

Newsweek

The Political Realignment Is Scrambling Party Lines

By Sam Lyman | Friday, December 17, 2021

Some things just get better with age. Like fine wine, denim jeans and *Seinfeld*—the '90s sitcom that introduced the world to [re-gifting](#), [the double dip](#) and [yada yada](#). To this day, *Seinfeld* has a special way of capturing life's absurdities and putting them into words.

In one particularly memorable episode, Elaine finds herself living in "[the Bizarro World](#)," a world where everything is a mirror image of the one she used to know. This includes her [three new friends](#) who are polar opposites of Jerry, George and Kramer yet eerily similar at the same time. The Bizarro World takes everything familiar and turns it on its head. It's the perfect metaphor for today's politics.

Sometime around 2016, we entered the Bizarro World. Beyond the general weirdness of American politics over the last few years, there is no better way to describe the massive partisan realignment taking place in this country. The two political parties have switched policies, key constituencies and even their respective positions in culture. In the political Bizarro World, what was up is now down and what was Left is now Right.

There's an image in the popular imagination of "the country club Republican"—white, well-connected and well-to-do business types in the vein of George H.W. Bush. People who went to an Ivy, own more than one house and use *summer* as a verb. It's an image that defined the party's core constituency for much of the modern era. But it's an image that's severely outdated in 2021.

Enter the Walmart Republican—the working-class, truck hat-wearing Midwesterner who, up until 2016, voted Democratic in every election. This, today, more aptly describes the median Republican voter. And the proof is in the numbers.

Today, [57 percent](#) of Republicans qualify as working class, hence the party's growing appeal in states where manufacturing drives the economy. This is just one reason the GOP carried several Rust Belt states that have historically gone blue. In the last election, [40 percent](#) of union households voted Republican—a number that would have been unfathomable in previous elections.

Democrats, meanwhile, are making major inroads in wealthy, predominantly white suburbs that used to be Republican strongholds. Take Loudon County, Virginia, one of the highest-income zip codes in the country. In 2000, George W. Bush won the county by a [16-point margin](#); in 2020, Joe

Biden won it by a [25-point margin](#). The speed and scale of this political transformation are astonishing.

Of course, this is just one dramatic example of the changing political composition of America's wealthy suburbs. But it's indicative of a broader trend: Democrats are increasingly the party of the upper-middle class. And they are increasingly white.

Among the most underreported political phenomena of the last two years is the fact that Democrats are hemorrhaging minority voters. In 2020, Trump defied the media narrative when he gained voters across every major [demographic category](#) except white men. Since Biden took office, this trend has only accelerated. The president's approval ratings among Blacks have [dipped](#) significantly since January, and a new [Wall Street Journal survey](#) finds that Hispanics—once among the Democratic Party's most reliable voting blocs—are now evenly split between the two parties. With Blacks and Hispanics exiting the party in large numbers, Democrats face an uphill battle heading into next year's midterms.

While no one was looking, the two parties switched constituencies. Yesterday's country-club Republicans are today's country-club Democrats. And yesterday's Reagan Democrats are now red-meat Republicans.

Mirroring this shift in demographics is an equally consequential shift in policy. Republicans are embracing their new image as the party of a diverse working class by tailoring their legislative agenda to meet the needs of blue-collar families. Noteworthy examples from this year include Senator Mitt Romney's (R-Utah) introduction of a [family policy plan](#) that would send direct cash payments to parents with children; Senator Josh Hawley's (R-Mo.) [blue-collar bonus](#), which would automatically award workers making below the median wage with a sizable tax credit; and Senator Tom Cotton's (R-Ark.) [proposal](#) to raise the minimum wage and index it to inflation.

Bills to increase working-class wages and offer a de facto UBI to American parents would have been unthinkable in the Republican Party of yesteryear. But not in the Republican Party of today.

Insofar as politics is downstream of culture, these changes in policy reflect an even more significant change taking place across American society. For all intents and purposes, conservatism has become the new counterculture.

Remember when the Democratic Party was the party of the forgotten man, anti-war protests and unmitigated free expression? Not so much anymore. The Democratic Party today is, without question, the party of the establishment.

In the last election cycle, nearly every major industry—be it entertainment, journalism, business, tech or academia—donated to the Democratic Party by [disproportionate margins](#). This confirmed what many already knew—the institutions of American power lean heavily leftward. Hence the corporate sponsorship of cancel culture, the politicization of our universities and the liberal about-face on matters of free speech. Notice it's rarely progressives being run out of classrooms, fired from news outlets and deplatformed en masse on social media. It's by and

large conservatives, moderates and left-of-center Americans who refuse to toe the woke party line.

As the progressives who control mainstream institutions crack down on free thought and expression, they are driving away creatives, innovators and heterodox thinkers. We are already seeing a [mass exodus](#) of talented entrepreneurs, business leaders and artists from blue states to red states.

Consider [the renaissance](#) taking place in cities like Miami, which is drawing tech workers away from San Francisco by marketing itself as an "anti-Silicon Valley" in terms of taxes and government policy. Also consider Texas' [burgeoning comedy scene](#) and [tech industry](#), led by the likes of Joe Rogan and Elon Musk. Or the establishment of the [University of Austin](#), which aims to puncture the ideological bubble of today's woke universities. Or the crypto innovation taking place in [Wyoming](#), which has established a groundbreaking legal framework to incentivize crypto firms to set up shop in the state.

Is this the future? One where conservative strongholds play host to a cultural rebirth? One where tech startups flock to places like [Provo and Salt Lake](#) instead of the Bay Area? One where comedians and artists feel more at home in Texas than in New York? One where crypto entrepreneurs move to Cheyenne to make their way in the new digital Wild West?

If this sounds like the opposite of everything we used to know, it's because it is. Welcome to the political Bizarro World.

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