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USA

# The Republicans' Trump Problem

- IV Online magazine - 2016 - IV495 - April 2016 -

Publication date: Sunday 24 April 2016

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**The Republican Party has a problem. At the time I am writing (March 24, 2016), Donald Trump enjoys a clear lead in the race for the 2016 Republican Presidential nomination. With nearly 60% (739) of the 1,237 delegates required for the nomination, more than both of his remaining opponents, Ted Cruz of Texas (465) and John Kasich of Ohio (143). According to Nate Silver's [FiveThirtyEight.com](http://FiveThirtyEight.com) website, Trump is expected to win all or a majority of delegates from Wisconsin, New York, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Indiana, West Virginia, Washington, California, and New Jersey. If he wins significant minorities of delegations from the remaining states (Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, Oregon, South Dakota, Montana, and New Mexico), he will be in striking distance (1,208 pledged delegates) of the nomination by June 7.**

The Republican "establishment" is haunted by the prospect of the oldest party of industrial capitalism in the United States nominating Trump, with many backing Cruz and encouraging the more "moderate" [Kasich to drop out](#) of the race. They hope to prevent Trump's nomination on the first ballot, provoking an "open convention" in Cleveland this summer where the party leadership will be able to select the candidate. Some are so desperate that they have discussed the possibility of the [third-party candidacy](#) – even though it would guarantee Hillary Clinton's election in November. Not merely is the party establishment – those with ties to old-line WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant) industrialists and bankers – embarrassed by a potential candidate who openly brags about the size of his genitals. Rather, they oppose key elements of Trump's program.

Although Trump is a capitalist, he does not represent any significant segment of his class. Though not above racist (particularly Islamophobic), misogynist, and anti-union politics, the Republican establishment and their corporate sponsors embrace neoliberalism and an aggressive foreign policy that seeks to secure the dominance of US capital across the world. Trump's opposition to "free trade" agreements, from NAFTA to the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, and his isolationist opposition to the second Gulf War and ambivalence toward Israel (the most reliable US ally in the Middle East), is repulsive to the US capitalist class.

Nor do Trump's calls for mass deportations of undocumented immigrants find a resonance among most business people. Capitalists, large and small, want a politically vulnerable pool of immigrant labor available in this country to work for wages and under conditions that those with citizenship rights would not tolerate. The [US Chamber of Commerce](#), the broadest organization of capitalists in the United States, supported suit by the American Civil Liberties Union and League of Latin American Citizens [against Arizona's law](#) allowing local law enforcement to detain undocumented workers, which had led thousands of workers to flee the state and thus deprived the state's agriculture and construction industries of cheap and pliable labor. The Chamber and the [Business Roundtable](#), which represents the largest transnational corporations, back an immigration reform that will expand "temporary worker" programs for both high-tech and agriculture and "a tough but fair process for the 11 million undocumented people who are living in our country today to earn a legal status." Put simply, capitalists want a pool of truly disposable and precarious "guest workers" to labor across the US economy, not their removal from the US labor market.

Where does Trump's support come from? For many on the mainstream right and liberal left, the answer is clear – the [white "working class."](#) Unfortunately, their definition of "white workers" is quite broad – all non-Hispanic whites without a college education. Not only does this conception allow mainstream commentators to caricature white workers as ignoramus swayed by demagogic buffoons such as Trump, but it also allows them to [misrepresent the social basis](#) of Trump's campaign. First, although approximately 55% of Trump supporters do not have a bachelor's degree, this demographic makes up approximately 70% of the US population – this group is underrepresented among Trump voters. However, the college-educated white "new middle class" (professionals and managers),

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approximately 30% of the population, is overrepresented, at 40% of Trump supporters. More importantly, the category “non-college educated whites” includes both wage workers and the self-employed — the traditional middle class.

Whereas white workers, including some union members, make up a minority of Trump’s supporters, [the majority](#) is drawn from the traditional and new middle classes — generally older white males and the less well-off strata of these classes. According to the [Washington Post](#), half of Trump supporters had individual incomes of less than \$50,000 annually. The impact of three decades of neoliberalism, in particular, the stagnation of real incomes and growing inequality, combined with massive losses of personal wealth (mostly housing values), growing personal debt, and growing economic insecurity since the recession of 2007-2008 have produced a polarization of US politics in 2016.

The same social and economic forces that have shifted younger, more racially and gender diverse middle and working class people toward the left-wing populism of Bernie Sanders, have made the right-wing populism of Trump attractive to many older white men in the middle and working classes. Caught between a decimated labor movement and an extremely aggressive capitalist class, parts of the middle classes are drawn to a politics that scapegoats immigrants, unions, women, LGBT people, and people of color. The Trump phenomenon is part and parcel of the growth of right-wing populism among the middle classes across the capitalist world — the UK Independence Party in Britain, the National Front in France, and the Five Star Movement in Italy.

Right-wing populism is ideologically similar to the classic fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Without question, the Trump campaign has allowed genuinely fascist elements in the United States — white supremacist organizations organized to physically confront unions, immigrants, native-born people of color, and LGBT people — to emerge into the political sunlight. Clearly, the candidate’s encouragement of physical violence against his political opponents and the emergence of the “Lion’s Guard” — “an informal civilian group dedicated to the safety and security of Trump supporters by exposing Far-Left rioters” — are [alarming](#). However, Trump’s campaign is [not fascist](#), nor do the fascist elements around it — nor Trump himself — have a significant chance of coming to power.

Populist ideology alone does not define fascism. Instead, fascism is a social movement of the middle classes that is organized as both an electoral party and a street-fighting organization that seeks to physically defeat the organizations of working people (left-wing parties, unions, etc.) and destroy the institutions of capitalist democracy. Fascism becomes a mass movement with the potential of taking political power when left-wing movements threaten but fail to take power and capitalist classes continue to fear challenges from below. Trump is attempting to win an election, not abolish representative government. More importantly, US capitalists, unfortunately, have not faced any serious challenge to their dominance in the United States. They have no need to turn power over to the radicalized middle classes. If the Republican establishment cannot stop Trump, they will likely cross partisan lines and support a neoliberal politician like Hillary Clinton.

The claim that Trump is a fascist is not simply an academic or analytic problem. More importantly, it buttresses a strategy for the progressive left that is [self-defeating](#). Reasonably frightened by the prospect of a Trump presidency, the official leadership of unions and organizations of women, people of color, immigrants, and LGBT people will double down in their support of whomever the Democrats nominate at their Philadelphia convention — including Clinton — as the “lesser-evil.”

This strategy is based on two illusions. First, there is the notion that Trump has a reasonable chance of being elected president. Most political commentators agree that [Trump can win](#) only if there is a sharp decline in voter participation, especially among young people, women, and people of color. If Trump is nominated, there is a strong likelihood that most traditionally Republican corporate donors will jump ship and support Clinton. Her record as “co-President,” Senator, and Secretary of State demonstrates that she is a reliable neoliberal representative of capital. Armed with a

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larger war chest and able to appeal to widespread loathing of Trump, Clinton will probably be able to build a massive “get out the vote” machine. Quite likely, she will be able to mobilize voters in as great numbers as Obama did in 2008, when slightly more than 57% of eligible voters came to the polls — the largest percentage in 40 years.

Second, “lesser-evilism” has actually accelerated the drift to the right in US politics. The fear of alienating their Democratic “allies” has led the official leadership of reform movements in the past 80 years to derail the sort of social movements — militant labor struggles, mass movements against racism, sexism, and war — that can win reforms and build left-wing consciousness and politics. In the name of “being realistic,” these forces adapt to the Democrats and drop demands for real reforms. The Democrats are then free to “compromise” with the Republican right. With social movements weakened and invisible, the “alliance” with the Democrats allows the populist right to remain the main voice of militant opposition to the failed policies of the Democrats.

Fortunately, we have a concrete example of how to fight Trump and the right. The mass mobilization against Trump initiated by immigrant students at the University of Illinois-Chicago that led him to cancel his rally is an example that needs to be replicated whenever and wherever Trump attempts to campaign. Along with rebuilding effective social movements among working people, these sorts of mobilizations will build the basis for a real independent political alternative to both right-wing populism and mainstream neoliberalism.

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