

Having lived through, observed and pondered upon the political events (and the reporting and analysis thereof) of the past 30 years, I appreciate having Cathy's careful curation of the multitude of scholarly resources that are available to provide some structure and perspective.

This matter got my attention after the 2004 Presidential election and Thomas Frank's book [What's the Matter with Kansas](#). Why do people vote against their best interests? Twelve years later, all of Frank's comments continued in my conundrum as I watched the election of Donald Trump and all of its ramifications. As such, I have spent the past nearly 10 years since leaving the daily workforce reading and discussing and sorting out my own thoughts.

My initial thoughts on this topic went to George Packer's 2021 Book - [Last Best Hope](#) and his introduction of "Four America's" into deliberations such as this.

Packer's Four Americas are roughly characterized as follows:

Free America: Freedom means limited government and maximum individual liberty.

Real America: The "real" nation is rooted in traditional, often rural, working-class, and culturally conservative communities.

Smart America: Success comes from education, merit, and participation in the knowledge economy.

Just America: America is defined by systemic injustice, and the central task is to expose and dismantle oppression.

Each of these Americas have their sets of Core Values. Each America is embodied by distinct psychographic characterizations.

I generally agree with the "common thread" here that both of our traditional Political Parties - Democratic and Republican have been "hollowed out" - primarily because the nature and needs of the people who comprise the rank and file party member have changed more rapidly than the institutions' ability to address them.

Alongside Packer's observations (now more than five years in use and still useful) come those of Martin Gurri (e.g. [The Revolt of the Public, 2014](#)), Zeynep Tufekci ([Twitter and Tear Gas, 2017](#)) and [Jonathan Haidt](#). I asked Microsoft Copilot for a compare/contrast and received the following, which I think will be helpful in bringing Gurri, Tufekci, and Tufekci into our discussion.

## Cross-Mapping Summary Table

Packer's America	Gurri's Framework	Tufekci's Framework
<b>Free America</b>	Long-standing revolt against the Center; distrust of authority validated by information explosion	Rapid mobilization without durable institutions; anti-government energy amplified online
<b>Smart America</b>	The Center losing control of the narrative; legitimacy crisis hits hardest	Technocratic worldview struggles in a networked environment where expertise is contested
<b>Real America</b>	Populist revolt; public negates institutions	Strong mobilization, weak organizational capacity; resentment fuels networked protest
<b>Just America</b>	Moral revolt against institutional hypocrisy; negational politics	Networked movements with cultural power but structural fragility; tactical freeze

THEN, I “did my homework” and was most intrigued by Sam Rosenfeld’s and Daniel Schlozman’s deconstruction/ reconstruction of the role of political parties in the US in the second quarter of the 21st century.

[\*The Hollow Parties: The Many Pasts and Disordered Present of American Party Politics\*](#)

Rosenfeld/Schlozman propose six different political “party strands”:

- the antiparty strand,
- the accommodationist strand,
- the pro-capital strand,
- the policy reform strand,
- the radical strand, and
- the populist strand

more detail on the strand characteristics can be found in this conversation from the Niskanen Center [Hollow political parties, with Sam Rosenfeld and Daniel Schlozman - Niskanen Center](#)

So -

How can Democrats win back middle-income voters without abandoning their suburban coalition?

I close with a recent comment from George Packer in conversation with Yascha Mounk:

“. . . I would say at least begin with those basic human qualities that still unite people. I still think most people want a decent society, do not want violence, do not like the contempt and the vitriol and the hatred that we live with on a daily basis. They want what is good for their neighbor and even for their compatriot, and they are afraid of the direction we are going in. If you can start with that, which is an almost non-political position to begin from, that might lead you to answer the more political questions and even the policy questions about what might reach people who think that you are the enemy—because that is where we are. If we disagree, we are the enemy.

<https://www.persuasion.community/p/george-packer> (November 8, 2025)

Respectfully,

Pat Newcomb