

Campaign 2024: Not Left Versus Right, But Affluent Versus Everyone Else

The realignment of major parties away from blue against red and toward rich versus poor dynamic is America's most undercovered political story

MATT TAIBBI

AUG 9



Joe Biden on his “victory lap”

Two sets of figures, collected four years apart by the research firm SSRS, for CNN:

- *Donald Trump, September, 2019: Strongly Disapprove, 48%. Strongly Approve, 28%*
- *Joe Biden, August, 2023: Strongly Disapprove, 42%. **Strongly Approve, 15%***

Plunging numbers for Trump prompted stories like, “Tldr: Trump’s in 2020 Trouble.” Biden headlines this week try to speak an upbeat narrative into reality, the most humorous probably being “Biden Heads West For a Policy Victory Lap” and “Biden Goes West to Tout The Economy.” According to a slew of reports the president’s “touting” trip celebrates “growth in manufacturing,” and opportunities afforded by the Inflation Reduction and Chips and Science Acts. “You can expect us to highlight more groundbreaking projects, more ribbon-cuttings,” White House Deputy Chief of Staff Natalie Quillan told the *Washington Post*.

Ribbon cuttings are a great idea. What could go wrong with *Joe Biden* and *giant ceremonial scissors*?

The White House plan is commendable in its boldness, declaring economic victory and sending Biden to battleground states to take a bow. This is in the context of still-bolder reports that explain poor numbers for Biden by claiming they’re the fault of the latest indictment of opponent Trump, which has “eclipsed” White House efforts to highlight Biden accomplishments. Not all is lost, however, according to Democratic pollster Anna Greenberg, quoted by the AP. Although the Trump indictment “sucks the oxygen out of everything else,” she said, it’s also hampered the Republicans’ ability to talk about other issues, like — the economy.

“People like to say nothing matters anymore,” Greenberg said. “But the conversation that you’re not having actually does matter.” Try saying that one three times fast.

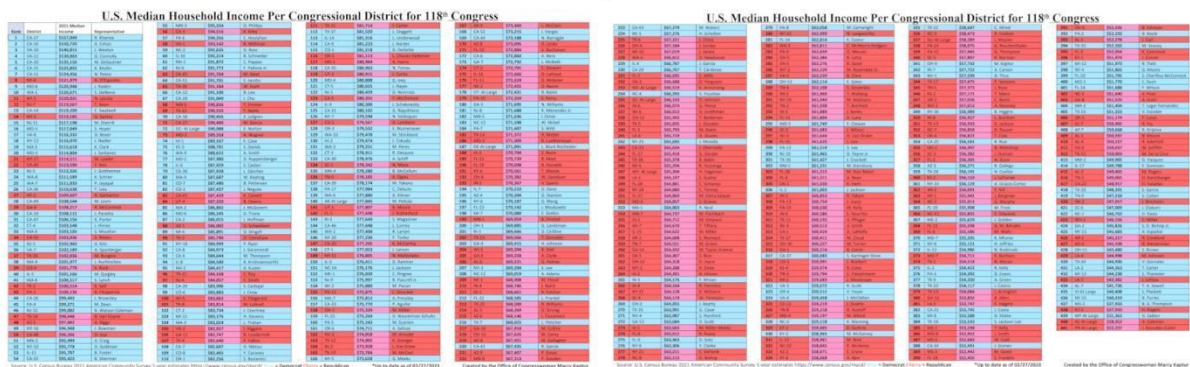
A lot of coverage of Campaign 2024 is going to be like this, in which aides, pundits, and pollsters speak like fridge-magnet haikus or Alan Greenspan pressers. There are now so many taboo subjects in American politics that even data journalists, whose job is to give us the cold hard facts, are forced to communicate in allusions and metaphors, because what’s happening can’t be discussed.

American politics has long been a careful truce, in which natural economic tensions were obscured by an elegantly phony two-party structure that kept urban and rural poor separate, nurtured a politically unadventurous middle class, and tended to the needs of the mega-rich no matter who won. That system is in collapse. Voters are abandoning traditional blue-red political identities and realigning according to more explosive divisions based on education and income. As the middle class vanishes the replacement endgame emerges. A small pocket of very wealthy and very educated, for whom elections have until now mostly been ceremonial and to whom more fraught realities of the current situation are an annoyance, will move to one side. That’s your “15% strongly approve” group, the Marie Antoinettes who’ll go to the razor pledging loyalty to the regent, even if he’s a loon in a periwig, or Joe Biden.

The inevitable other constituency is just everyone else, which should be a larger demographic. The only reason polls are at 43-43 (or perhaps slightly in Biden’s disfavor) is because the other actor is Donald Trump. If Democrats should be panicking because they’re not trouncing an opponent whose biggest campaign events have been

arraignments, it's just as bad for Trump that he polls even with a man who's a threat to walk into a propeller or carry a child into a forest every time he walks outside. Still, the abject horror Trump inspires among the Georgetown set may be his greatest political asset, and a reason the realignment seems to be proceeding even with him around.

The first evidence of such realignment would be one party becoming dominant among affluent voters. This is definitely happening. Democratic affiliation, not long ago far less likely in richer congressional districts, is now as mandatory a social accessory in wealthy suburbs as neck tucks or \$14,000 kids' birthday parties. Ohio's Marcy Kaptur, one of the last old-school liberals left in congress, launched a tirade about this in March to Business Insider, producing charts to visually demonstrate the phenomenon. Page 1 on the left, heavily blue, shows the richest seats. On the right are the poorest. "How is it possible that Republicans are representing the majority of people who struggle?" she said.



RICH DISTRICT, POOR DISTRICT: Democrats dominate richest House seats (left), while the poorest (right) are now red territories

Once-extreme racial splits are also eroding. We started to see this in 2020, when Trump lost the White House due to slippage among white men and somehow gained among women, black men, and Hispanic voters. This was dismissed as an anomaly then, but three years later the phenomenon appears to be widening. The Democrats' loss of Hispanic voters shows up repeatedly in surveys, and stories over and over now show Trump making gains beyond statistical error with black men in particular, as much as 18% according to a recent Reuters/IPSOS poll. It's becoming a harder issue to hide, with people like Ice Cube talking about finding "another dancing partner":

The data journalism reaction to all alarming polls has mostly been to dismiss them as meaningless, because "at this point voters haven't given much thought yet" to things. Also, poll-watchers are comforted by the fact that 8 in 10 black voters still insist they won't vote for Trump. This discounts that apathy still may result in minority voters sitting out elections or pulling a lever for Green Party candidate Cornel West, either of which would exacerbate the same isolation problem for the Toff Party. In classic fashion, Democrats have dealt with the West issue in the most insulting and counter-productive

manner possible, with Congressional Black Caucus chairman Gregory Meeks for instance scoffing that voters won't be "hoodwinked by a sideshow."

More important than the fact of these changes are the reasons. In March the American Enterprise Institute surveyed 6,000 respondents. As noted by political scientist Ruy Teixeira, moderate-to-conservative minorities by wide majorities opposed reallocating police funding, described racism as a problem of individuals as opposed to institutions, and said (by a 70-26 margin) transgender athletes should "only be allowed to play on sports teams that match their birth gender." The numbers were opposite for college grads, especially white college grads, who for instance agreed racism is "built into our society" by a staggering 82-18 margin. These numbers reveal wildly different worldviews between educational demographics.

Historically aristocrats lose it when their weird affectations outweigh their educational advantages, when they start bugging rare animals or amassing giant hose collections or falling into crackpot cults they then impose on the populace. The American variants already sound like aristocrats (who uses words like *deplorable* without irony?), and have a habit of believing things ordinary people instinctively find ridiculous. They're also enamored with the same mystical nonsense that captivated historical predecessors, with rich white co-eds gobbling up Ibram Kendi texts the way guilt-ridden Russian nobles lined up for the purifying touch of Rasputin. Their "experts" even gather in places like Davos to concoct Swiftian parodies of upper-class condescension, like the WEF's amazing "Let them eat bugs!" plan. On top of everything, they deny a class angle to their problems.



After 2008, when the finance sector bailed itself out and paid for it with the last equity the middle class had saved in their homes, I thought it was only a matter of time before parties broke down and voters re-aligned in the 99%-vs-1% direction the Occupy movement described. We're here. The phenomenon is obscured by Trumpmania, and the press will try to keep it obscured, but the subtext of Campaign 2024 is already the obvious drift of rich and poor voters in opposite directions, which can't end well. Isn't this the "conversation we're not having" that really matters?