

THE GREAT FALL: MCCARTHY'S OUSTER AND REPUBLICAN POLITICAL CANNIBALISM IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Abstract

In October of 2023, Kevin McCarthy became the first House Speaker in the United States history to be removed through a motion to 'vacate the chair'. The primary question addressed in this research is why the US House of Representatives broke over two centuries of precedence, and evicted their Speaker, pushing the US Congress into uncharted and unprecedented territory. The author argues that the main reason for Speaker McCarthy's dismissal was the historical trend of "political cannibalism" that has become a part of the Republican Party's nature in the 21st century. While other commentators have offered explanations ranging from personal vendetta to failed bipartisanship, the author of this research asserts that these explanations are not reasons, but symptoms of a broader tendency of the House Republican Conference to "cannibalise" its leadership. Through the use of qualitative historical approach analysis under an interpretivist framework, this research utilises historical records, individual testimonies, and journalistic reports to establish a causal link between the ouster of Speaker McCarthy and the historical propensity of Republican House members preying upon their leadership, which derives from factional antagonisms having overtaken any semblance of party unity. The author here points to processes set in motion by the 'Republican Revolution' of 1994, which have led the House Republican Conference to become an organisation where the desire to undermine, outmanoeuvre, and ideologically outflank each other has become a core political principle, resulting in the rank-and-file members showing hostility to their party leaders. The rise of Donald Trump, the vilification of compromise and the results of the 2022 midterm elections have further expedited the process of political cannibalisation, which manifested in a minuscule Republican minority overthrowing their leader. The legacy of now-disgraced former Speaker McCarthy is a House of Representatives in chaos and a Republican Conference ready to self-combust at the slightest incitement.

The Great Fall: Kevin McCarthy's Ouster and Republican Dynamics in the US House of Representatives

On 3rd of October, 2023, Kevin McCarthy, the Republican congressman from California, made history. McCarthy, who had been serving as the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, was ousted from his office by a majority vote of 216 to 210 (Escobar, et al, 2023). This marks the first time in US history that a Speaker of the US Congress has been removed by a vote of no-confidence. In this paper, it is argued that this historical debacle is not a fluke or a result of recent developments, rather, it is the culmination of a long trajectory taken by the Republican Party's House Congressional Caucus.

Using news sources, historical evidence, and political literature, this paper attempts to argue that McCarthy's unceremonious exit is a result of the fundamental nature of the modern 21st century Republican Party. Since 1994, the Republicans have gone through five House speakers within their 21 years of the House majority (roughly 4.2 years for each). In contrast, Democrats have had just one speaker in the eight years they held power in the House. This paper searches for the reason that Republican leadership has a high job turnover. In the light of which, this paper argues that the removal of Kevin McCarthy as speaker and the chaos that ensued is not an exceptional event, but rather a culmination of a long running process of self-destruction amongst Republicans.

Brief Context

The United States of America House of Representatives is the lower chamber of the bicameral US Congress. It serves biannual terms and its constituencies are based on census redistricting (Article 1, Section 2, US Constitution). The purpose of the US House of Representatives (colloquially 'the House') is to provide direct representation federally. Elections to the House that coincide with a Presidential election are called 'General Elections' and those that occur in the middle of the President's term are called 'Midterm Elections'. Along with the Senate, which uses whole states as constituencies, the House was born out of 'The Great Compromise' of 1787. As part of this deal, the Senate was to represent the long-term interests of the country and give voices to all states equally to prevent the hegemony of large states; while the House was to represent the current mood of the country and give the large states representation in proportion to their population to prevent minority rule. The total strength of the House is capped at 435 since the year 1910 (Ritchie, 2010). The most critical function of the House of Representatives is to appropriate funds through budgets, which allows the federal US government to spend money and keep its operations running. If the US Congress does not appropriate funds to the federal government in order to pay its employees and run its business, the government can no longer function and goes into a 'government shutdown'. In such a situation the US government can no longer carry out its operations until its supply of money is resumed by the Congress.

The Speaker serves as presiding officer of the House and its de facto leader. The constitution of the USA does not explicitly grant this position any power. Rather, all major and minor powers held by the Office of the Speaker today have been accumulated through the centuries by the holders of this office through rules passed by the House itself or through conventions (Chiu, 2019). In many cases, the power of the Speaker's Office has waxed and waned depending on the leadership capacity and influence of the individual who has occupied the position (Green, 2010). Initially, the role of the speaker was largely neutral, but under statesman Henry Clay, the speakership evolved into a political role, and since then the Speaker has also served as the leader of the majority party in the House (Ritchie, 2010). Today, all business of the House is presided over by the Speaker, who also appoints committees and has the authority to set the legislative agenda; along with a myriad of other accrued powers.

Under the current system, the House splits into two legislative groups – the House Republican Conference and the House Democratic Caucus. These groups fundraise for candidates, help them get nominations and whip votes for each side when the House calls for a vote. There are elected officers

within the caucuses such as the chairs and vice-chairs who lead these groups and represent the official voice of the party. Even if these party groups are influential, it is notable that intra-party caucuses within each party also hold tremendous weight and tend to vote in blocs (Rubin, 2017).

Newt Gingrich and The Republican Revolution

The roots of the modern conditions of the House Republican Conference and the chaos it begets lie squarely in the 1994 ‘Republican Revolution’. Prior to the 1990s, the House of Representatives was dominated by the Democrats for a long period. Over the course of decades, the perpetual Democrat majority and Republican minority had reached a consensus called the ‘new deal coalition’, which embraced social liberalism, welfare spending and a proactive role of the state (Drew, 1996). Throughout the 1980s however, a new crop of House Republicans emerged on the scene, typified by Dick Armey of Texas and Newt Gingrich of Georgia. This new group of Republicans shared a deep resentment towards not only the Democrats, but also their own Republican leadership. They believed that the welfare state institutions were obsolete and that the Republican Party needed to adopt hardline right-wing conservatism as the gospel truth which guides all governing principles. These new Republicans believed they were fighting an ideological crusade to save the soul of America from oppression of the elites. As a result, they viewed political compromise as submission to the enemies of America (Rosenfeld, 2018).

In 1992, Bill Clinton was elected president of the United States, despite many Republicans viewing him as an over-the-top threat to the United States. By this time, Newt Gingrich had emerged as the leader of the House Republican Conference. Gingrich and his allies believed that Clinton’s presidency was illegitimate and many on the far right of the Republican Party believed the president was a drug addict, murderer, and potential dictator with covert plans to perpetuate his tenure office and to end democracy in the United States (Gould, 2014). As the 1994 midterm elections approached, House Republicans created a ‘Contract With America’, which was a promise to try and dismantle the American liberal welfare state (Gillon, 2008). Gingrich made the anti-Clinton sentiment a core tenant of the party’s platform and created a vicious personalised vilification campaign. A vote for Republicans in 1994 was made out to be a vote against the very personage of President Clinton. Republicans won the 1994 elections with a large margin and obtained commanding majorities. They took control of the House of Representatives for the first time in four decades. This ‘Republican Revolution’ was seen by many to be a triumph of personalisation of politics which led to demonisation of political opponents (Critchlow, 2015). The Gingrich led Republican Conference took control of the legislature, not as a tool of policy making but as a weapon of policy nullification. Republicans had waged a successful war on the concepts of consensus and compromise (Rosenfeld, 2018).

As the new House Speaker, Gingrich realised his dream of creating a House Republican Conference that not only stopped creating consensus with the Democrats, but also despised consensus amongst its own members. Gingrich’s primary teaching to his caucus was “political cannibalism”. He taught his caucus that Republicans had to learn to get rid of those amongst them who had outlived their usefulness in politics. Gingrich’s foremost governing principle was nastiness, which to him was the

greatest political virtue. He remarked, “one of the great problems we have in the Republican Party is that we don’t encourage you to be nasty. We encourage you to be neat, obedient, and loyal, and faithful, and all those Boy Scout words, which ... are lousy in politics”. Gingrich made animosity towards your own party colleagues a basic feature of the Republican Caucus (Zelizer, 2020).

Gingrich clashed with Clinton periodically and his fight with the president led to a government shutdown in 1995-1996. The shutdown cost the US economy millions of dollars and forced multiple government services to shut down (Drew, 1996). Gingrich admitted to the ‘The Christian Science Monitor’ that the shutdown was in fact a petty revenge ploy, which made it seem as if Gingrich was throwing a tantrum at the cost of the economy (Purdum, 2018). When Clinton was re-elected for a second term in 1996, many pundits and insiders blamed the vindictive government shutdown for the Republican loss. However, Gingrich soon found a way to undermine Clinton once and for all. When the infamous Clinton–Lewinsky scandal was revealed, Gingrich left no stone unturned to make a spectacle out of it. Advocate Ken Starr, who had previously investigated Clinton in a property scandal, was appointed to investigate the nature of explicit relationships between President Clinton and the White House Intern Monica Lewinsky. Based on his report, Gingrich instituted an impeachment inquiry into Bill Clinton. As the inquiry went on, a group of House Republicans tried to oust Gingrich and failed (Broder & Yang, 1997). This group of Republicans, who claimed to be “pragmatists”, saw Gingrich’s campaign against Clinton as a publicity stunt and painted him as an ideological fundamentalist. Gingrich had hoped that the American public would completely reject the scandal ridden Democrats in the 1998 midterm election — he was wrong. Republicans had a historic underperformance in the 1998 midterm elections and nearly lost the majority in the House (Gillon, 2008). The “pragmatist” faction led by Bob Livingston and John Boehner (then Chair of the House Republican Conference) made a second push to oust Gingrich. Gingrich was now widely viewed as a political liability who had caused heavy losses to his own party. As Gingrich’s hold on power was loosening due to election losses, news broke out that much like President Clinton, Gingrich had also been involved in a relationship with a Congressional staffer (Dickinson, 2012). The so-called “Callista Affair” lost Gingrich any political mileage he might have had at that point. Instead of facing a challenge from his own caucus, Gingrich resigned his position and retired from Congress. In one of the final meetings with his colleagues, Gingrich complained that, “I’m willing to lead but I am not willing to preside over people who are cannibals” (The Associated Press, 1998). In an ironic yet cyclical display of ruthless politics, Newt Gingrich was removed from power by people who were following his lesson of “political cannibalism” (Saletan, 1998).

Between Gingrich and McCarthy

Upon Gingrich’s resignation, his automatic presumed successor was his ally turned critic, Bob Livingston of Louisiana. But, as Livingston’s election to the coveted office drew closer, it was revealed that he too was an adulterer. House Speaker elect Bob Livingston confessed to having been involved in an extramarital relationship and resigned before taking office (Neikirk, Dorning, & Blum, 1998).

In this vacuum, Republican Chief Deputy Whip Dennis Hastert became the new Speaker in 1999. Hastert was a compromise choice between the “pragmatists” and the “ideologues”. His election was largely a result of the fact that no other bigwig was willing to throw their name in the ring out of the fear of dividing the already miniscule Republican majority (Dorning, 2014). Hastert instituted numerous measures to prevent a small minority of ideologues from hijacking the House. Of these, the most important was the informal ‘Hastert Rule’ which dictated that only those bills were to be presented in Congress that had the approval of a majority amongst the majority caucus beforehand. This not only weakened the Democrats ability to propose legislation, but also prevented extreme members of the majority party from presenting bills in the House (Babington, 2004). Compared to his predecessor and his eventual successors, Hastert might have been considered a ‘good speaker’. He enjoyed the tacit support of all factions in his party and did not face any major opposition from within his own caucus. When Republicans lost the majority in 2006, he quietly retired as a well-respected politician. This is how his story would have ended had the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) not launched an investigation into his finances. Nearly a decade post-retirement, Hastert was accused, charged, indicted, and convicted of sexually assaulting at least five underage boys and using hush money to try and shut them up (Zapotosky, 2016). Dennis Hastert, the longest serving Republican Speaker of the House will go down in history as a convicted paedophile sex offender (Schmidt, 2017).

One of Gingrich’s original rivals, John Boehner, succeeded Hastert as the new leader of the Republicans. Once Republicans recaptured the majority in 2010, Boehner became the speaker. Within a year of his election, Boehner already started facing opposition from a group of Republican Colleagues who identified themselves as members of the ‘Tea Party’, a right-wing libertarian movement that sought to reduce government spending and end the fiscal deficit (Cillizza, 2013). These Republicans voted against measures that were seen as bipartisan and considered such bills to be examples of Boehner bowing down to President Obama, a Democrat. The fact that Boehner did not nullify Obama’s agenda completely and worked with him on occasion, proved to the hardline Republicans that Boehner was a part of the ‘corrupt establishment’. His image as a ‘pragmatic conservative’ made him less and less palatable to the Tea Party extremists. Many of these hardliners voted against his re-election to the speakership in 2013 (MacAskill, 2013). In particular, when Boehner refused to threaten the Democrats with a government shutdown in the course of budget negotiations, he earned the ire of multiple fiscal conservatives of his party. Boehner also refused to support the racist ‘birther conspiracy’ dog whistle against Obama, a major talking point of many Republicans of the day (Boehner, Boehner to ‘birthers’: Hawaii good enough for me, 2011). Boehner was constantly opposed to his legislative agenda, and was blocked by the right-wing partisans of his caucus on many major bills. By the year 2015, Boehner believed he could no longer hold his leadership position in a bona fide manner. Caught between a progressive Obama White House and an increasing number of ultra-conservative detractors; Boehner stepped down as Speaker and Head of the House Republican Conference (Bacon, 2015). Boehner would later call the right-wing demagogic ideologues within his caucus “political terrorists”, and declared them to be “legislative terrorists just looking to go to Washington and blow everything up” (Boehner, *On the House: A Washington Memoir*, 2021).

A new generation of Republican leaders who had pressured Boehner to leave was the triad of new leaders called the ‘Young Guns’, which consisted of Eric Cantor of Virginia, Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and Kevin McCarthy of California. Once Boehner was out of the picture, Kevin McCarthy was put up by the Young Guns and their supporters as the first choice for Speaker. McCarthy committed a major blunder before the speaker election. He claimed on national television that the Republican Party was using its House majority to enact a witch-hunt against Democrat Hillary Clinton (Prokop, 2015). By “saying the quiet part out loud”, McCarthy had told the country that Republicans were weaponizing their legislative powers and severely undermined the credibility of the ongoing Benghazi investigations in the House. McCarthy’s gaffe alienated many Republicans and he dropped out of the race for speakership (Steinhauer & Herszenhorn, 2015).

The Republicans’ new choice for speaker was Paul Ryan. Ryan’s term was accentuated with the rise and consolidation of the House Freedom Caucus. The Freedom Caucus was founded by ultra-conservative Republicans opposed to the establishmentarian pragmatism and compromise (Newton-Small, 2015). The aim of this caucus was to push the Republican Party and the House of Representatives to the political right (Lizza, 2015). The Freedom Caucus had supported Ryan to prevent themselves from being ostracised from the rest of the party (Newhauser & Fox, 2015). However, the Freedom Caucus mostly raged against Ryan’s leadership rather than stand with him (Bade, 2016). Ryan’s speakership also coincided with the rise of Donald Trump, who served as President from 2016-2020. Trump’s brand of politics ushered a sea change in Republican Politics. The ideas of “Reaganomics” and “Compassionate Conservatism” were deemed obsolete and a new tide of “politics of rage” and “American Carnage” took over (Alberta, 2019). Trump’s brand of politics advocated that the noisiest voices got the most attention, and therefore were the most powerful voices (Haberma, 2022). Under Trump’s influence, the House Republican Conference fully embraced right-wing populism and anti-establishmentarian rhetoric, rejecting any need for policy making or electoral platforms (Kazin, 2017). In 2018, when Republicans lost the majority and Ryan stepped down as Speaker, he left a Republican Conference dominated by the worst instincts of “Trumpism” and hyper-partisanship (Werner, 2018).

Kevin McCarthy and 2022 Elections

Prior to the 2022 midterm elections to the House, polls and conventional wisdom said that Republicans would take back the majority in the House of Representatives (Fitzgerald, 2022). Kevin McCarthy, who had returned as Republican leader post Paul Ryan’s exit, predicted that the Party would win in a landslide wave (Goldiner, 2022). But as the results came in, it was clear that the Republican wave had fizzled. They flipped just nine seats, and ended up getting a four-seat majority in a House of 435 members. Not only that, but Democrats still controlled the Senate and the White House. The narrow majority made it so that Kevin McCarthy needed the near unanimous support of his caucus of 222 members, since 218 is the needed majority number to be elected speaker. Upon the declaration of results, McCarthy had prepared for a gruelling battle to the speakership. But even before the floor vote, McCarthy faced an internal challenge from far-right Freedom Caucus member, Andy Biggs of Arizona (Zanona, Rogers, & Raju, 2022). Before the Speaker vote was to commence on the 3rd

of January 2023, several Republicans announced their refusal to support McCarthy (Beavers & Carney, 2023). Despite this, McCarthy decided to force a vote on the House floor. McCarthy failed to win over nineteen Republican votes and lost the first round of the Speaker election. This marked the first time in over a century that the majority party failed to elect a speaker in the first round (Brockell, 2023). Not only that, but McCarthy lost all the three rounds of voting held on the 3rd of January. The primary source of opposition to McCarthy came from the Freedom Caucus and its most conservative members. The anti-McCarthy camp did not have one single candidate, but worked to deny him the 218-vote mark. McCarthy began slowly whittling away at his opponents, and made many concessions to the extreme right flank of his party conference (Bushard, 2023). McCarthy's most significant concession was to grant a rule change that would allow a single member to file a vote of no-confidence against the speaker. At one point, after McCarthy lost the 14th round of votes, pro-McCarthy congressman Mike Rogers of Alabama almost physically assaulted an anti-McCarthy congressman Matt Gaetz of Florida (Wu & Hill, 2023). McCarthy finally won the Speakership on the 15th round of votes, with 216 votes for McCarthy, 212 votes for the Democrat nominee Hakeem Jeffries, and six republican members voting 'present' to reduce the majority threshold. This was the most rounds needed to choose a Speaker since the US Civil War (1860-1865).

The Ouster of Speaker McCarthy and its Aftermath

Within months of being elected, McCarthy came to loggerheads with his adversaries of the House Freedom Caucus. As previously stated, one of the main functions of the House is to provide funding to the government at large. To do this, the House must raise the "debt-ceiling", so that the government can borrow more money from the reserves and keep itself running. In May of 2023, McCarthy began negotiating with the Senate leaders and the White House under President Biden, a Democrat. The negotiations however were fraught with discontent, since McCarthy was being pressured by his Republican colleagues to demand large budget cuts, and Biden was unwilling to make any reductions to the expenditure on welfare schemes (Drenon, 2023). The mounting threat of the government defaulting on its debt did not stop the hardliner Republicans from resisting any compromise with the Democrats (Lange, Slattery, & Morgan, 2023). By the end of the month, McCarthy and Biden reached a tentative deal that further matured into the 'Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2023' (Gregorian, 2023). Neither the deal nor the final bill had the full endorsement of far-right Republicans (Blitzer, 2023), with seventy-one Republican members voting against the Act (Office of the Clerk, 2023).

McCarthy's true test came in September however, when the actual appropriations budget of the US government was put to vote in the House. On 29th of September, the Federal Government appropriations budget that was endorsed by McCarthy was defeated in the House. Hardline Republicans, most of them members of the Freedom Caucus, cross voted with the Democrats to tank this budget (Warburton & Morgan, 2023). In effect, this meant the US government would run out of money and shut down on the first of October. Rather than pass a full budget, McCarthy negotiated with the Democrats to pass a 'Continuing Resolution' on the 30th of September, which extended the ongoing budget and prevented a shutdown in the near future by kicking the can down the road (Edmondson & Hulse, Congress Narrowly Averts Shutdown as House Democrats Help Pass Stopgap

Bill, 2023). The Republican hardliners saw McCarthy's attempt at compromise a betrayal of their ideology, with many of them voting against the resolution. Now that the shutdown was averted, far-right House Republicans, led by Matt Gaetz of Florida, initiated a call to oust McCarthy from Speakership (Brassil & Lightman, 2023). Gaetz's dispute with McCarthy had a personal touch, but discontent against the Speaker also came from ideological critics of the Freedom Caucus. Even if a small group of Republican rebels were to try and remove McCarthy, it would be up to the Democrats to keep him in power by voting against his ouster. But rather than reaching out to Democrats to save his seat, McCarthy openly blamed them for the failure to pass a budget, despite having passed the 'Continuing Resolution' with their support (Fortinsky, 2023). McCarthy alienated his own party's right flank as well as the Democrats in the House (Benen, 2023).

On the 2nd of October, Gaetz filed the motion to 'vacate the chair'. The final vote on the 3rd of October saw the House vote to remove the sitting speaker. With a tally of 216-210 (Roll Call 519; House Resolution 757, 2023), 208 Democrats and 8 Republicans voted in majority to carry the motion to remove McCarthy from his position, making it the first time in history that such a motion had passed. Kevin McCarthy lost his gavel in less than ten months from the assumption of office (Edmondson, McCarthy Is Ousted as Speaker, Leaving the House in Chaos, 2023).

McCarthy's removal pushed the house into an unprecedented scenario. The Republican Conference was still divided, and most Republicans still harboured resentment towards the eight members who had unseated McCarthy. The Republican Conference's first choice to replace McCarthy was his lieutenant and Republican Caucus floor leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana. Scalise withdrew his nomination before a floor vote could occur (Broadwater, Edmondson, & Demirjian, 2023). Republicans then chose the poster-boy of the famous and infamous Freedom Caucus, Jim Jordan of Ohio to be their next nominee. Jordan pushed for a floor vote, but his candidature was blocked by the moderates of his party (Kilander & Garcia, 2023). In the course of three ballots, Jordan lost more and more votes each time before being removed as candidate by his conference (Kimball & Wilkins, 2023). The next nominee was Minnesota native Tom Emmer. Emmer was publicly denounced by the former president, Trump and rescinded his candidature before the speakership vote (Isenstadt & McGraw, 2023). The now fatigued House Republicans finally settled on Christian-Nationalist Mike Johnson of Louisiana, who was ultimately elected Speaker of the House on the 25th of October, 2023 (Sotomayor, Alemany, Caldwell & Meyer, 2023). In a span of twenty-two days, the House Republican Conference had cycled through a total of five different choices for the Speakership.

McCarthy's Fall and Politics of Chaos

Most commentators have ascribed McCarthy's fall to a multitude of reasons rooted in recent years. Some have blamed his lack of bipartisanship (Fortinsky, 2023; Benen, 2023), and oxymoronically others say it was his bipartisanship that sank his vessel (Brassil & Lightman, 2023). Both of these reasons obviously cannot be true together. Still other reasons have ascribed his fall to a narrow house majority of just four seats. This is however an ahistorical statement, since speakers with similar majorities have survived full terms in office, including Nancy Pelosi (speaker from 2006-2010, 2018-2022), who also

had a miniscule four seat majority in the House. Another argument made by many is that McCarthy's seat was threatened from the beginning by the Right flank within his party (Blitzer, 2023), and that his failure to keep his promises to them caused the revolt against McCarthy (Hulse, 2023). Still other commentators have placed the onus on individuals like Matt Gaetz (New York Post Editorial Board, 2023) or Donald Trump (LeVine, Scherer & Reston, 2023).

At best, these explanations are judgements of symptoms, rather than the root cause of the problem. By looking at Kevin McCarthy's speakership in a vacuum, as most commentators have done, they fail to take cognizance of the chain of events that led to the said event. It is only through the discussion of prior Republican speakerships of Newt Gingrich, Dennis Hastert, John Boehner, and Paul Ryan, that we can see a long-term pattern of disruption in the Republican Caucus, which is rooted in the principle of 'Political Cannibalism'. The attempt made here is to specifically contextualise the events of McCarthy's dismissal in the context of larger political forces that have been at play. Gingrich and Boehner had to leave their positions due to internal opposition, and Ryan also faced the threat of revolt from the Freedom Caucus (Bade, 2016). Hastert also had to make arrangements like the 'Hastert Rule' to keep the far-right minority in his caucus at bay.

The Political Cannibalisation of the leaders within the Republican party reflects a post-policy and post-consensus political reality, where classical ideologies have been made irrelevant by populism, culture wars, and media circuses (Martin, 2021; Alberta, 2019; Popli, 2023). By fighting against their own leadership, Republicans fundraise for elections (Gillespie, 2023), and polish their credentials as anti-establishmentarian populists (Kazin, 2017). Political Cannibalism is politically expedient not only because it helps Republican members climb the leadership hierarchy, but also because it keeps them from being burdened by the responsibility to govern. As Republican leadership administers and governs the House in a majority, the average House Republican can remain in office without actually caring about policy by simply raging against everyone else and scapegoating their leaders when they are confronted about the lack of concrete achievements. Political Cannibalisation makes it so that ungovernability (Hulse, 2023), personal vendetta (Donlevy, 2023), chaos (Cottle, Douthat, & Polgreen, 2023), and factionalism (Olsen, 2021) are not roadblocks, but advantages in the ascendancy of a Republican politician. Political Cannibalisation induced chaos has allowed a shorter and more expedient path to power. Gingrich toppled the entire preceding Republican leadership, and was then ousted by Boehner, Hastert and Livingston in turn. Boehner was then forced out by the pressure of the 'Young Guns' including McCarthy and Ryan; who were then forced out by the Freedom Caucus and other far-right ideologues. This cycle of supplanting one generation of leaders by next is the true causation and the backdrop which should inform our inquiry into McCarthy's historical unseating. The trends and processes which began in the past of the House Republican Conference have led it to 'decapitate its own head'. The seeds of this historical act lie in the evolution of the modern House Republican Conference, as set in motion by the 'Republican Revolution' of 1994.

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