

The MAGA Attractor: Fantasy, Colonization, and the Terminal Phase of a Sealed Basin

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Abstract

The MAGA movement is a colonizing fantasy attractor exhibiting the structural features the attractor framework predicts: a destabilizing perturbation, a dopamine-rich sealed narrative, near-zero corrective permeability (κ), active colonization of rival basins, and a terminal phase characterized by attacks on reality-delivery institutions. This paper applies the κ diagnostic—a set of observable indicators measuring a belief system's willingness to update on contradictory evidence—to MAGA as a case study. We include a minimal comparative sketch applying the same indicators to a left-aligned movement to demonstrate symmetric applicability. We engage disconfirming instances within the MAGA case, define the terminal phase formally, and ground the attractor framework in established dynamical-systems and motivated-reasoning literatures. The paper does not offer predictions. It identifies structural tendencies and leaves empirical validation to future work.

1. Introduction: The Diagnostic Stance

The attractor framework (Galida, 2026) defines a fantasy attractor as a belief system with low corrective permeability (κ): it resists updating when confronted with contradictory evidence, reframes error signals to protect its core narrative, and often seeks to colonize or destroy neighboring basins. The framework draws on dynamical-systems theory (Strogatz, 2018; Kelso, 1995), which characterizes attractors as regions in state space toward which trajectories converge and remain unless perturbed. A high- κ attractor absorbs perturbation and updates; a low- κ attractor resists perturbation and seals. This paper applies that diagnostic to the MAGA movement.

The framework predicts that sealed attractors exist across the political spectrum. A fully symmetric analysis would examine movements of all orientations using the same κ indicators. The present paper is a single-case application, supplemented by a brief comparative sketch in Section 6. It does not imply that MAGA is unique or uniquely sealed. It demonstrates the diagnostic method on a prominent and well-documented case.

2. Operationalizing Corrective Permeability (κ)

Corrective permeability is not a single number. It is a composite of observable indicators. A movement's κ can be estimated—qualitatively, not metrically—by examining its responses to disconfirming events. The indicators below are applicable to any political or social movement.

κ Indicators

Indicator	High κ (reality-aligned)	Low κ (fantasy attractor)
Electoral loss response	Concedes defeat; analyzes reasons; adapts strategy	Rejects outcome as fraudulent; seeks to overturn result
Legal defeat response	Accepts ruling; appeals within system; adjusts behavior	Delegitimizes courts; portrays defeats as persecution
Internal dissent tolerance	Debates openly; allows factional disagreement	Purges dissenters; enforces narrative loyalty
Media coverage response	Engages with critical reporting; distinguishes bias from fact	Labels all critical media as "enemy"; constructs alternative media ecosystem
Policy failure response	Acknowledges failure; revises approach	Blames enemies; reframes failure as sabotage
Leader criticism response	Evaluates criticism on merits; holds leaders accountable	Treats all criticism as treason; leader is beyond reproach

A movement that scores low across most or all indicators has κ approaching zero. A movement that scores high across most has κ approaching one. The assignment is comparative and qualitative, not computational.

3. The Initial Perturbation: A Basin Destabilized

The MAGA movement emerged from a genuine, large-scale perturbation to the personal and social attractors of millions

of Americans. For decades, the post-war American basin was stable for its primary beneficiaries: manufacturing jobs provided middle-class security, cultural norms were broadly shared, and the United States enjoyed unchallenged global dominance. Over several decades, that basin was progressively destabilized. Deindustrialization eliminated millions of stable jobs. Globalization shifted economic power away from domestic manufacturing. Cultural norms around race, gender, sexuality, and religion shifted rapidly. Demographic projections showed a future in which the previously dominant group would become a minority. Each of these was a perturbation. Cumulatively, they shattered the old basin.

The attractor framework does not judge the legitimacy of the grievances. It notes that a destabilized attractor seeks a new basin. The question is always: *What basin will replace the old one?*

4. The New Basin: Narrative, Dopamine, and Motivated Reasoning

The core narrative of the MAGA attractor is well-documented: the adherent is the authentic voice of the nation; their loss is a theft by corrupt elites and internal enemies; the leader will restore greatness. This narrative is an ontological rescue. It replaces a confusing, painful reality with a simple, morally charged story.

The dopamine dynamics are well-established. Certainty, righteous anger, and tribal belonging activate the mesolimbic reward system (Olds & Milner, 1954). But dopamine alone does not distinguish fantasy attractors from reality-aligned movements—all high-commitment groups generate reward. What distinguishes low- k attractors is the *impermeability* of the reward loop: the system prevents corrective information from

entering, so the dopamine cycle never encounters disconfirmation.

The motivated-reasoning literature provides a well-established parallel. Individuals process information in ways that protect identity-congenial beliefs (Kahan, 2013). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) predicts that group membership becomes a source of self-esteem, making threats to the group's narrative feel like personal attacks. The MAGA attractor operates at the intersection of these dynamics: a highly salient group identity, a narrative of victimhood and restoration, and a reward system that fires on certainty. The basin is psychologically satisfying and neurochemically self-reinforcing.

5. Applying the κ Indicators to MAGA

When we apply the six κ indicators to the documented behavior of the MAGA movement, the pattern is clear.

- **Electoral loss response:** The 2020 election was rejected as fraudulent. Over 60 court cases were dismissed, yet the “stolen election” narrative persisted. Electoral officials who certified results have been purged and replaced. κ is near zero on this indicator.
- **Legal defeat response:** Criminal and civil indictments against the movement's leader are framed as “witch hunts” and “election interference.” Courts are delegitimized. κ is near zero.
- **Internal dissent tolerance:** Republicans who criticized the leader have been primaried, censured, or forced from office. Internal debate is treated as disloyalty. κ is near zero.
- **Media coverage response:** Mainstream media are labeled “enemies of the people.” A parallel media ecosystem

delivers only narrative-congruent information. κ is near zero.

- **Policy failure response:** Trade wars that harmed farmers were reframed as necessary sacrifices, not policy failures. Promised infrastructure and healthcare reforms that did not materialize were blamed on opponents, not acknowledged as unfulfilled. κ is near zero.
- **Leader criticism response:** Criticism of the leader is treated as treason. The leader's statements, even when contradictory or demonstrably false, are accepted by adherents without correction. κ is near zero.

5.1 Disconfirming Instances and Complexity

The assignment of $\kappa \approx 0$ is a pattern judgment, not a uniform claim. Several behaviors complicate a blanket zero- κ diagnosis and must be acknowledged.

- Some MAGA-aligned officials did certify the 2020 election results under intense pressure, including figures such as Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and Arizona's Republican governor Doug Ducey, who faced threats and political retaliation for doing so. This is evidence of $\kappa > 0$ among individuals within the movement's orbit.
- The movement's policy agenda did shift in notable ways relative to prior Republican orthodoxy, including trade protectionism, pharmaceutical pricing reform, and infrastructure spending. These represent genuine policy adaptation, even if they served the broader narrative of economic nationalism.
- Internal dissent, while punished, has not been eliminated. Some Republican figures continue to criticize the leader from within the party, and factions with incompatible interests (economic libertarians, Christian nationalists, working-class populists)

persist.

These instances suggest that the movement is not a perfectly uniform basin. Some members and subgroups exhibit higher κ than others. However, the overall pattern—sustained across multiple years, multiple domains, and the movement’s dominant institutional responses—remains one of extremely low corrective permeability. The dissenting officials were purged, not elevated. The policy shifts occurred within a sealed narrative that did not acknowledge prior error. Internal critics were marginalized. The diagnostic is a structural assessment of the attractor’s dominant dynamics, not a claim about every individual within it.

6. Comparative Sketch: A Left-Aligned Case

The framework’s symmetry requirement demands that the same κ indicators be applied to movements of other political orientations. A full comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief sketch demonstrates the method’s applicability.

Consider the progressive wing of the Democratic Party’s response to the 2016 election loss. On the κ indicators:

- **Electoral loss response:** The loss was accepted, though accompanied by narratives of Russian interference and Electoral College illegitimacy. The outcome was not rejected as fraudulent, but external factors were invoked to explain defeat—a partial but not complete κ signal.
- **Legal defeat response:** Progressive legal setbacks (e.g., on immigration policy, voting rights) have generally

been accepted within the system, with strategy adjustments rather than court delegitimization. κ is moderate-high.

- **Internal dissent tolerance:** The progressive coalition contains vigorous internal debate between moderates and left factions. Primary challenges are common and openly contested. κ is high on this indicator.
- **Media coverage response:** Progressives engage with mainstream media but also criticize it for bias. An alternative media ecosystem exists but has not fully sealed; cross-pollination with mainstream outlets is common. κ is moderate.
- **Policy failure response:** Failed progressive initiatives (e.g., certain criminal-justice reform measures, housing policies) have generated internal debate and strategy revisions, though blame-shifting also occurs. κ is moderate.
- **Leader criticism response:** Progressive leaders face significant internal criticism. Figures such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are both celebrated and challenged from within the movement. κ is high.

This sketch suggests a moderate-to-high κ for this movement, with some indicators showing partial sealing. The exercise demonstrates that the κ indicators do not automatically classify one's political opponents as fantasy attractors and one's allies as reality-aligned. The diagnostic discriminates based on behavior, not affiliation.

7. Colonization: "You Must Join or Be Destroyed"

A fantasy attractor does not peacefully coexist. It colonizes. The MAGA movement demands that other basins submit to its

narrative or be treated as enemies. This operates at interpersonal, institutional, and electoral levels. Families are fractured by loyalty demands. The judiciary, civil service, and military are to be purged of “disloyal” elements. Election administration is being restructured to place loyalists in positions of authority over vote counting and certification. Colonization is a structural necessity: a sealed attractor cannot tolerate rival basins that might deliver a fatal perturbation.

8. Beam and Sliver: Internal Contradictions as Diagnostic Features

All political coalitions contain tensions between stated values and enacted policy. The diagnostic question is not whether contradictions exist, but whether the attractor can acknowledge and address them. High-k movements can name their own tensions. Low-k movements cannot.

The MAGA attractor exhibits several severe, structurally unresolvable contradictions:

- **Liberty vs. Authoritarianism:** The movement claims to defend freedom while supporting a leader who attacks the free press, demands personal loyalty, and threatens to use state power against opponents.
- **Law and Order vs. Criminality:** The movement claims to uphold law and order while its leader faces multiple felony convictions and indictments.
- **Populism vs. Plutocracy:** The movement claims to be a working-class revolt while its policy agenda primarily benefits the wealthy.
- **Christianity vs. Cruelty:** The movement claims Christian values while supporting policies that separate migrant

families and mock the vulnerable.

What makes these contradictions diagnostically severe is not their existence—all coalitions contain tensions—but their structural unresolvability within the current basin. The movement's dependence on a single leader whose personal legal exposure is inextricably linked to its narrative makes acknowledgment of criminality equivalent to basin collapse. The contradiction cannot be resolved; it can only be suppressed by attacking the legal system itself. This dynamic is distinct from the ordinary policy tensions of a political coalition, where compromise, leadership change, or platform evolution can absorb and resolve contradictions over time. In the MAGA basin, the leader cannot be replaced without dissolving the attractor, and the criminal charges cannot be acknowledged without invalidating the narrative of persecution. The beam is locked in place.

The sliver is projected outward with equal force: every fault is hung on the opponent. The movement cannot name its own contradictions, so it names everyone else's—real or invented—with relentless intensity.

9. The Terminal Phase: Formal Definition and Observable Signs

Within the attractor framework, a **terminal phase** is reached when a sealed attractor, facing sustained and credible existential threats, shifts its primary behavior from narrative self-maintenance and colonization to the active dismantling of the external correction mechanisms that could deliver a fatal perturbation.

Transition conditions include:

1. **Loss of institutional control:** The movement no longer reliably controls the executive or legislative branches through normal electoral means.
2. **Credible legal jeopardy:** Leadership faces prosecution, incarceration, or removal from ballots.
3. **Narrowing coalition:** The movement's demographic base cannot reliably produce majorities in national elections.
4. **Elite messaging shift:** The movement's leadership explicitly frames institutional destruction as the only path to survival.

When these conditions are met, the attractor is no longer merely sealed. It is actively destroying the sources of perturbation.

Observable signs of a terminal-phase political attractor:

1. **Rejection of electoral outcomes** as illegitimate unless the movement wins.
2. **Purge of dissenting officials** from election administration and party structures.
3. **Preparation for institutional override** through legal theories that would allow loyalist bodies to override popular vote counts.
4. **Normalization of violence** as patriotic self-defense.
5. **Attacks on truth-delivery systems**—media, science, intelligence, courts—to neutralize their corrective function.

The MAGA movement currently exhibits all five signs. The transition conditions are partially met (credible legal jeopardy is present; electoral losses have occurred; the coalition faces demographic challenges) and partially contested (the movement retains significant institutional power through the courts and state legislatures). The terminal

phase is not an all-or-nothing category; it is a trajectory along which the movement has demonstrably moved.

10. Trajectory: Structural Tendencies, Not Predictions

The attractor framework identifies structural tendencies, not certainties. Three trajectories are possible for a terminal-phase fantasy attractor, and they are not mutually exclusive.

Escalation. If the leader faces incarceration, removal from ballots, or definitive electoral defeat, the movement may escalate. Violence is the final defense of a sealed basin that cannot tolerate reality. Escalation risk is elevated when institutional pressure intensifies.

Fracture. The movement contains factions with incompatible interests. If the central figure becomes unavailable, the attractor may fracture into competing sub-basins, each claiming legitimacy. This is a common post-charismatic trajectory.

Slow Fade. Some fantasy attractors fade as the promised restoration never arrives, adherents age, and younger generations find the narrative less compelling. This trajectory requires sustained institutional resilience and an absence of triggering crises.

The current structural conditions—ongoing legal pressure, sustained institutional attacks, and the centrality of a single figure—make escalation and fracture the highest-concern scenarios. The slow fade remains a possibility only if institutions hold and no major crisis intervenes. No probability is assigned. The framework names the tendencies and leaves empirical validation to events.

11. Conclusion

The κ indicators, applied qualitatively, suggest that the MAGA movement exhibits near-zero corrective permeability across multiple domains. The movement colonizes rival basins, cannot acknowledge its internal contradictions, and exhibits the observable signs of a terminal-phase attractor. Disconfirming instances complicate but do not overturn the overall pattern. Symmetric application of the κ diagnostic to movements of other political orientations is methodologically required and has been briefly sketched; full comparative validation remains necessary. The framework provides structural tendencies, not predictions. The methodological limitations are acknowledged. The analysis is offered as a diagnostic contribution, not a final determination.