

Expanding the Republican Tent with More Black, Hispanic, and Young People

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Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein. What Happens Next is a podcast which covers economics, politics, and history.

2024 is a presidential election year, and I intend to make a series of podcasts that will cover all aspects of the campaign from both the Democratic and Republican perspectives. Today's topic is Expanding the Republican Tent with More Black, Hispanic, and Young People.

Our speaker is Patrick Ruffini who is the author of the book Party of the People: Inside the Multiracial Populist Coalition Remaking the GOP. Patrick is the founder of Echelon Insights that uses digital analytics to improve polling and strategy for Republican candidates. I want to hear from Patrick if voter behavior is entrenched and whether the Republicans can persuade Black and Hispanic voters to vote like their White Working-Class brethren.

Buckle up!

Patrick can you please begin with your six-minute remarks.

Patrick Ruffini:

Party of the People is a book about the parties and their reversal in who they represent. The Democratic Party had been the party of the downtrodden, of the poor, of the working man. And those people are increasingly Republicans.

20 years ago, you had something like a 40-point divide between the richest voters and the poorest voters in the electorate in terms of who they supported. The very wealthiest voters tended to lean much more Republican than the poorest voters. Now that has compressed to nothing.

Larry Bernstein:

Just to clarify for the audience, 20 years ago America's wealthiest cohort used to vote 70% Republican and 30% Democratic and the poorest voted the reverse with 30% Republican and 70% Democratic. But today, both the rich and the poor are evenly split at 50% for each party.

Patrick Ruffini:

Whether or not you have earned a college diploma tends to be the dividing line between the parties and that has replaced income. Republicans have the momentum among voters who are on the bottom of educational attainment.

The Democrats make the case for themselves based on social tolerance, racial tolerance, on protecting institutions, protecting democracy. And it's less about pushing economic populism, about standing up for the rights of working people.

On the Republican side, you do not hear Republicans providing this limited government economic philosophy or providing this argument that we saw during the Reagan era and through the Republican revolution with Newt Gingrich, reducing the size and scope of the federal government. It's mostly been replaced by cultural arguments. There is a right of center cultural push, the anti-wokeness debate. And as a result, who is in the parties is changing dramatically.

In 2016 Donald Trump wins an election, nobody thought he could win, because he is able to consolidate support among white working-class voters.

Now why does that matter?

White working-class voters are over 40% of the electorate. They are the largest group demographically in the electorate. Everybody had written them off as this declining group, but they are the largest. And if you can win enough support in that constituency, you win states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin.

Fast forward to 2020 and Trump, it's a replay. Most of the states go the same way, but Trump does gain some support among Hispanics and African Americans. And you see this realignment of working-class voters extend to working class voters of color.

In 2024 trends among white voters seem to be played out. If you have the third successive election with Donald Trump as the Republican nominee, people are set in their reactions. This election is happening in a period of high anxiety, high dissatisfaction, inflation, rising housing costs. And you're seeing in the polls a further realignment of those non-white working-class voters towards the Republican party. We are potentially headed for another surprise to the results of the 2024 election.

Larry Bernstein:

In our national politics, statewide voting patterns change. They can change quickly. In 1976 in the Ford-Carter presidential election, the national map was the opposite that it is today. California was red and Texas was blue. Why do analysts place so much faith that voting patterns change slowly?

Patrick Ruffini:

People have bought into this idea of polarization.

People have bought into this cognitive trap of saying because this has been the trend for 15, 20 years, this is going to continue indefinitely into the future.

Or because the demographic group has voted the same way for the last few election cycles, that they are going to continue along that track.

There could be a change like you saw in 2020 along the Rio Grande Valley, like you saw in Miami, like you saw in 2016 in the Rust Belt. And there can be surprises. Changes could be bigger in either direction, a pro-Democratic direction or in a pro-Republican direction.

When people are trying to predict the future, there is a tendency to try to downplay the polls. If polls are saying there could be a big shift in one demographic group that that is not real, that's a polling error response bias, when more often than not, we're surprised on election night that something has swung way more than we expected.

Larry Bernstein:

America is a big country, and you expect a few communities to have massive swings in partisanship each election cycle. In your book, you highlight Winnetka Illinois. This is the town where Home Alone was filmed. It is also where I attended New Trier public high school. The town is 95% white and 3% Asian, it is one of the wealthiest suburbs in the US, and practically everyone graduated from college.

From 2012 to 2020, Winnetka went from voting for Romney over Obama by 12 points to supporting Biden over Trump by 36 points, a margin swing of 48 points.

What happened?

Patrick Ruffini:

I have lived in places like that. They are a huge outlier being highly educated and upper income. This was where the Home Alone house was, and how much money did that family need to afford the nice house and the plane trip to Europe, and that's emblematic of that community.

What we saw in the 2016 and 2020 elections was those types of areas that used to be representative of this very upper crust, Republican sensibility. Mitt Romney as a candidate who himself embodied the sense of noblesse oblige. This wealthy CEO type manager, fix it Republican in contrast to the boorish and vulgar Donald Trump. It turns out when you make that switch from Romney to Trump, to a radically different type of candidate, people move, people change their view.

People like me who live in the DC suburbs who live where we do not come across very many people in our intimate social circles who did not graduate from college. We were unable to see that significant sections of the electorate would be drawn to a candidate like Trump where they were not drawn to a candidate like Romney.

All we saw was the downside of a candidate like Trump rather than the potential electoral upside. And that led many people, me included, to be surprised on election night 2016. You had Winnetka shift by 40 points, but you had communities in Southern Illinois shift dramatically in the other direction. And you had places in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Ohio, Iowa, throughout the Midwest shift dramatically for Trump because they are not like Winnetka, Illinois.

Larry Bernstein:

Let us use Ohio as an example. Obama beat Romney by 3 in 2012 and Trump beat Hillary by 8 in 2016. That is a 11-point Republican swing in the context of a 2 point nationwide Republican improvement.

White working-class voters in places like Youngstown or rural people in Ohio preferred Trump to the country-club Romney candidate. Ironic given that Trump owns country clubs.

Patrick Ruffini:

He is a trader to his class. I am the one who knows how the system is rigged because I rigged it. I contributed all this money to Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton, Chuck Schumer, so I know, and they were doing my bidding, and now I am going to show you the working class American. I am going to help you because I know how the system is completely broken and I think you can make fun of that all we want. That resonated with a lot of people and that idea of him flaunting his wealth is something that brashness, maybe tackiness that people find that appealing. It is a different approach than somebody who is maybe on the defensive about their wealth like Romney.

Larry Bernstein:

I want to push back against the importance of a specific candidate representing the Republican party. I would not expect rural or white working-class voter support to differ significantly for Trump relative to Haley.

Patrick Ruffini:

Trump was a catalyst for an underlying impetus in the electorate. When you look at countries throughout the western world, it's not just the United States, you have right of center parties becoming more populist. You have immigration across western countries pushing politics in a populist direction. Politics is changing in such a way that this alignment was inevitable. It was

delayed because when Romney was more upper crust country club. He did underperform among working class voters. This track towards more populous politics, this class role reversal. It's happening in the UK, Australia not just the United States. But then you have Trump who really is so on the nose in terms of exemplifying it. It is not like any of this is specific to Trump or any of this is new.

In the 1960s with the realignment around the counterculture around Vietnam. The working class shifted dramatically away from the Democratic party in the 1960s. And then it stops, until 2000. And then you see another shift into this urban-rural divide, more non-college educated voters voting Republican. And then Trump takes it even further.

If Nikki Haley is the nominee, she will no doubt do better than Donald Trump would do among white college educated suburbanites, and that would be enough to guarantee her a win because she just gets voters that Trump does not. But the basic template for Republican coalition is Trump's template, right? The coalition itself is becoming more geared towards populist issues. Nikki Haley would do better than Trump among college educated voters. Absolutely. But she would also be a very different candidate than Mitt Romney was.

Larry Bernstein:

White working-class voters prefer Republicans to Democrats by 70 to 30. How is that possible and why did that happen?

Patrick Ruffini:

It is amazing because you had a party that was defined for so long as the party existing for the working class, that we stand up for unions. Biden comes from that era and tries to recapture it with going to the picket line in Michigan for the UAW. But Biden is along for the ride in a party that is increasingly college educated in which the policy divides are not about trying to create economic opportunity for people in the bottom half.

In the campaign, they are going to be talking about Dobbs, about democracy, about issues that their base wants to talk about.

I start the book in one of my early chapters, you have that sign, you are driving around the suburbs, "We believe love is love, black lives matter," right? All these social causes, you saw that a lot in 2020 and you saw especially around me and I'm like, "where is raising the minimum wage? Where is fighting economic inequality?"

You have an aging cohort of Democratic party leaders who still have those instincts to try and recapture that old working-class vote. Biden pushing for infrastructure.

He is incredibly old school in that regard, but in terms of the mechanics of the campaign and what voters are going to be hearing, it is probably going to be Dobbs and democracy because that is a reflection of prioritizing the base over swing voters who do feel a lot of economic anxiety right now. But it is a mistake.

Larry Bernstein:

In 2004, Thomas Frank wrote his book entitled *What's the Matter with Kansas* about how Kansas voters were mistakenly voting for Republicans because their financial interests were more aligned with the Democratic Party agenda. Why is that?

Patrick Ruffini:

That was an all-consuming question in 2004 for Democrats, this shift with rural America. In 2004, it bothered Thomas Frank to see this large working-class constituency defect to the Republican Party. It is just a misconception of what the self-interest is of the working class in terms of who is going to offer the biggest government programs. I spend a lot of time talking to voters in focus groups and almost no one brings up the size of the government or benefits. The thing that most matters to people is do I have a good job. What do things at the grocery store cost? What is the price of gas? What is my economy looking like?

Because people do not aspire to be beneficiaries of government programs. They aspire to have a good job, to have economic opportunity, to see their kids moving up. And right now, they are just not seeing that from the current economy. And the instinct within the Democratic Party has been to invalidate, to dismiss, to minimize those real struggles that working class families are articulating.

Larry Bernstein:

Democrats won the popular vote in every presidential election since 1992 except for 2004. Some say the Democrats have a demographic destiny as white voters are a declining percentage of the American population. Isn't the future looking bright for the Democrats?

Patrick Ruffini:

This was all encapsulated in a book, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* that was written in 2004 by Ruy Teixeira and John Judis, who recently have both come out and said, no, it is no longer going to be an emerging democratic majority. The Democratic Party faces serious challenges. They have written a book that came out the same day as mine, *Where Have All the Democrats Gone* that is a full recantation of that hypothesis. And what do they say went wrong? They recognize that white working-class voters would continue to be a plurality of the electorate. For a Democratic majority to emerge, you could not completely piss-off white working-class voters. You need to maintain the Clinton-era margins with white working-class voters and that

has not happened. The largest group demographically within the electorate, the bottom has fallen out for Democrats.

In the Obama era, they were able to make it up with black and Hispanic voters because of who Obama was as a candidate. But since the Obama era, we have seen a dramatic drop off in turnout in those communities. Republicans in the Trump era can appeal to a broader segment of the electorate with more populist themes that is not running on the old Reagan economics.

If you look at a state like California, that is undergone a lot of demographic change. The biggest reason why California is such a Democratic state is not because of Hispanics, it is because white voters changed their views. In Orange County they have completely flipped.

Texas recently became plurality Hispanics. That does not mean there will be plurality of Hispanics in the electorate because recent Hispanic immigrants cannot vote, maybe their children will, but that will be decades down the road.

In history, we saw waves of immigration. Italians, Irish, were Democrats in big cities and were the mainstay of the Democratic Party. And over time they shifted to a majority Republican group.

You are going to have a Hispanic community that is more middle class, more embedded in the mainstream of American society, and it is going to be more of a 50 50 group without the Democratic advantage that you see today.

Larry Bernstein:

White working-class voters support Republicans by 40 percent but voters black working-class voters support Democrats by 80 points. Why should this voting be dramatically different by race if their political and economic interests are similar? Will whites and blacks shift to voting like each other if they have similar education attainment, social class, and income?

Patrick Ruffini:

There is a legacy in history behind why black voters are so Democratic. And that starts in the 1960s. Historically, Hispanic voters too have leaned Democratic. The shifts we are seeing are not going to shift overnight. But on a long enough time horizon, it could. But over four-years, you typically see minor shifts.

But my argument is that they are moving in the same direction. Republicans are adding votes from those communities while they are losing votes from college educated white voters.

When you look at the views of black voters, they are largely like the median voter on policy. We must coalesce and consolidate our votes in one political party to gain some measure of political power. There is a huge social stigma attached to defecting towards the Republican Party.

In the same way I visited the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. In that community, which is nearly a hundred percent Hispanic, there was that same, we all vote Democrat. If you pull a Republican ballot, then you are a social outcast. Star County Texas shifted by 55 points in the 2020 election. It can happen, but it is not to say it will happen, but the trends are there.

The trends are also towards greater assimilation of non-white groups into the American mainstream. You are seeing fewer and fewer people living in 100% minority racial enclaves anymore, both black and Hispanic. And the ability for one side to enforce a racial voting norm is going down, but there is still a lot of history, and you are not going to overcome it in one election cycle.

Larry Bernstein:

Do Black Democrats hold more conservative policy views than White Democrats?

Patrick Ruffini:

When you look within the Democratic Party, there is substantial divides. Black Democrats are to the right by double digits of White Democrats and particularly White college educated Democrats on every issue.

It's not that they're all politically conservative. They are moderate. But on the margins that should create room for defection.

I have a wonky graph in my book that if you survey black voters on a lot of different issues, and then you build an ideology score. You asked them 10 policy questions and they give six conservative answers, they are 60% conservative. Ideologically, those types are voting Democrat by 80 to 90% margins if you are black. If you are white, those types of voters are voting 70% Republican. In that ideological space, it is a huge gap. If I were betting, it is going to move in a Republican voting direction.

The gravitational poll of ideology in the same way in 2020, if you just filtered black conservatives, Hispanic conservatives, Asian-American conservatives, those groups compared to 2016 swung 35 to 40 points to the right.

Larry Bernstein:

In 2016, in the days before the election, Hillary Clinton decided not to campaign in Wisconsin. Would you recommend that Trump go to a black church in Milwaukee?

Patrick Ruffini:

He should. It is more the symbolism of that. It is not that you are going to flip that community. There was a report he was planning on doing a rally in the South Bronx. That is a state that he is not going to win.

Politicians should do those things. And Joe Biden should go to a rural community. You should have candidates on both sides who are willing to make a bid for votes on the other side of the ideological spectrum. That is better politics. You absolutely should do that.

For so long the African American vote has been written off. For Republicans, it is a persuasion vote because you have people who take moderate positions, but they do not necessarily vote in a moderate way.

Larry Bernstein:

Trump typically speaks to a very friendly audience. Can Trump manage a hostile crowd in Milwaukee?

Patrick Ruffini:

That says a lot about your political skill to play off potential opponents to use that to rally your supporters, more particularly if they are being rude or heckling. You must be nimble. And the politics of the day, which takes place entirely within safe spaces for one political party or another is increasingly a very dispiriting type of politics because we are not seeing any genuine attempt at persuasion of the other side. And that goes for both parties.

Larry Bernstein:

In 2016, Trump used to go to rallies without prepared remarks. Is he scripted now? Will his campaign be professionally managed in 2024?

Patrick Ruffini:

What we saw in 2016, Trump is entertaining. He is engaging, and you rarely see politicians who compete on that dimension. It is all about who has the most focus group tested approach that appeals to the most voters in a calculating way. And Trump was competing on an entirely different dimension of culture, of being this brash, entertaining, what is he going to say next? Being unpredictable, spontaneous. That led to him to run circles around the entire Republican field and then overperform in the general election. And we thought it was all a liability being completely unscripted and those rallies.

Trump has more prepared remarks these days. He has more staff. He has a professional apparatus that has served him well in this primary campaign in terms of organizationally outfoxing

endorsements, going into DeSantis's backyard and grabbing members of his congressional delegation, which you could never have envisioned him doing in 2016. Part of that is he was the incumbent president. He has access to more people and more expertise now. 2016 Trump is different.

Larry Bernstein:

In the past few presidential elections, the Democrats have done extremely well among young voters. But recent polling shows that the Democratic advantage with young voters is shrinking. What is going on?

Patrick Ruffini:

It is part and parcel of a shift among young Latino and African American voters towards the Republicans.

In the Obama years where it was this natural inevitability that young voters would be for a Democratic party led by him. We develop these heuristics about what young voters look like based upon an entirely different set of young voters that did not exist as a part of the electorate 10 years ago.

There are new entrants to the electorate, and I think they are alienated from Biden, alienated from the Democratic Party and are up for grabs by a third-party candidate. There are people holding out. A lot of people will probably come home in the end, but you are not going to be the same old margins that we have seen in past elections.

Larry Bernstein:

Will Biden's support of Israel in Gaza hurt his election prospects?

Patrick Ruffini:

We overestimate how much it affects turnout. With the Israel issue, it is more of a question of third-party defection than an outright vote for Trump.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode with a note of optimism. What are you optimistic about as it relates to partisanship?

Patrick Ruffini:

I am optimistic. The country is less racially polarized and that runs against the conventional wisdom and media narrative. You see decreasing racial residential segregation. You see rising incomes, particularly among Hispanics and Asians. You see Hispanics will probably be right in the middle economically of America. There is a positive and hopeful story to tell about what is

happening in the country and how voters of different backgrounds are coming closer together. You see it in rising rates of intermarriage. You see it in people living closer together. And that is what my book is about just as much as it is about the politics.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks Patrick, for joining us today.

If you missed our previous podcast the topic was Did the President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis Commit Treason?

Our speaker was Cynthia Nicoletti who is a legal historian and law professor at the University of Virginia School of Law. Cynthia is the author of the book *Secession on Trial: The Treason Prosecution of Jefferson Davis*.

I chose this topic for this podcast because the facts of Jefferson Davis's case relate to the ongoing legal battles for Donald Trump. Davis's case turns on Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, which is the exact same section that has been applied by Colorado and Maine to prevent Donald Trump for being on their presidential ballot.

Davis was captured at the end of the civil war and was indicted for treason under penalty of death. Cynthia discussed whether Davis committed treason? Could Davis get a fair trial? And should the Union have skipped the prosecution and simply shot him?

I would now like to make a plug for next week's podcast with Philip Wallach of the American Enterprise think tank.

Philip is the author of the book *Why Congress* which describes the role of the legislature in the American constitutional framework and why we need to force Congress to legislate instead of delegating their responsibilities to the executive branch, the bureaucracy, and the courts.

You can find our previous episodes and transcripts on our website whathappensnextin6minutes.com. Please subscribe to our weekly emails and follow us on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

Thank you for joining us today, good-bye.