

Class Dismissed II

The Secession of the Successful

It's not every day that you find us agreeing with President Clinton's former Labor Secretary, Robert Reich. But back in the 1990s, Reich captured an emerging social phenomenon, which he called "the secession of the successful." By that he meant the nation's elite removing themselves from everyday people and their concerns.



THE RETURN OF “THE GREAT DISCONNECT”

Our latest review of census data,¹ updated from our previous memo, “[Class Dismissed I](#),” confirms that Reich’s assessment is now hard fact, but maybe not in the way he envisioned it. The “successful” class—defined not just by income, but by education, geography, and cultural homogeneity—is seceding in large part to the Democratic Party and away from Republicans.

By “secession,” we (and Reich) mean moving into a hermetically sealed, elite cultural bubble, set apart from the working class and poorer populations, which are increasingly afflicted by the nation’s most crushing social pathologies. According to the latest data, uncovered by CGCN researchers, those most beset by social and economic maladies—with some exceptions—are far more prevalent in Republican, rather than Democratic, districts.

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A PARTY REALIGNMENT DECADES IN THE MAKING

This reality is fueling the most significant political realignment in the post-war era, and why the two parties stand, at times, in mutual incomprehension of each other. As we discussed in “[Class Dismissed I](#),” the composition of the two parties now looks very different than even a decade ago. The GOP is no longer dominated by Izod-wearing denizens of the Shaker Heights Country Club,

1. [Census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

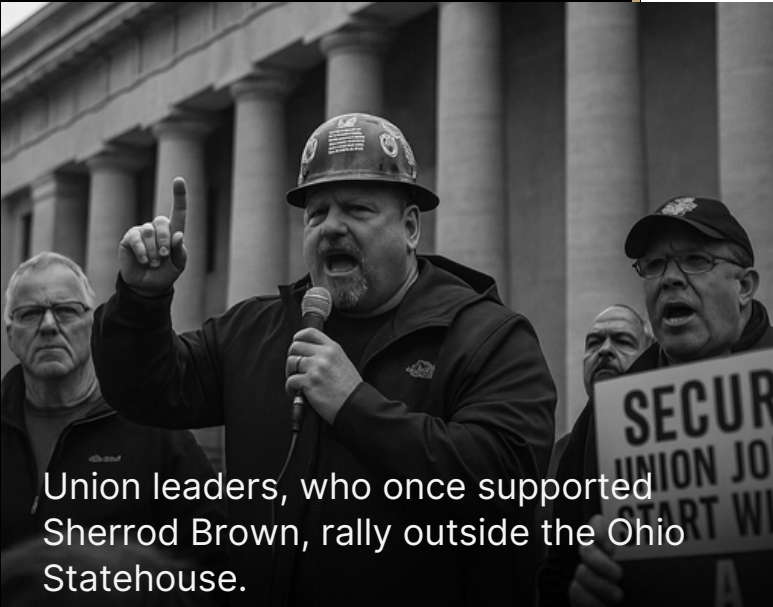
and the Democrats are no longer the party of working-class locals in Youngstown's Royal Oaks Bar and Grill.

Take the case of former Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), long considered the perfect political

instantiation of the working-class fighter. Brown is seeking to make comeback after losing his senate seat in 2022. As the New York Times put it, "Sherrod Brown has long been the blue-collar conscience of the Democratic Party — a steadfast ally of organized labor who talks about dignity of work with the conviction of someone who still believes the union card is a sacred document."

In short, anyone familiar with his decades-long career would know that unionism is in Brown's DNA. But in a sign of the times, his opponent, incumbent Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH), just inked substantial endorsements from Ohio's industrial labor unions, including the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 18 and 66, "giving the incumbent support from affiliated unions in all of Ohio's 88 counties," according to Axios. On top of this, in September, the Northwest Ohio Building Trades Council flipped its support from Brown to Husted. This is, in short, earth shattering.

"The Mahoning Valley is the backbone of Ohio's working class," said Jesse DiRenna, business manager for IUOE Local 66 told Axios. "Sen. Jon Husted leads with action not just photo ops. His values align with ours, which is why we support him.



Union leaders, who once supported Sherrod Brown, rally outside the Ohio Statehouse.



Doug Emhoff protests Trump by holding a sign expressing he'd rather be at brunch in Santa Monica, CA, which has an average household income of \$176,289.

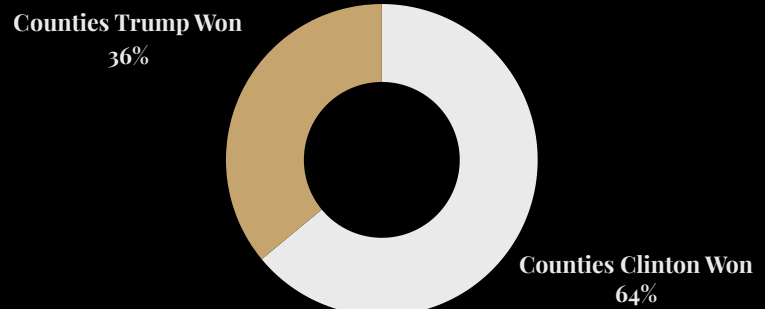
AMERICA, TWO REALITIES

There's that word: *values*. Social theorists have long identified a breach in the common ground—the values, the habits, the mores—that was once the country's solid foundation. Neither side now seems to understand the other, each speaking in strange tongues—or, for some, speaking in ways they find offensive, labeling them ignorant, or worse, racists or fascists.

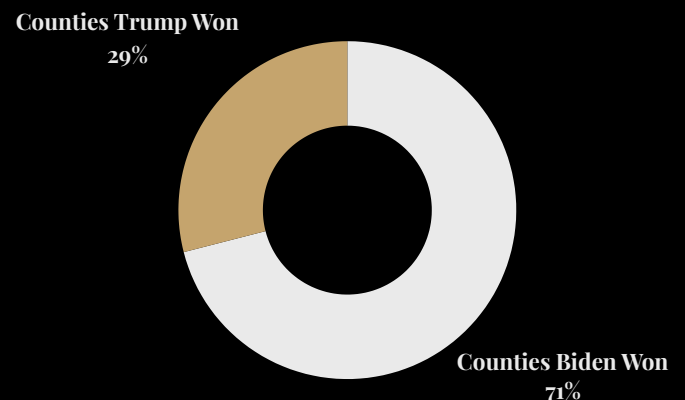
The reasons for this in many ways gets down to how people live, where they live, and what living is like for them. Consider that Democrats, in fact, represent far wealthier districts and constituents than the GOP. For example, over the last three presidential election cycles, Democratic candidates won counties with a higher share of aggregate GDP than Donald Trump:

- In 2016, Hillary Clinton won counties with 64% of aggregate GDP while the counties Trump won had 36%.
- In 2020, Joe Biden won counties with 71% of aggregate GDP while the counties Trump won had 29%.
- In 2024, Kamala Harris won counties with 63% of aggregate GDP, while the counties Trump won had 37%. Donald Trump won 86% of the total counties in the US in 2024.²

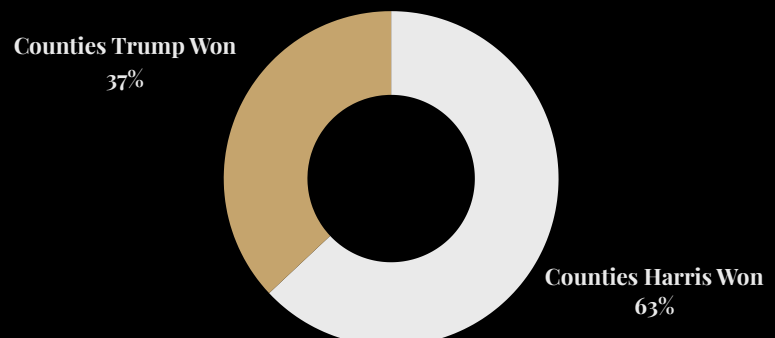
Aggregate GDP
2016



2020

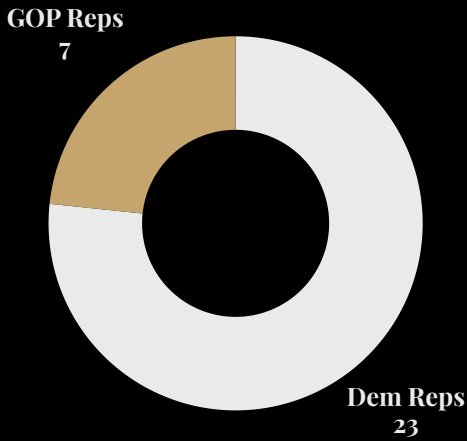


2024



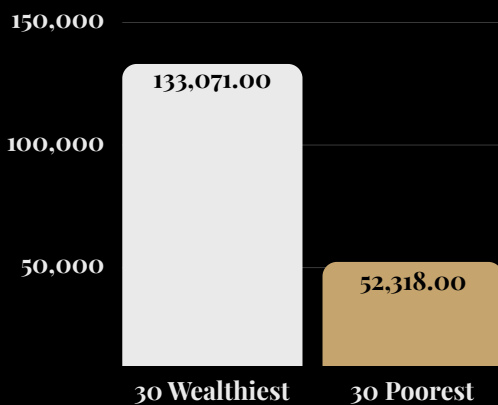
2. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/trump-again-won-counties-representing-a-minority-share-of-national-gdp-but-with-notable-gains/>

30 Wealthiest Districts



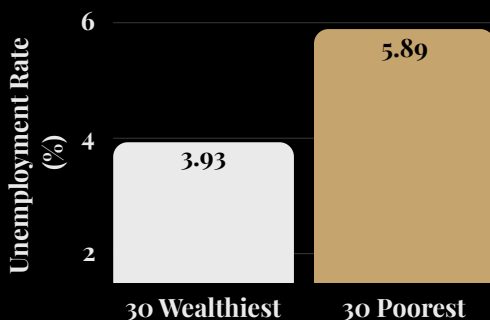
Median Income

\$



Average Unemployment

%



According to U.S. Census data, America's wealthiest districts are overwhelmingly represented by Democrats. Of the 30 richest congressional districts, only 7 are represented by Republicans, while 23 are represented by Democrats.

By contrast, representation among the 30 poorest districts is more evenly split — Democrats represent 18, and Republicans represent 12.³

Many of the wealthiest districts are represented by high-profile Democrats such as Nancy Pelosi, Eric Swalwell, Ted Lieu, Pramila Jayapal, Ro Khanna, Jerry Nadler, and Jamie Raskin — names that are also some of the most familiar on cable news.

Meanwhile, lawmakers like Hal Rogers, Bruce Westerman, Bennie Thompson, James Clyburn, and Rashida Tlaib represent some of the poorest districts in the nation.

The political and moral burden of representing poor and forgotten Americans now lies with the GOP.

Moreover, the stark divide between the everyday experience of one living in a poor congressional district as compared to a wealthy one explains in good measure why the two parties speak different languages. Take the following statistics, which CGCN Group compiled, comparing the 30th poorest districts in the United States to the 30th wealthiest districts in the country:

- The median income in the wealthiest districts is \$133,071, which is more than double the median income of \$52,318 in the poorest districts.
- The average unemployment rate in the wealthiest districts is 3.93%. For the poorest districts, it is 5.89%.⁴

3. Census.gov, select state and district, socio-economic, median household income (Dollars)

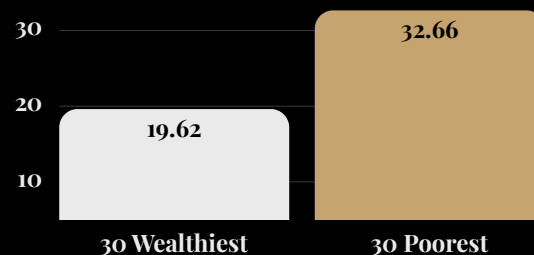
4. Census.gov, select state and district, workers, unemployment rate

- Opioid deaths are far more common in the poorest areas. There are 19.6233 opioid deaths per 100,000 in the wealthiest districts. This number is even higher in the poorest districts. It jumps to 32.466 opioid deaths per 100,000 in the poorest districts.⁵
- Firearm homicides are also far more common in the poorest districts. There are 13.39 firearm homicides per 100,000 people in the poorest districts. This number is 3.2 per 100,000 for the wealthiest districts.⁶
- The poorest districts are trailing in high school completion. The average for the top 30 wealthiest districts is 92.93% with the number dropping to 84.66% for the poorest districts.⁷
- The poorest districts have a lower life expectancy by about five years. The average life expectancy for the top 30 wealthiest districts is 81.333 years. For the poorest districts it falls to 75.82.⁸

IDEOLOGY WITHOUT CONSEQUENCES

It's difficult to imagine these statistics not affecting one's political outlook, on both sides. Residents of poorer neighborhoods simply don't have the time or predilection to grapple with the luxury ideas incubated on college campuses in the latter half of the twentieth century, and that erupted into the national political debate over the last decade. Whatever you want to call it—"wokeness," "neo-Marxism," or "political correctness"—Charlie Kirk captured the view of a large part of the country when he said, "if you go down the income ladder, the poorer you are in

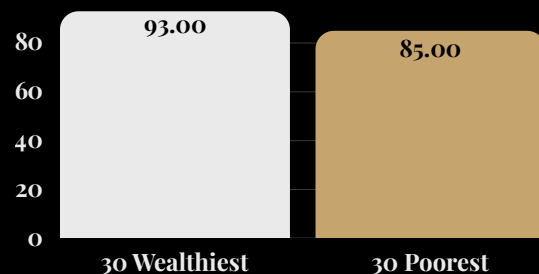
Opioid Deaths
(Per 100,000)



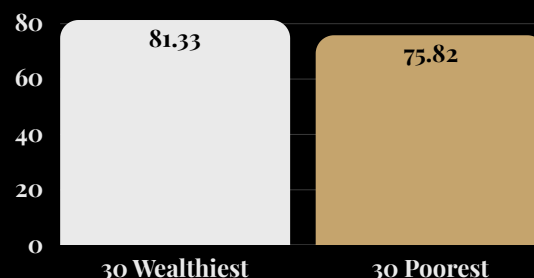
Firearm Homicides
(Per 100,000)



High School Completion
Percentage



Life Expectancy
Age



5. congressionaldistricthealthdashboard.org, select state and district, opioid deaths
 6. congressionaldistricthealthdashboard.org, select state and district, firearm homicides (per 100,000)
 7. congressionaldistricthealthdashboard.org, select state and district, high school completion
 8. congressionaldistricthealthdashboard.org, select state and district, life expectancy

America, the less likely you are to believe in the ideas that the woke are pushing. That's a uniquely white, upper-middle-class, college-educated phenomenon."

THE COGNITIVE ELITE AND THE MEDIA BUBBLE

That phenomenon is part of what Reich meant by the "secession of the successful." Those presiding in the upper social enclaves tend to interact only with each other, formulate exotic ideas divorced from the concerns of those outside their social circles, further entrenching power and influence over everyone else. In 1994, social theorist Charles Murray identified the convergence of the affluent with a "cognitive elite," which he said posed serious implications for modern governance.

Some may say, "So what else is new, the rich and powerful have always dominated politics in this country." True. But the combinations of what Murray described, coupled with the social and economic balkanization of the country (accentuated by COVID-19), is profoundly changing the two parties, but even more so in how the country is governed. We often hear concerns about "Democracy!" on cable news channels. But those repeatedly invoking the term probably are unaware of what's really happening, or that they are part of the problem they denounce. As Murray wrote:

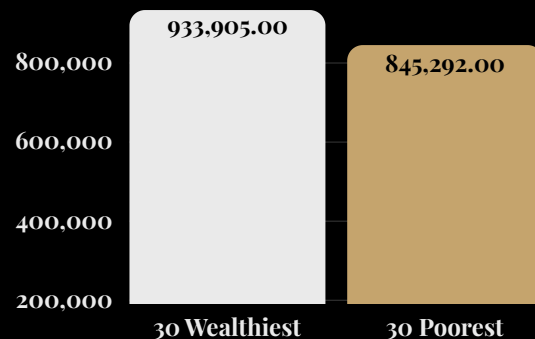
“The members of the cognitive elite are likely to have gone to the same kinds of schools, live in similar neighborhoods, go to the same kinds of restaurants and theaters, read the same magazines and newspapers, watch the same television programs, even drive the same makes of cars.”

The elite's monocultural milieu also extends to political contributions. Corporate PAC dollars disproportionately fund moderates from wealthy, elite-educated districts. It is easier to write a \$5,000 corporate check to someone who dresses and talks as you do, or to a candidate who holds a degree from the same or similar hifalutin university. In some ways, this proclivity is ideological; but in another important sense, it can just as easily be characterized as class bias.

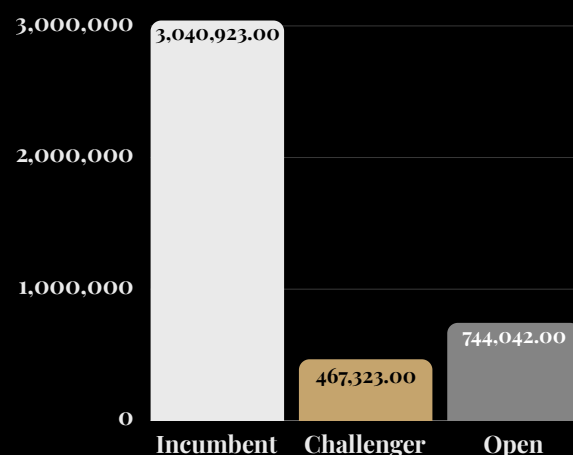
This elite separateness tends to compound the indifference of wealthier parts of America to what those outside their circles think about politics, about culture, about sports, and more fundamentally, what their values are. "When the members of the cognitive elite (of whatever political convictions) hang out with each other, often exclusively with each other, they find it hard to understand what ordinary people think." (emphasis added) That this socio-cultural dynamic now defines modern American life is hard to deny.

Take Ivy League universities, which tend to be hothouses of woke ideology. One shouldn't be surprised, therefore, that woke concepts find greater currency on the left, for the simple reason that those with degrees from these institutions are far more likely to be Democrats than Republicans, which was not the case in the latter half of the twentieth century. Consider the data we uncovered:

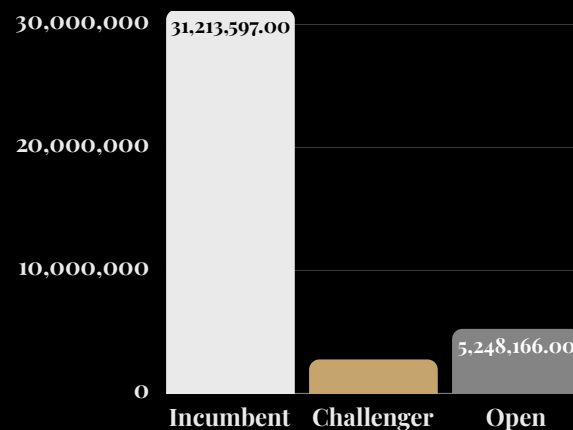
Total PAC Contributions^{9.}



Total Raised (House)^{10.}



Total Raised (Senate)^{11.}

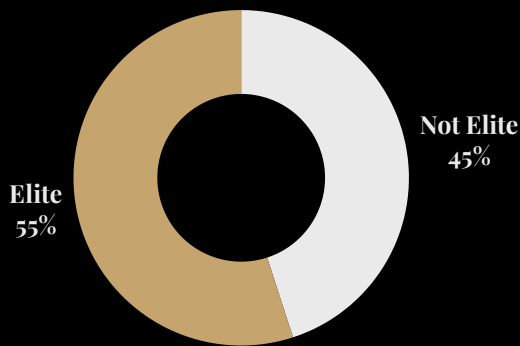


9. Rep name+opensecrets into google, select rep name-campaign finance summary, select PACs

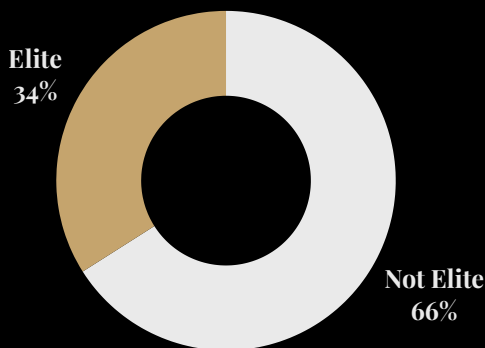
10. <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/incumbent-advantage>

11. <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/incumbent-advantage>

Senate Republican Elite University Education 93rd Congress



117th Congress



- In the 93rd Congress (1973-75), 55% of Senate Republicans went to elite universities. In the 117th Congress (2021-2023), that number declined to 34%.
- House Republicans educated from elite universities plummeted from 40% in the 93rd Congress to just 15% in the 117th.
- In the 117th Congress, over 50% of Democratic Senators had degrees from elite institutions.
- House Democrats who graduated from Harvard rose from 9% (93rd Congress) to 15% (117th Congress). Democratic senators from Yale University rose from 5% (93rd Congress) to 6% (117th Congress).^{12, 13.}

Members of the mainstream media, too, are far more likely to attend Ivy League schools than the rest of the nation. And per Murray's point, reporters often discriminate in favor of their kind. Luisa Marcela Ossa, a professor at La Salle University, wrote in *Esquire* that the media "routinely favors voices of Ivy League and other elite university faculty as representative of academia at large." The experiences of faculty and graduates of wealthy institutions, she noted, "are regularly presented and promoted as the norm in academia instead of the exceptions that they are."

Ossa is on to something. In her view:

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This favoritism isn't just a hunch of mine. Why do media outlets tend to work so frequently with professors from elite schools? Perhaps because they employ editors who went to those schools...A 2018 article in *The Intercept* indicates that [major media outlets] "are overwhelmingly dominated by graduates of America's elite schools."

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12. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/08/30/political-diploma-divide-now-applies-members-congress/>

13. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/on-the-decline-of-elite-educated-republicans-in-congress/B50B628CA9CCC799A0D86D9496EA3F6F>

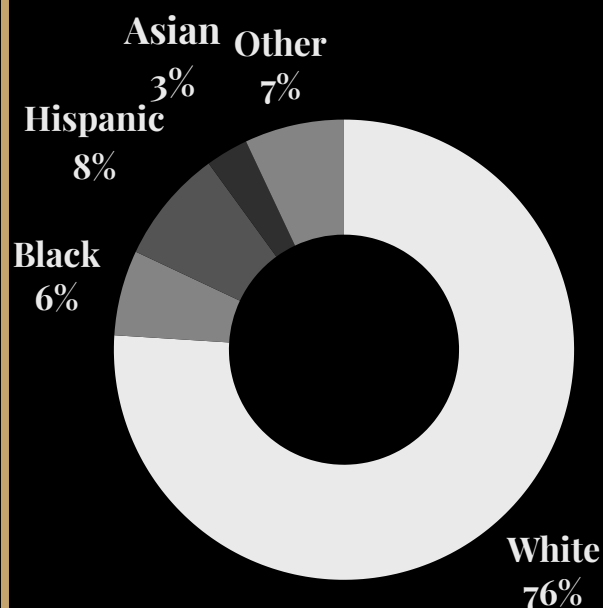
What's more, she points out that the "whiteness of these elite institutions is well documented and should not go unnoted." For example, white faculty make up over 80% of the faculty at Harvard and Brown, and the Black student population at many elite institutions hovers around just 8%." Her acidulous conclusion: "Thank you for reading this op-ed by a non-white professor from a non-elite school."

And whether consciously or not, most reporters strain to understand worlds completely foreign to them. Here we mean rural areas and low-income neighborhoods, marred by crime, opioid deaths, and chronic unemployment, with populations who are religious, without college degrees, and overwhelmingly black and Hispanic.

Hence, it's not difficult to see the result: media bias. As conventionally understood, such bias also stems from a well-documented fact: reporters identify far more as Democrats than Republicans. A 2022 study by Syracuse University's Newhouse School found that 36.3% of journalists identified as Democrats, while only 3.4% identified as Republicans. But in a similar context, the lack of newsroom diversity can also bias coverage.¹⁴

In 2023, Digiday, a digital media company that tracks key statistics at major news outlets, found that, despite promises made through diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, "media outlets are still mostly hiring white people." According to a 2022 Pew Research Survey, 76% of journalists surveyed were white, 8% identified as Hispanic, 6% as Black and only 3% as Asian. This lack of diversity is compounded by the fact that most media companies are "white-owned and the majority of those writing stories are white" means that "the news we receive is at greater risk of being white-centered."¹⁵

Racial Breakdown of Journalists



14. <https://newhouse.syracuse.edu/news/survey-of-journalists-provides-insights-into-the-state-of-journalism-today/>

15. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/04/us-journalists-beats-vary-widely-by-gender-and-other-factors/>

THE WORKING-CLASS COALITION EMERGES

So, what's the upshot of all this data? Democrats are from Venus, Republicans from Mars? Sure. The media exists in a bubble, indifferent to the rest of the country? In a word, yes. Elites stay away from, and condescend to, non-elites? Of course. But to us, it's more fundamental, something we will state again: Republicans are now a working-class party, the Democrats the party of the wealthy.

Even more interesting—and this gets to our main point—is what political theorist Francis Fukuyama wrote recently about President Trump. He's no fan, to be sure, but he noted recently (and correctly) that:

“

“many non-whites, including African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians, decided to vote for him (Trump) in 2020 and 2024.” “Indeed,” he added, “Trump has succeeded in doing what the Democrats once did: assembling a multi-racial working-class coalition.”

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Now, we can hear the skeptics: “that’s just two election cycles”; “Trump ran last time against a seriously flawed candidate.” Not wrong, as they say. But one can’t deny that something is afoot.

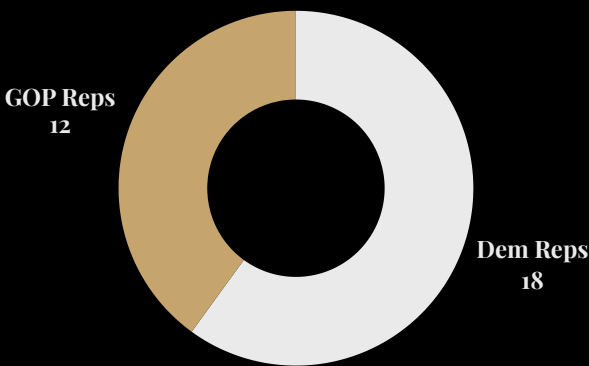
It’s one thing for Republicans to win over blue-collar voters, and Democrats wealthier ones. But if Republicans also succeed, as President Trump has

16. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/01/21/119th-congress-brings-new-growth-in-racial-ethnic-diversity-to-capitol-hill/>

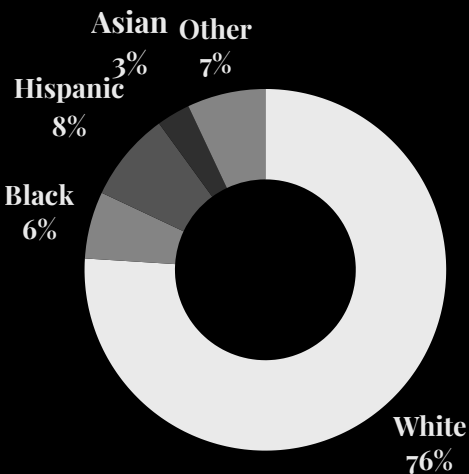
at least in the short term, in growing minority representation in their ranks, the balance of power between the two parties, and possibly in the country's major social and cultural institutions, could meaningfully shift to at least a more centrist posture.

Broadening the base—that's not something the two parties are accustomed to. In the 21st Century at least, going back to 2000, Presidential elections have been run with one goal in mind: solidify the base, plus one. The 51-percent strategy was pursued effectively by the standard setters, George W. Bush and then Obama (who employed it more so in 2012 than 2008). But with the signs latent in Trump's electoral data, the GOP's working-class coalition, if it continues to grow, could hold power for more than just a few election cycles.

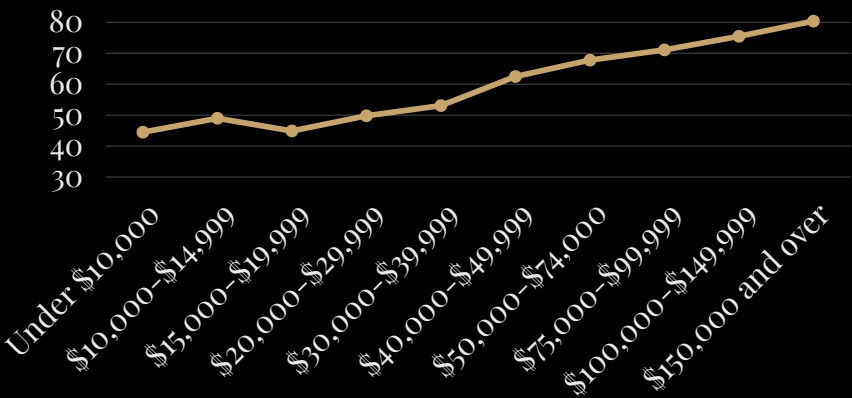
30 Poorest Districts¹⁶



Racial Breakdown of Journalists



Voting by Family Income (%)





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