

The Progressive Moment Is Over

Four Reasons Their Era Has Come To An End

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It Wasn't So Long Ago Progressives Were Riding High. They Had A Moment; They Really Did. Their *Radical* Views Set The Agenda And The Tone For The Democratic Party And, Especially In Cultural Areas, Were Hegemonic In The Nation's Discourse. Building In The Teens And Cresting In The Early '20s With The Black Lives Matter Protests And Heady Early Days Of The Biden Administration, Very Few Of Their Ideas Seemed Off The Table. Defund The Police And Empty The Jails? Sure! Abolish ICE And Decriminalize The Border? Absolutely! Get Rid Of Fossil Fuels And Have A "Green New Deal"? Definitely! Demand Trillions Of Dollars For A "Transformational" Build Back Better Bill?

We're Just Getting Started! Promote DEI And The Struggle For "Equity" (Not Just Equal Opportunity) Everywhere? It's The Only Way To Fight Privilege! Insist That A New Ideology Around Race And Gender Should Be Accepted By Everyone? Of Course, Only A Bigot Would Resist!

As Far As Progressives Were Concerned, They Had Ripped Open The Overton Window Wide Open And It Only Remained To Push The Voters Through It. In Their View, That Wouldn't Be Too Hard Since These Were Great Ideas And Voters, At Least The Non-Deplorable Ones, Were Thirsty For A Bold New Approach To America's Problems.

So They Thought. In Reality, A Lot Of These Ideas Were Pretty Terrible And Most Voters, Outside The Precincts Of The Progressive Left Itself, Were Never Very Interested In Them. That Was True From The Get-Go But Now The Backlash Against These Ideas Is Strong Enough That It Can't Be Ignored.

As A Result, Politics Is Adjusting And The Progressive Moment Is *Well And Truly Over*.

Astute Observers On The Left Acknowledge This, Albeit With An Undertone Of Sadness. Progressive Substacker Noah Smith Plaintively Notes:

I Spent Pretty Much All Of The 2010s — My First Decade As A Writer And A Pundit — Advocating For Various Progressive Causes... I Called For Expanded Immigration, National Health Insurance, And A Bigger Welfare State, Extolled The Benefits Of Diversity, Cheered For A Revival Of Labor Unions And Stronger Antitrust, Criticized Mass Incarceration, Dreamed Of A Phase-Out Of Fracking, And Even Endorsed Reparations For Slavery. In The Late 2010s, It Felt Like A Long Wave Of Progressive Sentiment... Had Finally Reached A Critical Level Of Intensity...

A Few Years Later, I'm Not So Sure. My Values Haven't Become More Conservative — My Desire For A More Economically Egalitarian And Socially Tolerant Society Has Not Diminished An Iota... But I Have To Say That I Now Doubt The Practical Effectiveness Of Some Of The Policies I Embraced In Previous Years. Others Still Seem Like Good Ideas, But I've Been Dismayed At Their Botched Implementation Where They Were Tried. And Many Progressive Ideas Simply Don't Seem Like They'll Be Able To Win Majority Political Support In The Near Future.

Andrew Prokop Of The Uber-Progressive “Explainer” Site, Vox, Laments:

The Left's Hopes For Sweeping Change From The 2010s Have Crashed Into The Reality Of The 2020s.

The Energy Of The Bernie Sanders Presidential Campaigns And The George Floyd Protests Is A Distant Memory. Some Members Of The Squad Have Moved Toward The Democratic Mainstream,

While Others Lost Primaries. Several Of The Progressive Prosecutors Elected In Recent Years Have Been Ousted From Office (By Voters Or Due To Scandals) Or Appear Headed That Way.

In Democrat-Dominated Spaces — Like Cities And Mainstream Media Outlets — There's Been Growing Pushback Against The Left. Ambitious Progressive Rallying Cries Of Just A Few Years Ago, Such As Defunding The Police And Medicare-For-All, Are Now Absent From The Discourse. Politicians Who Assiduously Cultivated Left Activists Are Now Increasingly Tacking To The Center, Most Notably Vice President Kamala Harris, Who Has Abandoned Many Of The Positions She Took While Running In The Democrats' 2020 Presidential Primary.

Altogether, It's Seemed That Progressives Have Moved From Being On The Offensive To Being On The Defensive — In Both Politics And The Nation's Culture.

Finally, David Weigel Of Semafor, Observes In His Recent Article, "No Matter Who Wins, The US Is Moving To The Right."

*The Democratic Party, After Two Decades Of Leftward Post-Clinton Drift, Has Jerked Abruptly Right. Facing **Donald Trump** For The Third Consecutive Election, Democrats Are Making Rhetorical Concessions That They Didn't Want To, Or Think They Needed To, In 2016 And 2020. They've Adjusted To An Electorate That's Shifted To The Right, Toward The **Trump**-led GOP, On Issues That Progressives Once Hoped Were Non-Negotiable — Immigrant Rights, LBGTQ Rights, Climate Change Policies, And Criminal Justice Reform...*

Both Parties Now Face Voters, White And Non-White, Who Were Open To Some Left-Wing Ideas About Race, Crime And Gender In 2020 But Are Far More Skeptical Now.

So How Did The Progressive Movement Fall Apart, Seemingly At The Moment Of Its Greatest Triumph? It Is Not Hard To Think Of Some Reasons.

Loosening Restrictions On Illegal Immigration Was A Terrible Idea And Voters Hate It. When Joe Biden Came Into Office, He Immediately Issued A Series Of Executive Orders Dramatically Loosening The Rules For Handling Illegal Immigrants. This Was Rapturously Applauded By Progressives As Exactly What Was Called For. And There Were Immediate Real World Effects, As Camilo Montoya-Galvez Of CBS News Noted:

Would-Be Migrants, As Well As Mexican Cartels That Run Transit Networks, Heard A Clear Message: Entering The United States Had Become Easier. The Number Of People Attempting To Do So Spiked Almost Immediately.

A New York Times Reporter, Miriam Jordan, Crisply Explained Why So Many Migrants Came:

It Is Not Just Because They Believe They Will Be Able To Make It Across The 2,000 Mile Southern Border. They Are Also Certain That Once They Make It To The United States They Will Be Able To Stay.

Forever.

And By And Large, They Are Not Wrong.

The Predictable Result Of This Dramatic Surge In Illegal Immigration And The Diffusion Of These Immigrants Into Overburdened Cities All Over The Country Was A Spike In Both Salience Of The Issue And Of Negative Sentiment Toward Biden And The Democrats For Letting Get Out Of Control.

This Has Resulted In Huge Advantages For **Trump** And The Republicans On Who Voters Trust To Handle The Issue — Advantages That Have Continued Even As The Biden Administration Finally Moved In Mid-2024 To Tighten The Border Through Executive Action And Candidate Harris Runs Commercials Promising To Be Tough On Border Security.

The Democrats Should Have Seen This Coming. Contrary To The Claims Of Progressive Advocates, The Reality Of American Public Opinion And Politics Is That Border Security Is A Huge Issue That Cannot Be Elided In Any Attempt To Change Or “Humanize” The Immigration System. Public Opinion Polling Over The Years Has Consistently Shown Overwhelming Majorities In Favor Of More Spending And Emphasis On Border Security.

It Should Therefore Have Been Obvious That Any Moves Toward Greater Leniency At The Border Raised The Possibility Of Knock-On Effects And Unintended Consequences That Would Be Highly Popular. And Now Voters Are Increasingly Open To Even Draconian Immigration Restriction Measures. An Astonishing 62 Percent Of Voters In A June CBS News Survey Supported “Starting A New National Program To Deport All Undocumented Immigrants Currently Living In The US Illegally,” Including 47 Percent Of Blacks, 58 Percent Of White College Graduates, And Even 53 Percent Of Hispanics.

As Smith Notes:

Americans Simply Do Not Like The Practice Of Rewarding Asylum Seekers For Crossing The Border Illegally. They Do Not Want A Policy Of “More Immigration By Any Means Available,” If Those Means Involve The Condoning The Violation Of The Nation’s Laws And Borders. They Demand To Choose, As A Nation, Who Gets Into The Country, And Not To Have Their Choices Abrogated By Lawyers And Courts.

Progressives' Epic Failure To Understand These Realities Is One Of The Big Reasons Why The Progressive Movement Is Over.

Promoting Lax Law Enforcement And Tolerance Of Social Disorder Was A Terrible Idea And Voters Hated It. In The Aftermath Of The Police Killing Of George Floyd And The Nationwide Movement Sparked By It, The Climate For Police And Criminal Justice Reform Was Highly Favorable. But Democrats, Taking Their Cue From Progressives, Blew The Opportunity By Allowing The Party To Be Associated With Unpopular Movement Slogans Like “Defund The Police” That Did Not Appear To Take Public Safety Concerns Very Seriously.

At The Same Time, Democrats Became Associated With A Wave Of Progressive Public Prosecutors Who Seemed Quite Hesitant About Keeping Criminals Off The Street, Even As A Spike In Violent Crimes Like Murders And Carjacking Swept The Nation. This Was Twinned To A Climate Of Tolerance And Non-Prosecution For Lesser Crimes That Degraded The Quality Of Life In Many Cities Under Democratic Control. San Francisco Became Practically A Poster Child For The Latter Problem Under DA Chesa Boudin’s “Leadership.”

The Enthusiastic Supporters Of A Boudin-Style Approach To Policing In San Francisco And Elsewhere Tend To Be White College-Educated Liberals — The Mass Base, As It Were, Of The Progressive Movement. Nonwhite And Working-Class Voters Approach The Issue Of Crime Quite Differently. Think Of Eric Adams’ Support In His Successful Run For The New York Mayoralty, Or Of Cherelle Parker’s Support In Her Successful Run To Be Philadelphia’s Mayor.

These Sentiments In Pro-Democratic Nonwhite And Working-Class Urban Areas Should Not Be Puzzling. These Voters Tend To Live In Areas That Have More Crime And Are Therefore Unlikely

To Look Kindly On Any Approach That Threatens Public Safety. A Pew Poll Found That Black And Hispanic Democrats — Who Are Far More Urban And Working Class — Are Significantly More Likely Than White Democrats To Favor More Police Funding In Their Area.

A Survey Conducted For My New Report With Yuval Levin, “**Politics Without Winners**,” Confirmed The Strength Of These Sentiments. The Survey Asked About Police Funding In Two Different Ways. By 65 - 34 Percent, Respondents Endorsed Fully Funding Police Departments Over Reallocating Police Funding To Social Services, And By 73 - 25 Percent, They Backed Keeping Police Budgets Whole In The Interests Of Public Safety Over Reducing These Budgets And Transferring Money To Social Services. Among Nonwhite Working-Class Voters There Was A 30-Point Margin Against Reducing Police Budgets, Which Ballooned To 50 Points Among Moderate-To-Conservative Working-Class Nonwhites, The Overwhelming Majority Of This Demographic. By Contrast White College-Grad Liberals *Favored* Reducing Police Budgets By 20 Points.

That Tells You A Lot. As Smith Apologetically Admits:

*The Simple Fact — And The Thing I Failed To Properly Realize Before 2020 And 2021 — Is That **Policing Works**. A Bunch Of Evidence Shows That Police Deter Crime — Through The Threat Of Incarceration They Represent, Their Presence On The Street, And Through Their Simple Removal Of The Most Criminal Fraction From Wider Society. That Doesn't Mean Police Are The Only Thing That Reduces Crime... [B]ut Police Are An Essential, Indispensable Part Of American Public Safety, And Without Public Safety Nothing Else In Society Can Function.*

Whodda Thunk It? Progressives Own This One And It Is Another Big Reason The Progressive Moment Is Over.

Insisting That Everyone Should Look At All Issues Through The Lens Of Identity Politics Was A Terrible Idea And Voters Hated It. In Recent Years, Huge Swathes Of The Democratic Party, Egged On By Progressives, Have Become Infected With An Ideology That Judges Actions Or Arguments Not By Their Content But Rather By The Identity Of Those Engaging In Them. Those Identities In Turn Are Defined By An Intersectional Web Of Oppressed And Oppressors, Of The Powerful And Powerless, Of The Dominant And Marginalized. With This Approach, One Judges An Action Not By Whether It's Effective Or An Argument By Whether It's True But Rather By Whether The People Involved Are In The Oppressed/Powerless/Marginalized Group Or Not. If They Are, The Actions Or Arguments Should Be Supported; If Not, They Should Be Opposed.

This Approach Is In Obvious Contradiction To Logic And Common Sense. And It Has Led Much Of The Democratic Party To Take Positions That Have Little Purchase In Social Or Political Reality And Are Offensive To The Basic Values Most Americans Hold. Take The Vogue For "Anti-Racist" Posturing. This Dates Back To The Mid-Teens And Gathered Overwhelming Force In 2020 With The George Floyd Police Killing And Subsequent Nationwide Protests. It Became De Rigueur In Democratic Circles To Solemnly Pronounce American Society Structurally Racist And Shot Through With White Supremacy From Top To Bottom.

Nothing Exemplifies This Better Than The Lionization Of Ibram X Kendi, Whose Thoroughly Ridiculous Claims Were Treated As Revealed Truth By Tens Of Millions Of Good Democrats, With Progressives At The Ready To Make Sure They Stuck To The Catechism. Kendi Wrote, For Instance:

There Is No Such Thing As A Nonracist Or Race-Neutral Policy. Every Policy In Every Institution In Every Community In Every Nation Is Producing Or Sustaining Either Racial Inequity Or Equity Between Racial Groups... The Only Remedy To Racist Discrimination Is Antiracist Discrimination... The Only Remedy To Past Discrimination Is Present Discrimination. The Only Remedy To Present Discrimination Is Future Discrimination.

Only Those Who Have Checked Their Capacity For Critical Thinking At The Door Could Possibly Take Such Arguments Seriously. But Progressives Insisted These Absurdities Must Be Taken On Board.

Bad Ideas And Arguments Are Bad Ideas And Arguments To Most Voters. It Doesn't Matter Who Makes Them. Voters Generally Embrace Instead The Universalistic Principles That Are Embedded In Traditional American Values. They Believe, Unlike Kendi, That Racial Preferences In Rewards And Decisionmaking Are Not Fair And Fairness Is A Fundamental Part Of Their World Outlook. They Believe, With Martin Luther King Jr, That People Should "Not Be Judged By The Color Of Their Skin But By The Content Of Their Character." In A 2022 University Of Southern California Dornsife Survey, This Classic Statement Of Colorblind Equality Was Posed To Respondents: "Our Goal As A Society Should Be To Treat All People The Same Without Regard To The Color Of Their Skin." That View Elicited Sky-High (92 Percent) Agreement From The Public, Despite The Assaults On This Idea From Sectors From The Left.

Similarly, A 2023 Public Agenda Hidden Common Ground Survey Found 91 Percent Agreement With The Statement: "All People Deserve An Equal Opportunity To Succeed, No Matter Their Race Or Ethnicity." This Is What People Deeply Believe In: Equal Opportunity Not, Unlike The Intersectional Ideology Promoted By Progressives, Equal Outcomes.

In Contrast, Consider The Issue Of "Structural Racism." Is Racism Built Into Our Society, Including Into Its Policies And Institutions," As Progressives Maintain, Or Does Racism "Come From Individuals Who Hold Racist Views, Not From Our Society And Institutions?" In The Politics Without Winners Survey, By 61 To 39 Percent, Moderate-To-Conservative Nonwhite Working-Class Voters (70 Percent Of Whom Are Moderate, Not Conservative), Chose The Latter View, That Racism Comes From Individuals, Not Society. Hispanic Voters As A Whole Have Essentially The Same View.

In Stark Contrast, The Comparatively Tiny Group Of Nonwhite College-Graduate Liberals Favored The Structural Racism Explanation By 78 To 20 Percent. White College-Graduate Liberals, The Shock Troops Of The Progressive Movement, Were Even More Lop-Sided At 82 To 18 Percent. That Tells You A Lot About Who Has Influenced The Democratic Party On Racial Issues.

And Who Has Foisted The Metastasizing And Unpopular DEI Programs On A Public That Detests Them. Smith Lists Some Of The Most Annoying Programs From A Veritable Rogues' Gallery Of DEI Efforts:

DEI Training Sessions That Are Nonsensical And Often Racist, Declaring That Practically Every Desirable Work Characteristic, From Punctuality To Hard Work To Individualism, Is Part Of White Culture.

Mandatory DEI Statements That Do Little To Advance Equity, But Instead Simply Seem Like Humiliating Struggle Sessions.

DEI Departments Who Always Manage To Find More Instances Of Racism Within The Organizations They Work For, And Whose Solution To This Is Always To Recommend The Enlargement Of DEI Departments.

Thanks Progressives! They Own This One Too And It Is Another Big Reason The Progressive Movement Is Over.

Telling People Fossil Fuels Are Evil And They Must Stop Using Them Was A Terrible Idea And Voters Hate It. Since The Days Of Barack Obama And An “All Of The Above” Approach To Energy Production, Democrats, On The Urging Of Progressives, Have Embraced Quite A Radical Approach

To Energy Issues. Progressives Promulgated The View That Climate Change Is Not A Dynamic That Is Gradually Advancing, But An Imminent Crisis That Is Already Upon Us And Is Evident In Extreme Weather Events. It Threatens The Existence Of The Planet If Immediate, Drastic Action Is Not Taken.

That Action Must Include The Immediate Replacement Of Fossil Fuels, Including Natural Gas, By Renewables, Wind And Solar, Which Are Cheap And Can Be Introduced Right Now If Sufficient Resources Are Devoted To Doing So, And Which, Unlike Nuclear Power, Are Safe. Not Only That, The Immediate Replacement Of Fossil Fuels By Renewables Will Make Energy Cheaper And Provide High Wage Jobs.

According To The Progressive View, People Resist Rapidly Eliminating Fossil Fuels Only Because Of Propaganda From The Fossil Fuel Industry. Any Problems With Renewables That Might Be Cited, Such As Their Intermittency And Unreliability, Are Being Solved. This Means That As We Use More Renewables And Cut Out Fossil Fuels, Political Support For The Transition To Clean Energy Should Go Up Because Of The Benefits To Consumers And Workers.

Pretty Much Every Sentence In This Catechism Is Highly Debatable On Substantive Grounds. But The Catechism Is Not To be Questioned Progressives Insist. Biden In 2023 Echoed The Apocalyptic Rhetoric:

The Only Existential Threat Humanity Faces Even More Frightening Than A Nuclear War Is Global Warming Above 1.5 Degrees In The Next 20 — 10 Years. That'd Be Real Trouble. There's No Way Back From That.

The Implication Is That We Can't Worry About Trivial Things Like Workers' Jobs In High-Paying Industries Or Consumer Prices For Energy Or Even The Technical Feasibility Of Maximalist Energy Transition Plans. Hence The Progressive Commitment To The Fanciful Goal Of Net Zero By 2050 To

Limit Global Warming To 1.5 Degrees C. Hence Their Commitment To An Equally Rapid Buildup Of Wind And Solar In Energy Production.

This Is All Gospel To Progressives Who See Themselves As Noble Warriors Against The Impending Apocalypse. But Most Voters, Especially Working-Class Voters, Have Not Signed Up For — Or Are Even Much Interested In — The Rapid Green Transition They Envision.

Workers Far Prefer A Gradual, “All-Of-The-Above” Approach To Transitioning The Energy System To The Frantic Push For Renewables And Electric Vehicles (Not To Mention Heat Pumps, Electric Stoves, Etc.) That Characterizes Progressives’ Green New Deal-Type Thinking. In A Survey Conducted By YouGov Last Year, Just A Quarter Of Working-Class (Noncollege) Voters Embraced The Democrats’ Current Approach, Emphasizing Ending The Use Of Fossil Fuels And Rapidly Adopting Renewables. This Was Actually Less Than The Number (29 Percent) That Flat-Out Supported Production Of Fossil Fuels And Opposed Green Energy Projects. The Dominant Position By Far Was An All-Of-The-Above Approach That Called For Cheap, Abundant Energy From Many Sources, Including Oil, Gas, Renewables, And Nuclear, Favored By 46 Percent Of Voters.

Findings From The Politics Without Winners Survey Were Consistent With These Attitudes. We Asked Respondents Whether They Thought The Country’s Energy Supply Should “Use A Mix Of Energy Sources Including Oil, Coal And Natural Gas Along With Renewable Energy Sources,” Or “Phase Out The Use Of Oil, Coal And Natural Gas Completely, Relying Instead On Renewable Energy Such As Wind And Solar Power Only.” An Overwhelming 72 Percent In The Survey Favored The All-Of-The-Above Approach, Including Fossil Fuels, While Just 26 Percent Backed The Rapid Renewables Transition.

The Split Was Even More Lopsided Among Working-Class (Noncollege) Respondents, As It Was

Among Political Moderates. Predictably, Progressives' BFFs, White College-Graduate Liberals, Were An Exception — Two To One In Favor Of Getting Rid Of Fossil Fuels. But Moderate And Conservative White College Graduates, Who Vastly Outnumber The Liberals, Were Almost Seven To One Against. Given That Democrats Are Increasingly Reliant On Support From White College Graduates, This Indicates The Breadth Of Democrats' Progressive-Driven Vulnerability On Energy Issues.

The Hard Fact Is That Progressives' Intransigent Hostility To Fossil Fuels Is Not Widely Shared By Ordinary Voters, Who Are Fundamentally Oriented Toward Cheap, Reliable And Abundant Energy. In A Recent Result From The *New York Times/Sienna Poll*, Two-Thirds Of Likely Voters Said They Supported A Policy Of "Increasing Domestic Production Of Fossil Fuels Such As Oil And Gas." Two-Thirds!

Support For Increasing Fossil Fuel Production Is Particularly Strong Among Working-Class (Noncollege) Voters: 72 Percent Of These Voters Back Such A Policy. Support Is Even Higher Among White Working-Class Voters (77 Percent). But Remarkably, Support Is Also Strong Among Many Demographics Where One Would Think, Based On Conventional Wisdom, One Would Likely See Opposition. For Example, 63 Percent Of Voters Under 30 Said They Wanted More Oil And Gas Production, As Did 58 Percent Of White College Graduate Voters And College Voters Overall. Indeed, Across All Demographics Reported By The NYT Survey, All Racial Groups, All Education Groups, All Regions (Midwest, Northeast, South, West) And All Neighborhood Types (City, Suburb, Rural/Small Town) — Net Support (Total Support Minus Total Oppose) Was At Least 15 Points And Usually Much Higher. Now That's Popularity.

Or How About This Remarkable Result From A New NBC Poll. Testing A Wide Range Of Policy Proposals To See Whether Voters Would Be More Or Less Likely To Support A Candidate Who Espoused Them, The Most Positive Response Among Voters Was To A Proposal To Expand Domestic

Oil And Natural Gas Production. By A Very Wide 67 Percent To 15 Percent Margin, Voters Said They Would Be More Likely, Rather Than Less Likely, To Support A Candidate Who Wanted To Expand Fossil Fuel Production!

Voters Clearly Aren't Buying What Progressives Are Selling On Energy And Climate. Not Even Close. And That's Another Big Reason The Progressive Moment Has Come To An End.

What Comes Next? Certainly Harris Is Furiously Back-Pedaling From All These Positions But She Is Not A Particularly Convincing Messenger For A New Approach Or Even Able To Articulate What That New Approach Might Be. In All Likelihood, It Will Take Some Time For A New Moment To Emerge And Influence Democrats The Way The Progressive Moment Did. Until Then, Well — It Looks Like More **“Politics Without Winners.”**

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