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Introduction

The years following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 saw the abandonment of the Democratic Party by the white American South. That partisan realignment led slowly but directly to the arrival of Donald Trump, a supremely dangerous man—an enemy of racial justice—at the pinnacle of American power, where despite his narrow loss in 2020 he still lodges.

Many of the conflicts dividing Americans today have their roots in the civil rights movement and broader rights revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s—and in the reactionary response to those revolutions. Progressive insurgencies granted full citizenship to African Americans, empowered previously marginalized populations, and diversified the Democratic Party. They also mandated legal and constitutional protections for women, ethnic and racial minorities, criminal defendants, the poor, homosexuals, the handicapped, and the mentally ill.

The strategy that Trump, ever the opportunist, adopted when he launched his bid for the presidency was the white supremacist position that had been unambiguously articulated nearly six decades earlier by archconservative *National Review* editor William F. Buckley in his August 1957 essay "Why the South Must Prevail": "The issue is

whether the White community in the South is entitled to take such measures as are necessary to prevail, politically and culturally, in the areas in which it does not predominate numerically. The sobering answer is Yes." Buckley argued that this is "because, for the time being, it is the advanced race." The question, then, "as far as the White community is concerned, is whether the claims of civilization supersede those of universal suffrage." Buckley's answer: "The *National Review* believes that the South's premises are correct. If the majority wills what is socially atavistic, then to thwart the majority may be, though undemocratic, enlightened."

By the late 1960s it had become uncommon for people to explicitly express racially insensitive views. Buckley soon renounced his own editorial, and Republicans in general swiftly shifted to code words and phrases, such as "law and order," "the silent majority," and "welfare queens."

Still, the rights revolutions had given political conservatives a powerful tool to mobilize voters—especially lower- and middle-income non-college-educated whites who felt the Democratic Party had abandoned them. In 1964 many of these Southern voters supported Barry Goldwater, who carried Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina. By January 1976, Ronald Reagan picked up the racist mantle and regaled his Asheville, North Carolina, audience on the campaign trail with this oft-disputed anecdote: "In Chicago, they found a woman who holds the record. She used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare." "In fact," Reagan added, "her tax-free cash income alone has been running at $150,000 a year."[1]

By the time of Reagan's 1980 victory, the Republican Party had become the home of racial reaction.

Fueling the conservative response to the civil rights revolution of the mid-1960s was the onset of a surge in immigration to the United States following enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

According to the official House of Representatives description of the law, "Congress erected a legal framework that prioritized

highly skilled immigrants and opened the door for people with family already living in the United States. The popular bill passed the House, 318 to 95. The law capped the number of annual visas at 290,000, which included a restriction of 20,000 visas per country per year. But policymakers had vastly underestimated the number of immigrants who would take advantage of the family reunification clause."[2]

In 1970, 4.7 percent of this country's population was foreign born; by 2019, that had shot up to 13.7 percent. In actual numbers, there were 9.6 million immigrants in 1970; in 2019, there were 44.9 million, a 263 percent increase, with most of the new immigrants coming from Latin America, Asia, and Africa rather than the countries of northern, western, eastern, or southern Europe.[3]

For Trump, it has been a simple matter to focus native discontent on the surge in foreign-born low-wage workers competing for jobs and—in the view of his partisans—transforming American culture. He has demonized immigrants in countless ways, including by disparaging countries with majority-Black populations and supporting participants in the August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville.[4]

Understanding the role of increasing racial and ethnic diversity in empowering the contemporary conservative movement is crucial to understanding contemporary American politics—but there is more to American politics than that. These developments are explored in my 1992 book, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, and in my May 1991 *Atlantic* article, "When the Official Subject Is Presidential Politics, Taxes, Welfare, Crime, Rights, or Values . . . the Real Subject Is Race."[5]

The post-1964 Democratic Party quickly became a biracial coalition—and more recently a multiracial, multiethnic coalition. An increasingly influential upscale wing has also emerged as growing numbers of white, college-educated voters abandoned the Republican Party and, supporting more liberal politics, became Democrats.

The knowledge class in the post–World War II era has shaped, and was shaped by, the human rights, civil rights, antiwar, feminist, and gay rights movements, as well as by the broader sexual and information

revolutions. Members of this class—academics, artists, editors, human relations managers, lawyers, librarians, architects, journalists, psychologists, social workers, teachers, and therapists, as well as those in engineering, the sciences, finance, and other technology-focused domains—have had their lives upended by the legalization of contraception and abortion, by no-fault divorce, feminism, new behavioral norms, the effective disappearance of censorship, and the abolition of mandatory military service.

In the context of this ongoing state of flux are concerns among the growing numbers of college-educated voters who are preoccupied with reproductive rights, the environment, self-actualization, nonviolence, aesthetic fulfillment, racial and gender equality, and the administration of justice. This upscale cohort within the Democratic coalition is intensely hostile to agendas of imposed moral orthodoxy—often to religious observance itself—and particularly to the agenda of the socially conservative Right. The interests of these voters do not necessarily, or reliably, coincide with the priorities of the less privileged, and they often conflict with the values and religiosity of millions of middle- and working-class voters—many of them low wage, with only high school educations—who often find themselves disempowered, annoyed by, and resentful of contemporary cultural trends.

Across both parties, one's identity as a man or woman; as a heterosexual, homosexual, or transgender person; as white, Black, or Hispanic; as a feminist; as a Southerner; as a Christian; as tolerant or a disciplinarian; as an individualist or collectivist; as a pacifist or militarist; as a cosmopolitan or provincial; as an egalitarian—these and more have become a part of one's being as a liberal or Democrat on one side or as a conservative or Republican on the other.

Contemporary partisan schisms are far deeper and more irresolvable than past conflicts that positioned economic liberals and the Democratic Party against free market advocates and the Republican Party. Particularistic identities across the spectrum have now become consistent and coherent, what political scientists call "sorted"—into two competing and increasingly hostile identities, progressive or conservative, Democrat or Republican. One's sense

of self has become deeply entwined with one's partisan allegiance, escalating the stakes for both sides.

The subordination of economic to cultural and racial issues as the prime factors in elections has imposed significant consequences on those least equipped to bear the costs. In effect, the internal realignment of the Democratic Party has left without effective representation the broad class interests of those in the bottom half of the income distribution—those millions, of all races and ethnicities, without college degrees and with household incomes in the 25th to 65th percentile—just when the need for a strong political voice has intensified, especially for those left behind by the exacerbation of global competition that began in the early 1970s. Over subsequent decades, American corporations have cut pay and benefits for many workers in order to compete with low-wage producers in foreign countries, abandoning the post–World War II concord between labor and management and outsourcing production to factories abroad, while automation continues to transform the need for skills that used to be the province of human beings alone.

Artificial intelligence, argued MIT economist Daron Acemoglu in a September 2021 essay, "Harms of AI," is "being used and developed at the moment to empower corporations and governments against workers and citizens."[6] If the deployment of artificial intelligence remains on this trajectory, in Acemoglu's view, it will likely "produce various social, economic and political harms. These include damaging competition, consumer privacy and consumer choice; excessively automating work, fueling inequality, inefficiently pushing down wages, and failing to improve worker productivity; and damaging political discourse, democracy's most fundamental lifeblood."

The fracturing of the Left means there is no counterbalancing political force to reroute the thrust of AI more constructively. Beyond that, a weakened economic Left gives the Right what amounts to an open field to shape tax legislation, deregulation, and spending policies favoring the interests of those at the top. From roughly 1968 to the present, policy-making has been driven by the top quintile of the income distribution and by corporate America.

Not only have economic conservatives benefited from a wounded adversary, but the most powerful economic forces—global competition, outsourcing, an accelerating digital revolution, the ability of corporations to move capital and operations across borders—have worked to their advantage, and to the disadvantage of workers.

Liberal theorists have repeatedly called for a wide range of structural reforms, some of which might have spread more evenly the costs and benefits of the ongoing postindustrial upheaval. These include a stronger safety net; a higher minimum wage; expanded health care, childcare, and prescription drug coverage; more generous provision for the disabled and the aged; sharply increased spending on worker training (especially in community colleges); tax reform; trade policies with worker protections; and a complete revision of the National Labor Relations Act to account for globalization and robotization. No matter what their merits, these options have not had a chance while the balance of economic power has been tilted so far to the right.

The labor-left Economic Policy Institute, in *The State of Working America*, correctly points to the growing tension between wages and productivity:

> A key feature of the labor market since 1973—one that was not present in prior decades—has been the stunning disconnect between the economy's potential for improved pay and the reality of stunted pay growth, especially since 2000. Productivity grew 80.4 percent between 1973 and 2011, when, as noted, median worker pay grew just 10.7 percent. Since 2000, productivity has grown 22.8 percent, but real compensation has stagnated across the board, creating the largest divergence between productivity and pay in the last four decades. Stagnant wage and benefit growth has not been due to poor overall economic performance; nor has it been inevitable. Rather, wage and benefit growth stagnated because the economy, as structured by the rules in place, no longer ensures that workers' pay rises in tandem with productivity.[7]

The question remains: Why do the contemporary rules of the economy not ensure pay raises in proportion to improved productivity?

There are global forces beyond national reach driving some of these trends, but insofar as the rules are set domestically, the issue is political power. And at the moment, those who would benefit from policies encouraging shared rewards from growing productivity are split between two political parties, unable to effectively promote their material interests.

Evidence of the shift in emphasis from economic to cultural politics can be found in the contrast between voting in some of the nation's poorest white counties, on the one hand, and voting in affluent suburbs, on the other. Take 96.2 percent white McDowell County, West Virginia, where the median household income in 2020 was $25,997, compared with the national median of $67,340, and the poverty rate was 31.9 percent, compared with a national rate of 11.9 percent. In 1964, the county voted 83 percent to 17 percent for Lyndon Johnson over Barry Goldwater. In 2020, the county voted 78.9 percent to 20.4 percent for Trump over Joe Biden. Or take the entire state of West Virginia, which ranks forty-sixth in median household income. In 1964, fifty-one of the state's fifty-five counties voted Democratic. In 2020 and 2016, all fifty-five of the state's counties cast majorities for Trump.

In the 2020 election, nine of the ten counties in the United States with the highest median household income voted for Biden, including all of the top five, Loudon and Fairfax Counties in Virginia, Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties in California, and Los Alamos County in New Mexico.

The Democratic Party, once the party of working men and women, is currently dominated by issues of race, gender, and sexuality. In recent elections, these issues have overridden economic divisions. State voting patterns are defined by the degree to which residents have entered into what has been called a "second demographic transition" (SDT). This transition, according to Ron J. Lesthaeghe, of the Vrije Universiteit of Brussels, has two components: "The *first* principal component or factor describes typical SDT features such as the postponement of marriage, greater prevalence of cohabitation and same-sex households, postponement of parenthood, subreplacement fertility, and a higher incidence of abortion. By contrast,

the *second* principal component captures the family variables that generally lead to greater vulnerability of young women and children, such as teenage marriage and fertility, subsequent divorce, single-parent households, and children residing in the households of grandparents."[8]

Lesthaeghe elaborates further: "The SDT starts in the 1960s with a series of multifaceted revolutions. First, there was the contraceptive revolution, with the introduction of hormonal contraception and far more efficient IUDs; second, there was the sexual revolution, with declining ages at first sexual intercourse; and third, there was the gender revolution, questioning the sole breadwinner household model and the gendered division of labor that accompanied it."[9]

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This demographic transition has transformed the Democratic Party, transferring agenda-setting power to the knowledge class. And this ascendant constituency is most concerned with protecting and advancing recently democratized rights—notably reproductive rights, the right to privacy, and women's rights—as well as a comprehensive commitment to cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity.

These trends were apparent as early as the 1996 presidential campaign when two of Bill Clinton's top advisers, Dick Morris and Mark Penn, reported that one of the most effective ways of predicting voter behavior was from answers to five questions: Do you believe homosexuality is morally wrong? Do you ever personally look at pornography? Would you look down on someone who had an affair while married? Do you believe sex before marriage is morally wrong? Is religion very important in your life?

How did this come about?

Figures 0.1 and 0.2 compare the elections of 1976 (between two centrist candidates, Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford) and 2016 (pitting Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton). The horizontal axis measures the percentage of each state's vote cast for the Republican candidates (including Evan McMullin in 2016), and the vertical axis measures the degree to which the population of a given state has entered the SDT.[10]

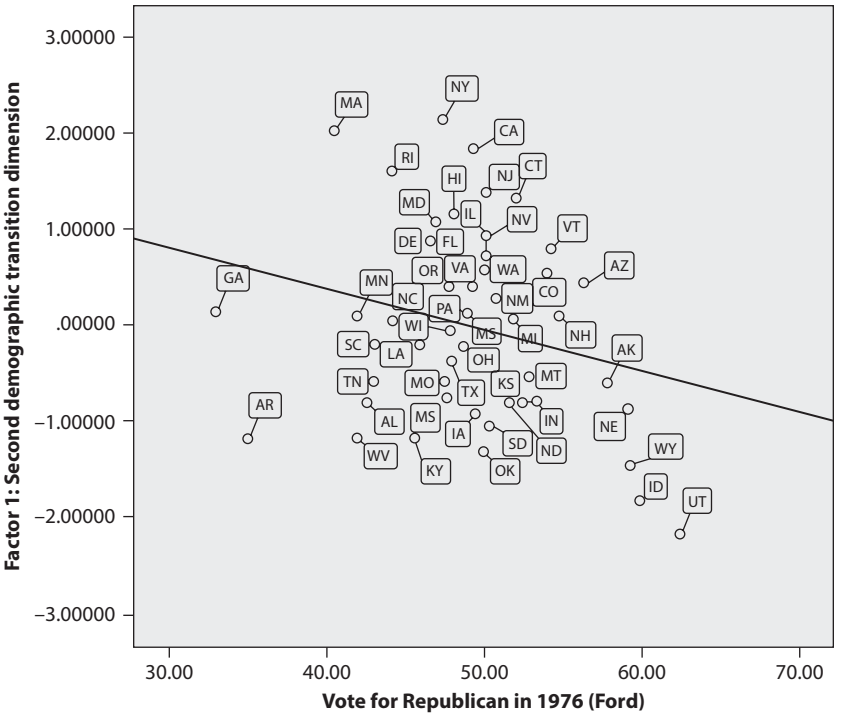

FIGURE 0.1. Vote for Gerald Ford in 1976.

In this country, individual states have moved into the SDT at very different rates. Those rates have, in turn, become increasingly correlated with how each state votes in presidential elections. What figure 0.1 shows is that as recently as 1976, the correlation between a state's ranking in the SDT and its partisanship in presidential elections was modest at best. States are scattered all over the plot. A host of states from Massachusetts to Utah are nonconforming outliers, placed far from the axis.

Figure 0.2 shows how, in a matter of forty years, the SDT becomes powerfully correlated with state voting. Instead of the scattergram seen in figure 0.1, the states in 2016 form a neat line along the axis, with virtually no deviance from the overall pattern.

In many respects, Lesthaeghe's SDT can be linked to the emergence of "postmaterialism" and the value of self-expressive individualism, first described by the late Ronald Inglehart, professor of political science at the University of Michigan, in his 1971 paper

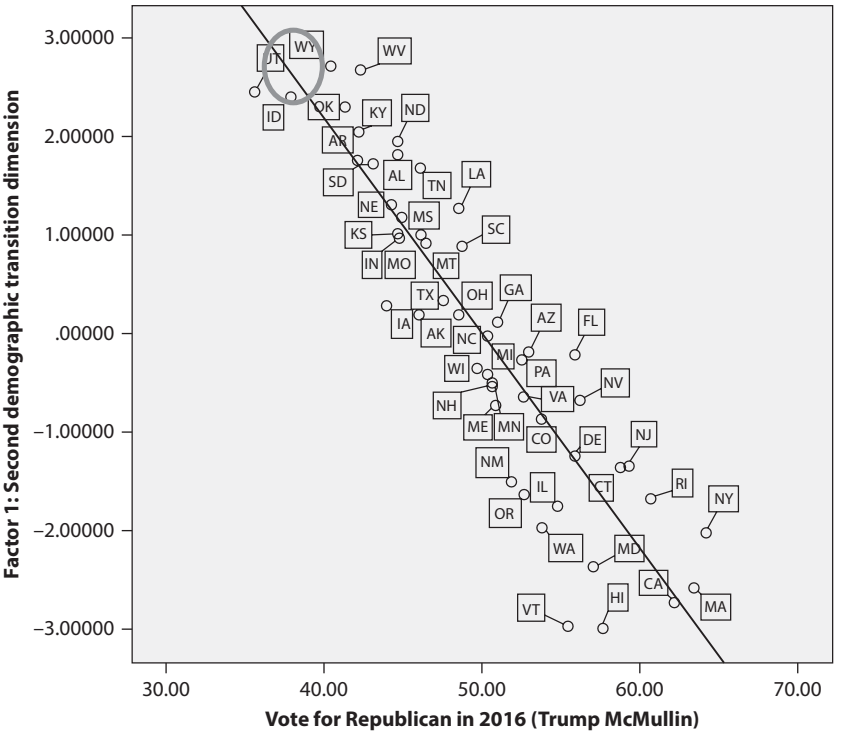

FIGURE 0.2. Relationship between the SDT factor and the vote for Trump and McMullin in 2016, US 50 states ($r = -.909$).
Source: Ron J. Lesthaeghe and Lisa Neidert, "Spatial Aspects of the American 'Culture War': The Two Dimensions of US Family Demography and the Presidential Elections, 1968–2016." From The New York Times. © 2017 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Used under license.

"The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-industrial Societies."[11] In three subsequent books, *The Silent Revolution* (1977), *Culture Shift* (1989), and *Cultural Evolution* (2018), Inglehart described the movement to postmaterialism, which included the following:

- "[A] shift in child-rearing values, from emphasis on hard work toward emphasis on imagination and tolerance as important values to teach a child."
- "An environment of trust and tolerance, in which people place a relatively high value on individual freedom and have

activist political orientations—attributes that, the political culture literature has long argued, are crucial to democracy."

- "[A] shift away from deference to all forms of external authority. Submission to authority has high costs: the individual's personal goals must be subordinated to those of others."
- "Tolerance of diversity and rising demands [among citizens] to have a say in what happens to them."
- "[The young are] more tolerant of homosexuality than their elders, and they are more favorable to gender equality and more permissive in their attitudes toward abortion, divorce, extramarital affairs, and euthanasia."
- "The feminization of society and declining willingness to fight for one's country."
- "[A] systematic erosion of religious practices, values and beliefs."[12]

When Lesthaeghe and Inglehart first explored the SDT and postmaterialist values, an underlying assumption was that these were beneficent trends reflecting growing affluence: that as scarcity diminished, new generations would inevitably shift their focus from economic survival to matters of lifestyle—including the environment and the breakdown of racial and gender barriers. In the words of Inglehart and Pippa Norris, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School, in their 2017 paper, "Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: *The Silent Revolution* in Reverse," "During the postwar era, the people of developed countries experienced peace, unprecedented prosperity and the emergence of advanced welfare states, making survival more secure than ever before. Postwar birth cohorts grew up taking survival for granted, bringing an intergenerational shift toward Postmaterialist values."[13]

In the mid-1970s, however, the postwar era of sustained, shared growth came to a halt, and the liberal order, and the economic security that accompanied it, began to fray. As foreign producers became competitive, globalization started to impose costs on American corporations and workers. Instead of shared prosperity, median salaries

stagnated while those at the top grew rapidly, driving new levels of inequality. A high school diploma lost its status as a sufficient credential for a middle-class job. Before long, big-box stores (Walmart, Target, and Costco) and, by the turn of the century, online commerce (Amazon) had begun to devastate small businesses and to decimate small towns.

Faced with growing challenges at home and abroad, American corporations abandoned paternalistic employment policies that carried the implicit promise of employment for life; the corporate view of unions changed from ally to adversary, with worker demands seen as leading to dangerous increases in bottom-line costs.

By the late 1970s, with the emergence of simultaneous inflation and stagnation—"stagflation"—and the threat to American industry from abroad, corporate America, joined by an ascendant conservative political movement, produced a powerful antitax, antiregulatory movement. In order to regain strength in a globally competitive environment, business abandoned past obligations to workers, the state, and the community. Environmental and workplace safety rules, seniority protection, unions, pensions, health insurance, and loyalty to workers were abruptly viewed as unsustainable costs that allowed European and Asian companies to undercut domestic producers.

These shifts in corporate employment policies coincided with a massive surge in immigration to the United States following the liberalizing policies of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. For Trump, it was a simple matter to focus native discontent on the surge in foreign-born low-wage workers competing for jobs and—in the view of his partisans—transforming American culture.

The net effect of the two revolutions that have dominated American society for the past five decades—first, the social and cultural revolution, and second, the technological and economic revolution that transformed employment, corporate business models, and market expectations—imposed what was often viewed as a survival-of-the-fittest ethos on the working and middle classes. Members of the upper-middle class survived and often prospered under the new sink-or-swim regime, but the less well-off, especially those without

college degrees, were ill-equipped to cope. It was at this stage that many liberals and the Democratic Party became preoccupied with the expanding cultural revolution, the plight of minorities, and various manifestations of identity politics, effectively forsaking the past commitment to class politics that had animated the Left through the New Deal and Fair Deal eras.

Emerging social-cultural movements—rooted in racial, sexual, religious, and gender, as opposed to class, identities—produced a series of conservative and right-wing countercultural revolutions over the course of the next five decades. These included Nixon's silent majority, the Christian Right, the Reagan Democrats, the angry white men, and the Tea Party and culminated most recently in the Trump Revolution. Each development was opposed, in part or in whole, to a greater or lesser degree, to the temper of the SDT, to postmaterialist values, to racial and ethnic diversity, to secularization, to reproductive rights, and to rapidly transforming gender roles.

The Republican Party capitalized on the dislocation and conflict generated by rapid cultural modernization, exploiting "wedge" issues like abortion and gay marriage which pushed voters' "anger points" and motivated turnout.

In the conservative-wave elections of 1980, 1994, 2010, and 2014, postmaterialism, noted Inglehart and Norris, "became its own gravedigger."[14] As liberalism shifted from advocacy on behalf of the economic have-nots to an agenda of racial integration and personal fulfillment, policies of redistribution, legal protection of unions, and the defense of the material interests of the working class were subordinated. "This, plus large immigration flows from low-income countries with different cultures and religions, stimulated a reaction in which much of the working class moved to the right, in defense of traditional values," wrote Inglehart and Norris. "The classic economic issues did not disappear. But their relative prominence declined to such an extent that non-economic issues became more prominent than economic ones in Western political parties' campaign platforms."[15] For white working-class voters experiencing lost jobs, the hegemony of alien cultures, and the steady deterioration

of their communities, the new, value-laden, antimaterialist liberal agenda amounted to an insult.

Ironically, these trends, which benefit Democrats, are arguably also fostering inequality. The late Princeton sociologist Sara McLanahan, in "Diverging Destinies: How Children Are Faring under the Second Demographic Transition," wrote that while children "born to the most-educated women are gaining resources, in terms of parents' time and money, those who were born to the least-educated women are losing resources. The forces behind these changes include feminism, new birth control technologies, changes in labor market opportunities, and welfare-state policies. I contend that Americans should be concerned about the growing disparity in parental resources and that the government can do more to close the gap between rich and poor children."[16]

As sociocultural and identity issues displace an ideology based on economic class, not only do the incentives for liberalism and the Democratic Party to address class-based problems of mobility and inequality diminish, but the center-left becomes vulnerable to economic special-interest pressures. Lobbies and trade associations focused on the legislative process as a means to commercial goals—tax breaks, regulatory change, subsidies, and so forth—can more readily apply pressure through campaign contributions and grassroots mobilization to members of the House and Senate who lack a broad ideological commitment to those in the bottom three quintiles of the income distribution. In a parallel development, Democratic incumbents have become increasingly dependent on the votes of the affluent to win elections, making these politicians reluctant to threaten the interests of their upscale constituents.

There are few better examples of Democratic susceptibility to special-interest pressure than the continued preservation of the carried interest tax break through four years of Democratic control of Congress—from 2006 to 2010 and again after the 2020 election. The carried interest break provides an estimated $18 billion annually to wealthy hedge fund operators and beneficiaries of investment funds.[17]

For a Democrat seeking election, the easiest path to capitalize on Republican social and moral extremism had been to stress threats to reproductive rights, to the teaching of evolution, to gay marriage, and to the protection of transgender people. In many respects, this was until recently a successful strategy: in seven of the last eight presidential elections, the Democratic candidate has won the popular vote.[18]

As the January 2021 insurrection in the US Capitol and the relentless, ongoing Republican efforts to have Trump illegitimately declared the winner of the 2020 election demonstrate, however, Democrats now face Republican adversaries who are determined not only to pare back the liberal state but to sabotage democracy itself, to overturn the will of the voters, to overthrow majority control, and to attack the legitimacy of election outcomes, undermining the very essence of American democracy.

At the same time, the Democratic Party's shift to postmaterialist values has left millions of white working-class voters with no perceived choice except the Republican Party.

For Republicans, the prospect of losing has become what political scientists describe as a "normative threat"[19]—a danger to the moral order underpinning society. Many liberals and Democrats saw and see Trump and the Republican Party as a fully comparable existential threat. Victory for the opposition, in each case, raises the specter of moral collapse.

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There has been a precipitous and accelerating decline of the United States on measures of freedom and democracy. From 2010 to 2020 Freedom House, which ranks countries based on an analysis of the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of the government, freedom of expression and of belief, associational and organizational rights, the rule of law, personal autonomy and individual rights,[20] demoted the United States from seventh worldwide to eighteenth, just below Croatia, Argentina, and

Romania. "The erosion of US democracy is remarkable, especially for a country that has long aspired to serve as a beacon of freedom for the world," the authors of the Freedom House study reported. "The downward trend accelerated considerably over the last four years, as the Trump administration trampled institutional and normative checks on its authority, cast aside safeguards against corruption, and imposed harsh and discriminatory policies governing immigration and asylum."[21]

In a ranking by the *Economist* magazine,[22] the United States fell from sixteenth in 2006 to twenty-sixth in 2020, "based on five categories: *electoral process and pluralism*, *functioning of government*, *political participation*, *political culture*, and *civil liberties*." The United States was described as a "flawed democracy"—as opposed to a full democracy. Twenty-two countries achieved "full democracy" status, led by Norway, New Zealand, and Finland. Among the fifty-three flawed democracies, the United States ranked just below France, Israel, Spain, and Chile, and just above Estonia and Portugal.

These downward trends culminated in Trump's election in 2016 and, despite his defeat in 2020, in his continuing power over a majority of Republican voters.

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The collection that follows of *New York Times* opinion columns from 2015 onward provides a real-time account of how and why Trump managed to prevail and an enlarged understanding of the forces that enabled his rise. The Trump era is not over yet—forewarned is forearmed.[23]

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