

The Right, the Far Right and the Rise of Donald Trump



Who is the Right?

- Elite right versus populist far right
- Elite right
 - Most reactionary sectors of Big Capital: oil, military-industrial, real estate, low end retail etc.
 - Focus on corporate economic power and militarism
 - Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bushes, McCain, Romney
- Main sectors of the populist far right
 - Christian Evangelical
 - Secular: Tea Party and Libertarian
 - Alt-right White supremacists
 - Armed militias

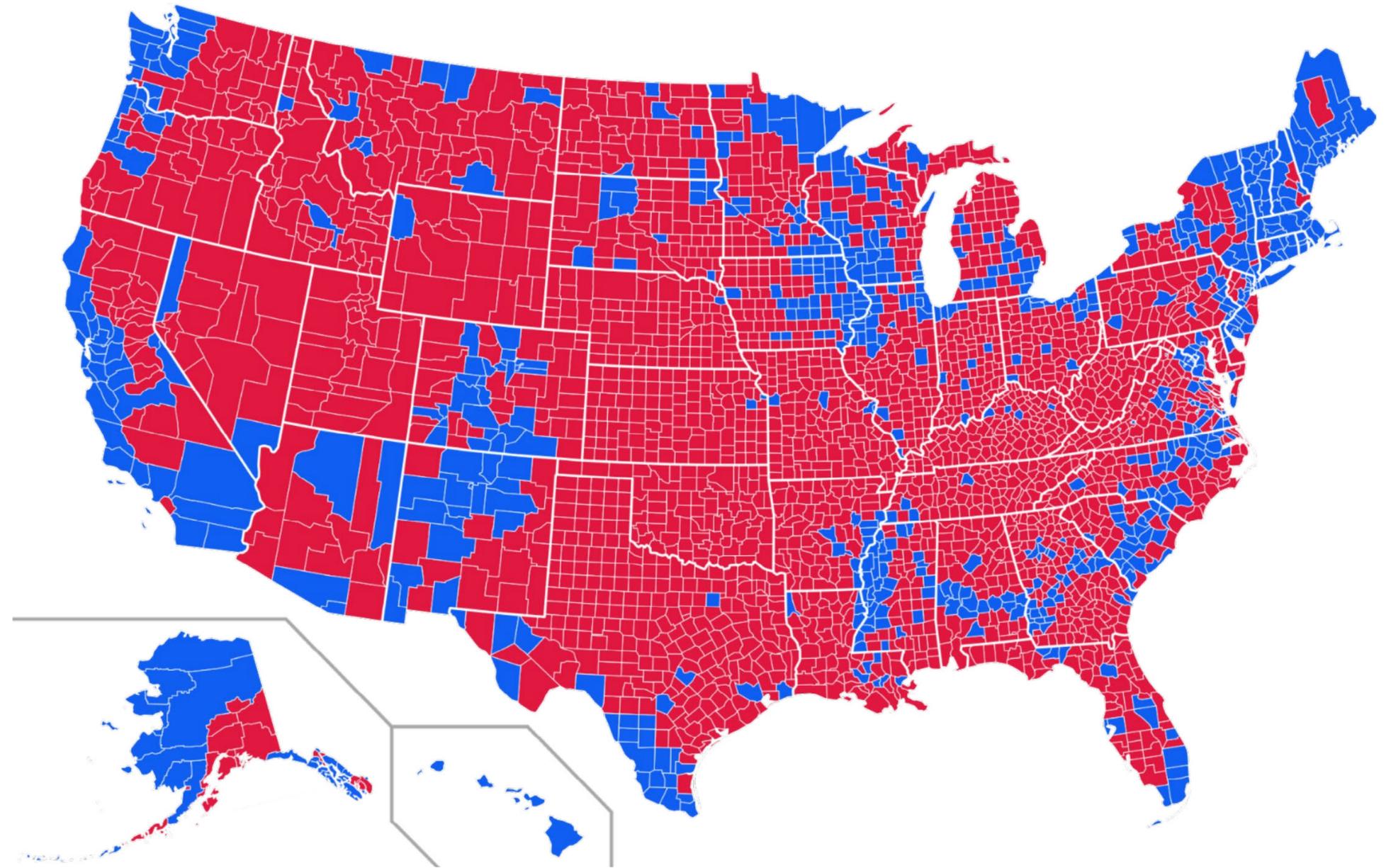


The Right Is the Most Powerful Political Force in the U.S.

Since 1968 the Republican Party has increasingly consisted of an alliance of the most rightwing sectors of the corporate elite with the populist far right.

- From 1968-2008 the Republicans dominated the presidency, with Jimmy Carter (one term) and Bill Clinton (who won due to the third-party candidacy of Ross Perot) the only Democratic presidents. Republicans lost the last two presidential elections to Barack Obama by slim margins.
- They still control both houses of the U.S. congress, much of the federal judiciary and, until the recent death of Scalia the, majority of seats on the Supreme Court.
- They control 31 Governorships and 30 state legislatures.
- They control the vast majority of the territory of the U.S.

A Red Country: Geography of the Vote by County – 2012



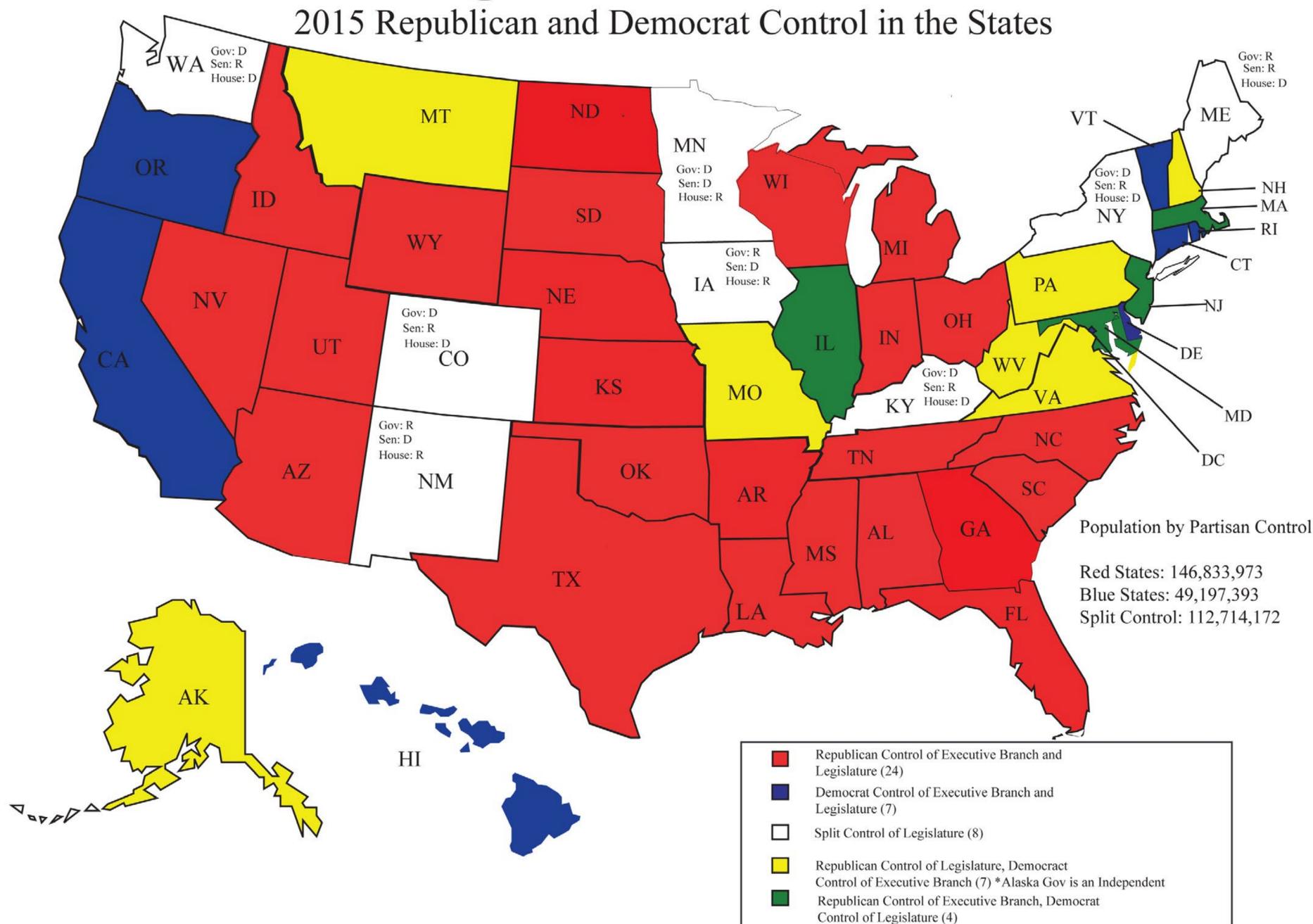


Republicans Control 60% of State Legislatures and Governorships

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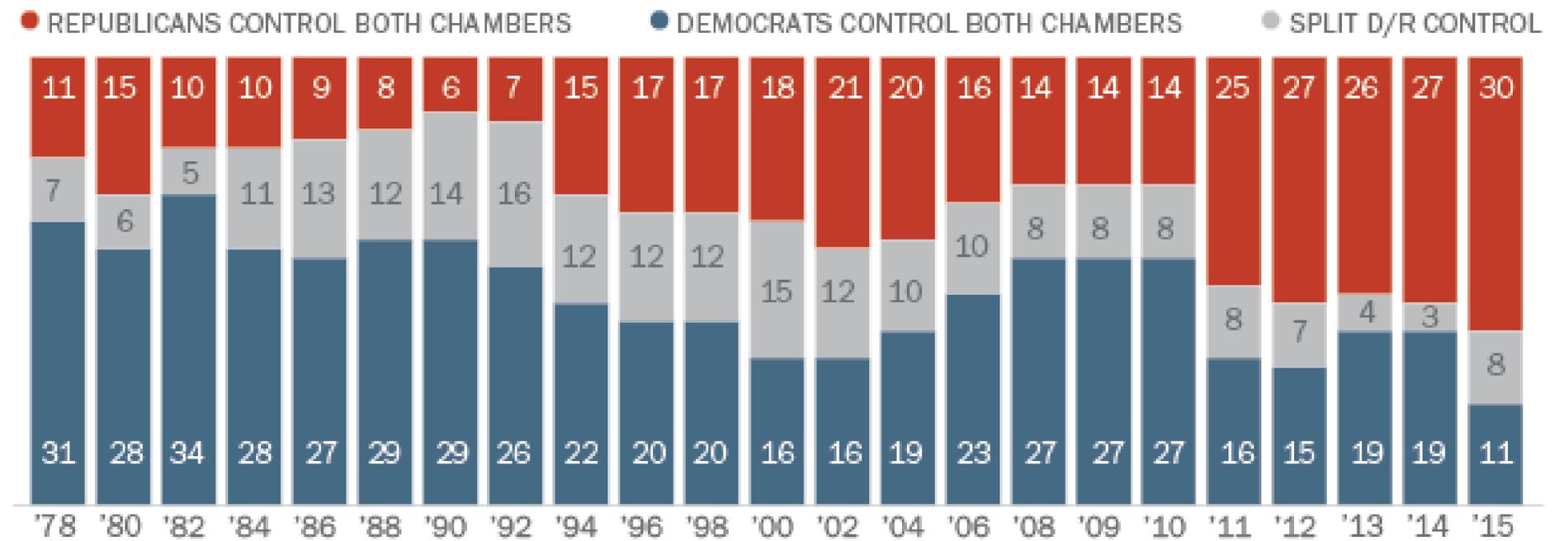
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Their Control of the States Doubled During Obama's Presidency

Partisan Composition of State Legislatures

Number of state legislatures



Note: Nebraska's unicameral legislature is officially nonpartisan, and is not included. Counts are as of January of each year, except June 2014 and February 2015. Prior to 2008, data available only for even-numbered years.

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

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The Rise of the Far Right Relative to the Elite Conservative Right



- Further Right than ever: blatant racism and xenophobia, pro-corporate economics, erratic foreign policy, and strong authoritarian tendencies
- More powerful than ever: captured numerous local and state governments in the last decade, and this year captured the national Republican Party



Recent History of the Far Right

- Modern origins in the backlash to the Civil Rights Movement and civil rights legislation
- The New Right gains ground in the 70s – anti-busing, anti-affirmative action, anti-gay, anti-abortion
- Reagan and the Christian Coalition: elite right captures governmental power, far right is an important but junior partner
- The Tea Party and the attempt to delegitimize Obama
- Trump moves far right themes central to the mainstream, overt racism, nativism and Islamophobia in particular



Why the Right is So Dangerous Now

- Racial fears stoked by change in racial demography, capped by election of President Obama.
- The Right has popularized the idea that there's a cause-and-effect relationship between racial change and the decline of the white middle class, even more since the Great Recession.
- Far right groups are reading Trump's rise as a sign that this may be their time.
- With the political center in mass disrepute, the far right is the most powerful and organized force poised to fill the void, especially given their recent capture of the Republican Party.
- The left is relatively weak. By many measures of political capacity — including the political influence of mass organizations like unions, progressive faith-based institutions, and mass movements — key sectors of the left have not recovered from defeats dating back to the Reagan “revolution.”
- Social scientists report that perceived physical threats or destabilizing social change drive many people – including those who might otherwise support basic social fairness – to support authoritarian figures and approaches. The wide array of real and perceived threats to social stability in contemporary society— inequality, race, terrorism — raises the danger of what we might call “disaster authoritarianism.”

Far Right's Overall Strategy



- Framing issues and debates
- Winning elections at every level from local school boards to the White House
- Passing legislation
- Controlling government agencies



The Far Right's Political Strategy

- A successful inside/outside strategy relative to the Republican Party and the electoral fight
 - Move from Democrats to Republicans after Civil Rights Movement and the GOP's southern strategy
 - Away from third party efforts to inside/outside strategy vis-à-vis the Republican Party; alliance and contention with the elite right
 - Long term effort to elect its own people to office at every level of government



The Far Right's Political Program

- Racism and nativism as anchor: “white racial solidarity is the anchor and heart of right wing politics in the U.S. across the spectrum from ordinary conservatism to rabid white supremacy.” The far right dispenses with the dogwhistles of the elite right and is explicit in their racism
- Other social issues: anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ, pro “traditional” family
- Minimal taxation and small government (except for police, prisons and the military)
- Guns
- Militarism
- Climate Change denial



Demographics of Their Base

Overwhelmingly white

- Rural areas and small towns nationwide
- South, mountain states
- Some medium size towns and white-flight suburbs
- Disproportionately male
- Older
- More affluent than average
- White evangelicals



The Far Right's Infrastructure

Successful social and political movements are made up of a network of components that work together.

- National Organizations
- Local Activist Groups
- Think Tanks
- Media & Publicity
- Foundations & Funders
- Ideologues
- Spokespersons
- Cultural Workers



Trump and the Far Right Take Over the Republican Party

- Leads the far right to crush the candidates of the Republican elite (Bush, Rubio, Christie, Kasich), an elite that has been the most powerful force in the U.S., and possibly the world, since 1980.
- Republican elite defeated, divided, demoralized.
- Some support Trump, but many do not; a few supporting Clinton.
- The alliance of the most reactionary sectors of the corporate elite and the populist far right is dismantled.
- The elite is left without a party or a mass following as the far right gains control of the Republican Party.

Trump and the Far Right



- Defeated the candidates of the other factions of the far right: Cruz (evangelicals), Paul (libertarians), Walker (Tea Party and Koch Bros), Rubio (Tea Party and elites) and won most of their base.
- Created a new political agenda, new political momentum and power.
- Reconfigured power relations among existing far right forces, creating an even more powerful and reactionary force.



Trumpism = Racist Authoritarianism

Trump's capture of the Republican Party's presidential nomination is an outgrowth of the Party's southern strategy. Running as a right-wing populist on stridently bigoted themes, he has further elevated racism as the right's cutting edge, fractured the Republican's political coalition, and opened the door to authoritarianism and white nationalism.

- Rabid racial bigotry, nativism and white boosterism: no more coded language
- Open misogyny
- National power centralization v. state's rights or small government
- Authoritarianism, including physical attacks on opponents
- Aggressive anti-elitism

Fascism?

We are not (yet) dealing with fascism, but history has shown that rightwing populism is fascism's precursor.

Trump's demonization of groups including Mexican immigrants and Muslims, his goading of supporters to violence, his assaults on the free press, his calls for religious tests for entrance to the U.S. and for expelling more than eleven million unauthorized residents – all this and more have led many to ask, "Is it fascism, yet?" The short answer is, No. (Or not yet.) Simply put, fascism is a variant of totalitarianism. Totalitarian governments tolerate no protest or unauthorized public expression and allow no institutions to exist outside the direct authority of the state. Under totalitarian rule there is only one party, the ruling party.

Fascism begins as a right-wing populist movement of people feeling displaced by 'others' and pushed down the economic ladder by a corrupt and decadent government. It calls for the unification of a multi-class, ethnically,

racially or religiously defined movement of 'real' citizens to restore the nation in a transformative rebirth. Fascism becomes possible when a faction of the ruling class backs the seizure of the state by an authoritarian movement as preferable to social instability and a threat to their fortunes, typically a threat from the left.

We haven't experienced that degree of erosion of democratic institutions or the organized violent shock troops characteristic of a rising fascist movement. However, Trump's popularity signals a real danger. His nomination demonstrates the growing viability of a national political platform rooted in scapegoating, eliminationism, and the assertion of exclusive cultural and racial identity. His slogan, "Make America Great Again," can be read as a restorationist fantasy that echoes fascist themes.

Can Trump Win?

Polls are all over the place, and many think they may not be as accurate as in the past, given Trump's unusual candidacy. We should not casually dismiss the possibility of a Trump win.

- He has a sizable electoral base that has hardly been shaken by all of his antics or by the tremendous criticism he has received.
- He has won enormous earned media and ramped up his fundraising, despite many wealthy Republican donors (such as the Koch Brothers) refusing to give.
- The potential for a ramp up in violence and fear due to some combination of terrorist attacks, attacks on police or racial violence would likely drive more voters into Trump's camp.
- And he is very likely to get the majority of the votes of the 8% who currently say they will vote for Gary Johnson, the Libertarian candidate.



Economics of Trump's Electoral Base

Inaccurate media portrayals of Trump's base as ignorant lower-class white people reflect elite stereotypes about who racists are and reinforce liberal (and left) biases against competing for the political support of the white working class.

Trump supporters are more likely to be college educated (44%) than white adults overall (33%). They enjoy higher median incomes (\$72,000) than the national median (about \$56,000), an income level about equal to the median of white households (\$71,300).

According to Matthew Lyons, co-author of *Right Wing Populism in America*, "A classic hallmark of right-wing populist movements is that they attract people in the middle echelons of the social hierarchy, who have genuine grievances against economic and political elites above them, but also want to defend their limited, relative privilege against challenges from oppressed groups below. Right-wing populism takes that mix of resentments and channels it in ways that reinforce oppression and hierarchy....This describes Trump's campaign perfectly."

What's at Stake?

- If Trump wins, he will certainly try to make good on his racist, anti-immigrant, militarist and authoritarian rhetoric. He could wield the power of the state to punish his enemies, including the press. Violent vigilantism would likely increase.
- A victory for Hillary Clinton would slow Trump's political momentum, but the hard right could potentially react aggressively to a Trump loss. Trump's 'rigged election' line is extremely dangerous.
- We cannot allow an electoral victory for racist authoritarianism.
- However, our work must broaden beyond "stop Trump." We need to build support for a political agenda that decisively rejects authoritarianism while advancing a progressive message centered on race, gender and economic justice, immigrant rights, and opposition to militarism.



The Future of the Far Right

- The post-election balance of strength between different sectors of the far right cannot be predicted. Neoconservatives, the Christian right, and extreme economic libertarians have different agendas and varying degrees of antagonism toward Trump.
- But odds are that, even if he loses the election, the ‘Trumpist’ wing (racist authoritarian populists) will emerge as the strongest force on the far right. Alt-right White nationalists, “Patriots” and armed militias will be important blocs within this current. The Trumpist far right will pose an ongoing threat to all democratic rights and progressive social movements, anti-racist movements in particular.



Progressive Strategy

- Defeat Trump by as wide a margin as possible
- Build independent progressive strength for the long haul, with communities of color and labor at the center
- Compete with right-wing populists for the allegiance of working class whites
- Going forward we face a fight against both the neoliberal capitalist elite and right-wing racist populism



Crush Trump

- Expose, demoralize, divide and disorganize the far right
- Gain momentum and develop strategic unity among progressives
- Keep the nomination of Supreme Court justices out of the hands of the far right
- Defeat far right (and other Republican) candidates for the Senate and the House



Going Forward: Inside/Outside Strategy

- We need to work for a Democratic presidential victory, but we cannot simply fall into step behind Hillary.
- We need to fight Trump inside and outside the electoral arena, in our communities, in the media, and at the polls.
- We need to unite with the broadest forces to defeat Trump, while also building the independent strength, unity and base of progressives for future battles, including the crucial fight against the corporate wing of the Democratic Party.
- We need a “Tea Party of the left.”
- We cannot sit it out or put our energy into doomed, politically purist third party schemes. Third parties have no chance of success and isolate radicals from the overwhelming majority of voters, especially people of color who understand the need to mobilize against Trump.

This presentation is one module of a three-part elections curriculum consisting of:

- Organizing on Shifting Terrain: A Changing Electorate and Rising Economic Inequality
- The Right, the Far Right, and the Rise of Donald Trump
- The U.S. Electoral System and Progressive Electoral Strategy

The curriculum was developed by Linda Burnham, Max Elbaum, Harmony Goldberg, Jason Negron-Gonzales, Tarso Ramos and Bob Wing.

The three presentations, the accompanying Facilitators' Guides and a Supplementary Resource Guide can be downloaded at www.organizingupgrade.com. To contact us, email electioncurriculum@earthlink.net.