trump who wants—or needs—a dictatorship; many of his supporters do as well. His true believers would welcome it: their hero remains in power, they can frame it as "restoring order," and some may even believe, "Since the beginning of time, we've been locked in a battle with the Democrats—finally, a chance to win it for good." Many of Trump's co-conspirators would embrace it too, because, like him, they need to escape accountability. The idea of returning to a normal world—where the con is exposed, the lies are revealed, and their protector is dragged into court—is unthinkable. They also know they have no one who could remotely replace Trump: no one who inspires the same loyalty or possesses the same instinct for holding the house of con together. There is no alternative to Trump—and therefore, no alternative to what once lay beyond the bounds of imagination.

Will Trump succeed? While not identical, his rise bears striking parallels to that of authoritarian leaders like Hitler. He capitalizes on widespread anger, economic anxiety, and cultural resentment—offering simple answers, emotional appeals, and scapegoats. He builds a personality cult, attacks democratic institutions, spreads conspiracy theories, and presents himself as the sole savior of a declining nation. Like past strongmen, he undermines trust in the media, courts, and experts, fuels hatred toward minorities and opponents, and encourages violence as a display of loyalty. He gains power legally but quickly works to dismantle the very system that enabled his rise—rewarding loyalists, purging dissenters, and hollowing out the rule of law. What makes it possible is not just his ambition, but the failure of institutions, opponents, and enablers to stop him. Too often, people fail to see what’s happening because the shift is gradual, unfamiliar, and easily dismissed as just “Trump being Trump.” They ignore the warning signs, underestimate the devastation a dictatorship would bring, and are guided more by emotion and hope than by clear-eyed reasoning—and by the comforting belief that “it can’t happen here.”

What’s to stop it from happening? Formally, that responsibility falls to the Constitution. But there are growing reasons to doubt that it will be strong enough. The hollowing out we’re witnessing today is unprecedented in its more than 200-year history—it’s being tested as never before. And some of those tests, including crucial ones, it has already failed: it allowed a direct assault on itself on January 6th without holding the lead instigator accountable. Anything that cannot defend itself against its enemies is ultimately doomed—because its attackers will not stop until they succeed.

This doesn’t mean we should write off the U.S. Constitution—but it does mean we can’t count on it to protect itself. It’s too weak for that, with too many flaws and too many enemies. Defending it will require everything we have. Perhaps its true value now isn’t in its ability to stand on its own—it can’t—but in its ability to delay the damage just long enough for people to wake up and rush to its defense. But that awakening must happen soon, because the clock is ticking. As the main protagonist of this story once said—speaking about Ukraine, though the warning applies just as urgently to America: *“Better move fast for your country, because otherwise, you won’t have a country left.”*

This summary captures only a few of the key conclusions. The true value lies in the detailed reasoning, evidence, and external references that support each point. These elements form the basis for why the conclusions are not just opinions—but grounded and likely correct. For that reason, reading the [full article](#) is strongly recommended—and essential for anyone seeking to seriously engage with or critique its arguments.

This article serves as a precursor and theoretical foundation for a much more important follow-up: a step-by-step guide on how to fight tyranny. [Get notified](#) when it goes live.