

Our Politics Now: Up vs. Down, Not Left vs. Right

If you were to view the evolution of politics in the West in traditional left versus right terms, you undoubtedly would see the political preferences of most people have shifted leftward.

Just look at how most Americans view federal spending: total government spending (federal, state, and local) [accounts](#) for 37.7 percent of the country's overall gross domestic product. In other words, 37.7 percent of America's economic growth is set to be generated by government spending (which is why Wall Street and other analysts worry about a government shutdown). There was a time—not long ago—in this country's history when government spending was in the single-digits. But, those days are gone.

Why?

Because the American people did not expect the government to do as much back then as they expect it to do today. But government spending is a two-way street. It is not merely corrupt politicians who have figured out that the path to power is through injudicious government handouts. The American people increasingly have come to demand such "benefits." For three generations, Americans consistently have supported Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Still more want education provided for young people. Many others believe more defense spending will make the country safer—and on the litany goes. Americans don't want less government spending; they've bought into the notion that, in order to overcome staggering levels of economic and social inequality, the government must have a role in their lives.

Maybe they're right. Regardless, convincing the vast majority

of the electorate that austerity is needed is an objective unlikely to be achieved by any political movement today, short of a severe crisis, such as a major war. Yet the Republican Party remains impervious to the message. It continues trotting out the tired arguments that it used (unsuccessfully) to fight the Progressives during the presidencies of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Barack Obama. That is, it did until Donald Trump embarked upon his mission to “Make America Great Again” in the 2016 presidential election.

Face it, the Left won the big economic battles of our age.

The 62 million Americans who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 did not vote for him because they wanted to slash federal government programs. Instead, they wanted Trump to make those programs more efficient and to ensure that only American citizens were granted the benefits the government had promised them. Had Trump behaved like a normal Republican presidential candidate (in other words, just another “beautiful loser”) and vowed a harsh plan of government austerity, he’d have lost to the other Republican duds in 2016. Those duds, in turn, would have lost to Hillary Clinton, who was promising every government handout and tax increase imaginable.

Leftist Interventionism Won the Foreign Policy Argument

As for foreign policy, the Left created the dominant paradigm in that arena as well: it’s all about interventionism.

Just as with government spending, there was a time when there were true differences of opinions between the Left and the Right when it came to foreign policy. The Left tended to favor more aggressive and interventionist foreign policies whereas the Right had more variegated views (namely, there were those called “isolationists” who wanted no involvement with the wider world and others who were “realists,” who merely wanted to maintain a healthy balance-of-power). Since the Reagan Revolution, however, the so-called “neoconservatives” became

the dominant figures in Republican foreign policy circles. Thus, interventionism became the dominant view for the Republican Party as much as it has been for the Democratic Party.

For the Left, their vision for an effective U.S. foreign policy had less to do with preserving the national interest and more to do with "maintaining global stability." Left-wing interventionists believed that by protecting at-risk civilian populations in far-flung countries that most Americans could not find on a map, they were creating a more peaceful, stable world. Theirs was a commitment to shared international norms (whatever those are) and multilateral institutions intended to diminish American sovereignty and its overwhelming military power. Weirdly, it constantly uses overwhelming military force to accomplish these goals.

Both the neoliberal and neoconservative interventionists believed that open borders and free trade were the solutions to humanity's warlike nature. It's just that the neoconservatives on the Right tended to emphasize hegemony and were willing to use unilateralism and preemption to enforce America's "unipolar moment" (the point at which the United States was the last remaining Superpower at the end of the Cold War). At least neocons used the rhetoric of national interest to advocate for their interventionism whereas the Left abandoned that concept entirely.

Traditional conservative views on foreign policy favoring such things as realism were pushed out of the GOP, while the traditional Liberals who favored non-interventionism at all costs, were ignored by the Democratic Party establishment. Despite the unpopularity of the Iraq War and the neocons, however, most Americans are still quick to support expansive military action in benighted corners of the world, such as Syria if it means ensuring that innocent people are protected (even when doing so risks wider war against a Syrian ally, like Russia). In effect, the Left managed to win out in the

foreign policy debate as well: it's all about armed humanitarianism these days. Trump is moving the Overton Window on this conversation, however, and thanks to Trump there is at least now room for debate.

The Culture War is the Elite's Method for Social Engineering

Culture is now the last remaining great battle between Left and Right. Just as within the fields of economics and foreign policy, however, the Left is winning the Culture War—and why wouldn't it? After all, the Left broadly dominates the media, the courts, academia, and the bureaucracy.

Given that most voters refused to elect a cost-cutting “conservative” like Jeb Bush in 2016, and instead favored the “King of Debt,” Donald Trump, it seems unlikely that Republican Party orthodoxy will have any real influence in American electoral politics going forward. The real battle is no longer between Left and Right; the Left has won two-thirds of the important political debates of our time (mainly because the GOP had no idea how to fight).

The real fight now is between up-and-down; those who comprise the elite and those who do not.

George Carlin once [observed](#) that modern America was “owned” by the wealthy; that the country had become a “big club . . . and you ain't in it!” He was right. America, once the shining example of a classless society, has been morphing into a class society ever since the Progressive Left rose to power in the 20th century.

The Republican Party needs to abandon its unthinking commitment to Ayn Rand-inspired policy. Instead, we could use more [Eric Hoffer](#). The GOP must be willing to focus on the cultural politics of our time and overcoming the stifling economic and social inequality imposed upon the country's lower class by a selfish, power-mad [managerial elite](#). Such an elite cares little about the trials of average

working people and it actively undermines opportunities working-class people may have for a better life, thanks to the elite's support for globalization, open borders, endless wars, and insane social policies aimed at fundamentally erasing the social and economic fabric of the working-class.

Therefore, President Trump is not a Republican, a conservative, or maybe even a rightist in the conventional sense. The horizontal definition of politics, Left versus Right, is no longer truly applicable to our time. Instead, Trump represents the new vertical politics of our age: fighting for the majority below against the socio-economic minority above. It is this framework that Trump, and the Republican Party, must operate in to win reelection in 2020.

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