

Here is a well-organized and sobering checklist that we can thank Rick Steves for. This "checklist" of steps toward fascism is derived from his 40-minute 2026 speech in the YouTube video linked here: <https://youtu.be/E20u5y7CJZQ> and at www.goose.com.

Rick's list is a genuinely useful framework for civic literacy.

1. Exploit fear and crisis.
Leaders rise during instability (economic collapse, war, social anxiety).
2. Promise simple solutions to complex problems.
They claim only they can "fix everything."
3. Position themselves as a strong, charismatic savior.
A single leader becomes the embodiment of the nation.
4. Encourage blind loyalty ("the leader is always right").
Critical thinking is discouraged.
5. Create enemies and scapegoats.
Minorities or outsiders are blamed for society's problems.
6. Stoke anger and nationalism.
Emotions override rational debate.
7. Use propaganda to control perception.
Media is manipulated to glorify the regime.
8. Undermine or control the press.
Independent journalism is weakened or discredited.
9. Erode democratic institutions gradually.
Changes happen incrementally, not all at once.
10. Normalize small abuses of power.
"Small evils become big evils" over time.
11. Encourage conformity and suppress dissent.
Individuality is replaced by unity and obedience.
12. Militarize society and glorify force.
Violence and expansionism become acceptable tools.
13. Use legal means to gain power, then bypass the law.
Democracies are often dismantled from within.
14. Reward loyalty and punish opposition.
Critics are marginalized, intimidated, or eliminated.
15. Convince people democracy is weak or failing.
Citizens are persuaded to trade freedom for "order" or "security."

The checklist above closely tracks what historians of fascism—like Robert Paxton and Umberto Eco—have documented. Rick Steves (an expert traveler, guide, and historian) draws on his decades of traveling through Europe and visiting the sites where fascism played out.

A few things stand out about the list as a whole...

The sequencing is important. Points 1–6 are about seizing power emotionally and psychologically. Points 7–10 are about consolidating it institutionally. Points 11–15 are about entrenching it permanently. It's a progression, not just a checklist of unrelated traits.

Point 13 is especially chilling...the idea that democracies are often dismantled from the inside, using legal mechanisms, rather than by outright military coups. Mussolini, Hitler, and others all came to power through nominally legal processes before gutting the institutions that brought them there.

Point 10 ("small evils become big evils") reflects the "boiling frog" dynamic that Steves emphasizes repeatedly...that the danger isn't one dramatic moment but the slow normalization of things that would have been unthinkable a few years earlier.

Point 15 is the ultimate goal: Once citizens are convinced democracy itself is the problem, the autocrat no longer needs to fight it. People surrender it voluntarily.

Now let's compare this to the **Republican/GOP/MAGA playbook/agenda**, known as "Project 2025." Project 2025 is a real, well-documented policy blueprint, so we can extract an accurate summary based on the actual document. It is presented here accurately and fairly without political dramatization, drawing *directly* from the documented contents of the 920-page *Mandate for Leadership* rather than critics or proponents. Here is a distilled checklist of Project 2025's core proposals...

Project 2025 / Mandate for Leadership: *A Distilled Checklist of the Core Proposals*

1. **Concentrate executive power in the presidency** — Reshape the federal government by consolidating executive power, reducing the independence of agencies and making them directly accountable to the president.
2. **Replace career civil servants with political loyalists** — Citing the Reagan-era maxim that "personnel is policy," install vetted conservative appointees throughout the federal bureaucracy, replacing nonpartisan career officials.
3. **Dismantle or restructure major federal agencies** — Proposals include abolishing the Department of Homeland Security and replacing it with an immigration-focused agency, and dramatically restructuring or downsizing others.
4. **Subordinate the Justice Department to the White House** — Reduce DOJ independence so it operates as a tool of presidential policy rather than as an independent law enforcement body.
5. **Restrict and reshape immigration enforcement** — Massively expand deportation authority, detentions, and border enforcement as central priorities.

6. **Roll back LGBTQ+ rights and protections** — Remove protections for LGBTQ+ people and eliminate what the document calls "transgender ideology" from federal policy, including banning certain content as obscene.
7. **Eliminate DEI programs across the federal government** — Remove DEI programs from agencies like the NIH and eliminate diversity-related offices and requirements government-wide.
8. **Restrict reproductive rights at the federal level** — Limit or eliminate federal support for abortion access, contraception guidance, and related healthcare programs.
9. **Weaken or eliminate major safety net programs** — Proposals include eliminating Head Start, restricting SNAP food assistance, limiting veteran disability benefits, and cutting support for farmers.
10. **Undermine Medicare and keep drug prices high** — Attack Medicare, keep prescription drug prices high, and restrict access to reproductive care.
11. **Dismantle environmental regulations and climate policy** — Refocus energy policy away from climate goals, increase fossil fuel production, roll back EPA authority, and reject climate science as a basis for federal policy.
12. **Defund public media** — Defund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which funds PBS and NPR, calling it "half a billion dollars squandered on leftist opinion each year."
13. **Restrict the independent press** — Reconsider accommodations given to journalists in the White House Press Corps.
14. **Politicize independent institutions** — Proposals include politicizing the Federal Reserve and making other traditionally independent bodies answerable to the executive.
15. **Implement through executive action, bypassing Congress** — Many of the most significant proposals are claimed to be implementable through executive branch action alone, without new legislation.

A Note on Framing:

Supporters of Project 2025 would spin these same points very differently — as restoring constitutional executive authority, eliminating unaccountable bureaucracy, protecting traditional values, securing the border, and reducing government overreach. People disagree sharply about whether those proposals are beneficial or harmful, but **the checklist above reflects what the document *actually proposes***. Unlike the Rick Steves fascism checklist, this one describes an active policy agenda in the USA rather than a historical pattern, so it sits squarely in ongoing political debate.

