**Re-Conceptualizing Realignment Theory: How Electorate Issue Cycles Can Account for the Trump and Sanders Phenomenon in 2016**

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March 15, 2016

**Abstract**

*The 2016 election cycle has astounded observers of American elections, both academic and lay, at the success of the populist campaigns of Trump and Sanders in the Republican and Democratic primaries. I propose that these primary battles of 2016 can be understood through re-thinking the implications of Realignment Theory to look at not only realigning elections, but also when the electorate first signals changes in their issue preferences, particularly in elections that may not result in these preferences being met. The Electorate Issue Cycle that I propose is one that I believe can answer the criticisms Realignment Theory has faced in explaining elections since 1936, as well as account for the current election cycle through constructing a class-based formulation of paradigmatic change in voter policy preferences that drive realignments.*

The purpose of this paper is to explain the current election cycle and, in the process, reinvigorate the study of realigning elections. Even as the periodicity of electoral change has recently been given new life by the study of large databases confirming repeating electoral patterns of behavior (Merrill et al, 2008), Realignment Theory is still reeling from the criticisms of David R. Mayhew (2002) who pointed to a number of problems with the theory as it had been developed to that point. Walter Dean Burnham, the foremost political scientist to develop and elucidate Realignment Theory has, himself, struggled to account for the apparent failure to replicate the kinds of conditions that emerged most particularly from the critical elections of 1896 and 1936, in elections during the 1960s and 1990s, when it was anticipated new realignments should have occurred.

Perhaps the most prominent controversies surrounding periods when a critical realignment is expected to take place have revolved around the following: 1. Sudden vs. gradual realignment 2. The phenomenon of divided government 3. A lessening of party identification 4. Low voter turnout 5. A lack of evidence of new permanent coalitions or alliances 6. The necessity of a precipitating external crisis

Before any of these others can be discussed, I feel the implications of periodicity, as generating political predictions, needs to be addressed.

Periodicity has actually been proven in recent times by analyses of large datasets, so should not need my endorsement. (Merrill et al, 2008, Conraria et al, 2011) The presence of a cyclical, repeating pattern of alternating party dominance historically from at least 1854 through 2006, bears out the work of political scientist Walter Dean Burnham and many others, as well as the earlier essays of historians Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. and Jr. (Schlesinger, Sr. 1939, Schlesinger, Jr. 1986). The recent work has so far not addressed realignment, *per se,* but simply establishes that voter party preference in national elections changes in a predictable pattern. *Some* kind of cycle lasting approximately three decades does occur. This is important to emphasize, because this has been a point of contention, not only with political scientists who study elections, but within the entire field of political science. The idea that our “science” might produce something that could actually have predictive value (as in other fields that call themselves sciences, where it is not merely the norm, but the requirement for such a title) is often dismissed as at best a profoundly dubious claim, and at worst *ipso facto* wrong. This line of thinking implies that this idea is by its very nature an attack on science or rationality. Even the suggestion political science can produce predictable results through analysis of historical data, in itself, tends to be regarded as an affront to political science and to all who value scientific inquiry, because the feature which defines all other sciences—the study of, observation, and production of events that can be replicated—is accepted as not possible within our own field. This Kuhnian paradigm shift in the view of what our field can offer, arguably in many ways making our field no more than a branch of history, can trace its roots to antibehavioralists in the 1960s, who organized the Caucus for a New Political Science in 1967. They claimed that political science should never be approached as a science—that large-scale theories predicting political behavior could never be credible. Political science should leave theory behind and confine itself to speaking only on the issues of the present, ahistorically.

Most of the caucus supporters…made these two points about a “science” of politics: 1) some things *can not* be studied scientifically, and 2) some things *should not* be studied scientifically. (Landau 1972:6ff). On the first point the argument is that the human being is more than an animal: the human being thinks, feels, and reacts in ways no laboratory animal would. The human being is too complex for simplified efforts at quantification. The enduring values that characterize humankind defy empirical assessment. The important things in life and politics cannot be measured in any conventional sense. And finally, the antibehavioralists contend that even if you could measure them, you should not; what can be measured can be manipulated and controlled. Such an effort would be unethical and it would be wrong (Surking and Wolfe 1970; Somit and Tanenhaus 1967, 1982:180ff.)[[1]](#footnote-1)

Not only is science repudiated as something for which the student of politics might aspire to, but the antibehavioralist conception offers a profoundly unscientific model of the human animal in society, as inhabiting a lofty plateau above and immune to the natural world, not subject to the conditions that Darwin had been at such great pains to spell out. A higher plain which raises man to a level of superiority in the firmament over his world that is more comparable to that of creationists, than to those who purport to find the *historical* evidence that man is descended from apes entirely compelling.

According to Lawrence Freeman, writing on the post-behavioralist era, the positivist-behavioral political science that had produced Realignment Theory was after this declared “moribund, if not dead.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Freeman writes that the Caucus for a New Political Science was the last of the several great movements to redirect the profession.[[3]](#footnote-3) “If a science of politics is not possible, as the caucus argues, the idea of science has been productive for the discipline. If the caucus had no particular agenda to substitute for the behavioral agenda, its protest was still productive of a more open professional association and perhaps one more sensitive to the environment in which we function. “ (Freeman, p. 36) This is a sad commentary on the state of the contributions of political science to scholarship, if these are truly its greatest advancements since the 1960s.

I have spent perhaps too long on this particular aspect of the discussion, yet I feel that without challenging the authority of this present paradigm; challenging the idea that man operates outside of nature, in a complex and chaotic fashion whose behaviors cannot be analyzed as the behaviors of other creatures on this planet, then I can have no expectation that anything I write hereafter will be regarded with any seriousness. The decline of Realignment Theory has as much, if not more, to do with this denigration of such research, as it has to do with the ways in which elections in the 1960s and 1990s did not fulfill the expectations of what realignments should look like, and what they signified.

**Electorate Cycles and Electorate Issue Theory**

Issue voting was not a necessary condition of classic Realignment Theory as it was first roughed out by Burnham, Chambers and others, but they, themselves, described their proposal as one that was in its early stages, and would undoubtedly be modified and fine-tuned in coming decades.[[4]](#footnote-4) Unlike parties in Europe, our parties didn’t operate on strictly ideological or class-based platforms; easily observable as both conservative southern Democrats and liberal northern Democrats inhabited the same party at the time in which these political scientists were writing. This is quite obviously true, but the refinement that I wish to introduce to Realignment Theory begins from this point.

It is my contention that issue voting is, in fact, the rationale for the periodicity of change in American elections, that can be observed through realigning elections, but which issue often does not *begin* at the time of a realigning election.

The problem, up to this point, has been in the assumption that voter preferences for change only begin with the realigning election that is observed, and that the agent of that change is necessarily the province of one of the two major parties.

What I am proposing here is a complimentary theory of Electorate Issue Cycles, that are distinct from Realignment Cycles. These Electorate Issue Cycles precede realignments, signaling a shift in the issue choices of the public. Party realignments are the result of one or both parties successfully answering the will of the people (thereby securing the election) and providing the people with a means, through their vote, to see their preferences turned into policy.

If this is the case, it is capable of explaining most, if not all, of the complaints that have been made about Realignment Theory in recent decades.

If the realignment of the electorate takes place prior to an actual election, reflecting a polity that has already undergone, or is in the process of undergoing, a shift in its priorities, then there are a number of ways in which we can readily imagine the will of the people for different policy preferences, than those dominant at that time in government, might be stymied.

Schlesinger wrote of exactly this process in *The Semisovereign People,* where he described how existing establishment politicians foiled competition between parties, leading to the favoring of the agenda of the upper class, particularly in the South, where one-party rule had been the norm since its adoption in the early 20th century up through the 1960s, in order to suppress the voice of African-Americans in elections. Whichever interests the establishment elite at any given time may serve, it is reasonable to assume that the machinery of the two-party system is “rigged” in their favor. This is particularly obvious in the current moment, when the head of the DNC, Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, has frankly acknowledged that “Unpledged delegates exist really to make sure that party leaders and elected officials don’t have to be in a position where they are running against grassroots activists.”[[5]](#footnote-5) We have also seen extensive discussions of Republican Party leadership working to go against the will of the people in order to secure a contested convention where Trump can be prevented from receiving the nomination.

The ability of the establishment to work against the desires of the electorate has a long history. It was only with the election of 1804 that a ‘presidential ticket’ was devised, but the ticket of a party was named by the members of Congress who belonged to that party, not by the people. It wasn’t until 1832 that we see caucuses of regular citizens choosing delegates to national conventions of the parties to nominate the president and vice-president. It is only in this period, as well, that we see most white males gaining the vote. Of course the black vote wouldn’t come until 1870 with the 15th Amendment, and then be effectively suppressed in the South for many decades through the party nominating process. The first presidential primary wasn’t held until 1901. We didn’t get the women’s vote until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Bernie Sanders sued Ohio (successfully) because its governor in June changed the rules to disallow 17-year-olds who would be qualified to vote in the November election from being allowed to participate in the Democratic nomination process. Sanders had good reason to think that 17-year-olds would vote overwhelmingly for him—if the voting age were set at 16, as it is in some other countries, this might make the difference in who became a party’s nominee, and ultimately, who became president. These are just a few of the most obvious political or legal features that stymie the ability of all of “the people” of the country to choose a candidate who most reflects their policy preferences.

When we move away from purely political obstructions, there are many other ways in which our system can fail to deliver the government desired by the majority of the electorate. Such things as the news coverage which may be subject to elites within the media, the need for money to run a campaign, the influence of on-the-ground organization by politicians running cities and by union leaders, by the great advantage of pre-existing name recognition. The ability to mount a successful third party campaign, even with money and name recognition and a popular agenda, has proven so far unsuccessful, given the many impediments. This means the populace is essentially limited to seeking satisfaction within the framework of two parties very much controlled by an establishment that has secured its power based on a previous issue focus. There is no incentive for any person already elected to Congress to want to see a realignment likely to introduce new opponents who may overcome the usual incumbent advantage. The resistance of the political establishment that has made its fortunes based on an existing alignment is a force that works against the public’s interest in a shift in issue focus and policies—which is what we see in a realignment. It is for this reason, I think, that the most obvious form of realignment has up until this time come about generally in conjunction with an external event that constitutes a crisis. The urgency of the public’s demand, under such circumstances, and a political party less certain of itself, has provided that sliver of opportunity needed to force the government to a new policy agenda, despite the resistance of the establishment. This is especially true in elections of long ago, but arguably, of all elections prior to the 21st century. We need only consider how Bernie Sanders could possibly have run in earlier years, without the internet to aid him in funding his campaign, and without its help in exposing his message to people who were not seeing it discussed by a news media dismissive of him.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is my contention, therefore, that realigning elections do not precipitate change, but are the result of a change in the policy preferences of the people that has preceded the realigning election, whether by a matter of months or by decades. The will of the people for change is often thwarted by our election practices and examining the difference between when a new electorate issue emerges, and when it is first implemented in government (through some version of a realigning election), can make realigning elections the measure for analyzing the state of our democracy. With a presumption of Electoral Issue Cycles recurring in a regular pattern of approximately the same length as classic realignment theory proposes for realignments, tending to precede the cycle of realigning elections, many of the puzzling aspects that have plagued discussions of realigning elections can be understood.

When we focus our attention away from election data to the voters, themselves, we assume that they have preferences which do not simply conform to a game-theory model, but shift to favor, or revolve around, certain issues or issue divides based not in the individual, but in the national polity. This has been an underlying assumption of Realignment Theory, since elections are a reflection of voter choices. Any examination of the extraordinary amount of built-in pressure to *deny* voters these preferences, should lead to the assumption that voter preferences *are not always met* in our electoral process. Voters may have certain preferences which are inhibited both at the primary stage and the general election stage in our (generally) two-party system. It is, in fact, rather extraordinary that these built-in obstructions are overcome, suggesting the intense power of the paradigmatic shift in the dominant issues of the electorate.

Electorate Issue Theory makes sense of why in some elections we may see sudden realignments, and in others the realignment may be more gradual. In the current Democratic nominating process, we see many older Democrats with a strong sense of party identification, and with fond memories of the Bill Clinton presidency, which are considered among the reasons for why these voters are strongly supporting Hillary Clinton. The dramatic support Sanders receives in people under 35, who have no fond memories of the Bill Clinton presidency, indicates that an issue change has taken place, however. With the lack of a precipitating crisis, a realignment is less likely to occur in this single election on the Democratic side, because older voters are not making an issue-based choice. Hillary Clinton has also noticeably copied the rhetoric of the Sanders campaign. Several in the media have hailed this as evidence that Bernie Sanders has won, even if Hillary Clinton receives the nomination, because he has moved her to the left.[[7]](#footnote-7) It seems unlikely, however, that should Secretary Clinton win not only the nomination, but the presidency, her campaign promises would be transformed into a strong effort to secure the changes desired by so many of her Democratic constituency, and along with it a genuine realigning election. The basis of her own support, and her establishment colleagues in Congress who have endorsed her so overwhelmingly, would not reflect the shift in the voter base, attracting working class whites to the party, that Sanders’ campaign appears to be generating. But the dramatic change in Clinton’s campaign rhetoric from 2008 to 2016 highlights one of the reasons for more gradual realignments, which can in part reflect the imperfect information voters receive from candidates who pander to their shifting concerns, knowing that they are under no requirement to act upon the promises they make.

One of the complaints about realigning elections in the 20th century has been that the party alliances that formed in the 1960s and 1990s did not seem as strong as before, nor do they seem to be based on strong party loyalty. As the Democratic Party took up the cause of civil rights, southern Democrats began to peel away to the Republican Party in national elections, though hardly overnight. If we understand that the electorate has already adopted new issue interests and policy preferences, then we can ask ourselves: Do these changed policy preferences necessarily require that the base of the party be made up of a totally different coalition than it had been previously? Unions, for instance, did not find their issues attended to after the New Deal as much by the Democratic Party in the 1960s, and barely at all in the 1990s, but in each of those periods, union issues were always, comparatively speaking, better protected by the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. The lack of strong interest in these issues, however, gave little incentive for individual union members to have a strong sense of party identification with the Democrats, so that the ability of the unions to deliver votes weakened. This also provides us with insight into one of the causes of low voter turnout. If, for instance, union members do not feel strongly affected by who wins an election, and is not strongly attached to the issue that is at play for other reasons, they cannot be expected to turn out. Despite two shifts in the Electorate Issue Cycle after the 1930s, unions continued in alliance with the Democratic Party, even as party identification weakened, contributing to the impression that realigning elections did not take place. It is not my goal in this paper to determine what should constitute a realigning election, and when they have taken place, but beginning from this discussion, it may be easier to formulate criteria to validate realignments in the 1960s with Kennedy or Johnson, and in 1980 with Reagan.

There are several other reasons for low voter turnout that deserve discussion. One is that, if neither party is offering a candidate who addresses the issue change that the electorate is seeking, then the electorate is likely to be apathetic. Perhaps even more important, however, is that Electorate Issue Cycles presume that there is a *single* issue that dominates public discourse and which characterizes the policy once politicians are successfully elected to enact it. The result of this is that we often see a split between parties, where one continues to try to invoke the establishment policies of the previous Electorate Issue Era, resisting the change of the new issue. But by the end, generally after realigning elections, both parties adopt the electorate’s single issue, even if in lesser ways they continue to act so as to mollify those in their constituency whose interests are not the focus of the times, continuing to produce some features of a left and right. We can see this, in particular, with the election of Bill Clinton, a neoliberal who, like the Republicans, favored free markets, free trade, lessening regulations on businesses and banks, and lower taxes. It wasn’t until the Democratic Party stopped putting forward candidates that aligned with the prior interest in pursuing greater equality for the poor and oppressed, and adopted the new electorate issue favoring unfettered markets, with Bill Clinton, that Democrats became successful. If we look back to Richard Nixon’s record on civil rights, we can see that his agenda, also, appears far more in line with helping the poor and oppressed, than Democrats like Bill Clinton several decades later. The result of this similarity between the parties when it comes to the defining issue and public policies of the time, mean that voter turnout is more likely to be driven only by issues of lesser importance to the majority of voters. When both parties are offering minor variations on the same central policy, then there is little incentive for many voters to care enough to vote.

The phenomenon of divided government is also one which, if we analyze through the lens of the policies that are favored by voters during a particular period, becomes a question of whether divided government helps, or hinders, the desired policies. We all know that so long as there were southern conservative Democrats, and a lesser number of liberal northern Republicans, the concept of party unity in voting within Congress was been lacking. Republicans for a brief period in the 1990s enforced unity to some degree with threats of running opponents in the primaries to any who went against party leadership, but that fell apart with the emergence of the Tea Party. But our question should not be even whether liberal or conservative policies went through, based on an analysis of where congressional members were truly positioned on a liberal-conservative scale, but whether gridlock prevented policies that were favorable to the electorate’s issue agenda from occurring. Thus, when NAFTA became a signature piece of legislation of Bill Clinton’s time in the White House, with initiatives that were more traditionally liberal failing, the question is whether this fulfilled the issue of the time which, whether this was its intent, or merely its result, was to favor large corporations and their CEOs. If so, then he fulfilled this purpose admirably. The first two years of the Clinton Administration had a government that was not divided, and one of Bill Clinton’s first efforts was to appoint Hillary Clinton to work on a form of national healthcare. This was not the policy issue that united the country. When the remaining years of Clinton’s presidency were under divided government, the public effectively put a break on issues that were not salient to the era. The Affordable Care Act of 2010, on the other hand, came at the onset of a new period with a switch to a new electorate issue, which has not met with public outcry, despite the efforts of the establishment of the Republican Party to engender that reaction. The point being that while in the past it is true that to a much greater extent party machines ran elections and people voted purely on party lines, making divided government far less likely, it is not true that divided government necessarily thwarts the policy agenda of the electorate. Though it can certainly do just that; though at its peril.

**Description of the Electorate Issue Cycles**

The theory I have described does not require that my analysis of what constitutes an Electorate Issue Cycle be correct. It does not require that there be a cyclical repetition of recurring electorate issues. What I have described so far can be true without requiring a similar acknowledgment of my own conclusions about the Electorate Issue Cycle. My research has, however, led me to identify certain dates and certain issues as comprising this cycle.

I am proposing that a change in the central issue of concern to the electorate occurs in a regular pattern of approximately 32.5 years,[[8]](#footnote-8) tending to precede the cycle of realigning elections. I suggest that these electorate issues are class-based, at least in their results. It has often been suggested that class does not play a large part in American elections, because our parties cannot be defined as catering only to a single class. Yet, despite closer alignment to class in many European countries, we can see that real questions exist about the enduring class-base of European parties over time, at least insofar as their party leadership seems to seriously usher in new policies beneficial to the class it professes to represent. In recent decades, we can see from the leadership of the Labour Party in the UK under Tony Blair, that after Thatcherism, the same trajectory as we experienced in the United States from Reaganomics onward persisted, one favoring the wealthiest in society, whichever party led.

While class-consciousness in the United States may be far weaker than it is in most European nations, this does not preclude the possibility that policies serving the interests of one particular class may dominate for a period of time. I propose that each Electorate Issue Cycle can be identified along class lines. That periods benefitting the lower or oppressed classes are followed by periods that benefit the upper classes, which are followed by periods that benefit the working and middle classes. This does not require us to accept that the *purpose* of the period is to benefit the lower, upper, or middle classes, only that this is the result. The interest in free-market capitalism need not be in order to promote the creation of a billionaire class who will rule the nation through “a corrupt campaign finance system,” but it is enough for us to observe that this is, for whatever reason, the actual result of a preference for such policies. Likewise, it need not be the class, itself, which drives the issue which supports it, though in most cases it is likely to reflect a greater restlessness in the population whose interests are surging to dominance. As an example, while the civil rights movement of the 1960s, an example of issues concerning lower or oppressed classes, was overwhelmingly dominated by African-American leadership and the protests of African-Americans who were being discriminated against. However, the civil war of the 1860s was not the result of slaves rising up against their oppressors. The pressures of the time to address the issues of the most oppressed members in society appear, for reasons that I will not speculate on here, to be exercised not only on members of that group, but to reflect a paradigmatic shift in the world view of a significant number, if not a majority, of the members of our society. If it did not, arguably the much smaller group that is the upper classes would have little chance in a democracy to have their interests furthered. Yet the last 36 years have demonstrated that those interests have indeed been furthered. Downturns resulting in the loss of homes, massive layoffs for no other purpose than to make companies money for companies by moving jobs overseas, and bailouts of banks under George H.W. Bush and Barack Obama, were essentially shrugged off throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. They only suddenly began taking on importance in 2010, with the Occupy Wall Street Movement. In 2014, French economist Thomas Picketty’s book, *Capital in the 21st Century,* became an unexpected best-seller with its claims that the United States was headed toward oligarchy because of the increasing concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of a very few.

I suggest that 2010 was the year in which a new electorate issue favoring the preferences of the middle and working classes began.

The results of this change in the interests of the electorate did not immediately play out in electoral politics. The 2012 election year was one of an incumbent—always viewed as difficult to unseat by those who might run in the primaries or general election against them. The neoliberal moderate, Barack Obama, ran against the neoconservative moderate, John McCain—though with the addition of a vice presidential candidate in Sarah Palin that hinted at the changes that the 2016 election would bring.

In 2016, we have candidates representing the establishment—the wealthy upper class whose interests dominated the previous Electorate Issue Cycle—who have gotten amazingly little traction on the Republican side. On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton was all but crowned by the Democratic establishment and the media before the fact, the strength of her bid in the primaries, at least, considered only a little short of what might be expected of a sitting president. Yet she is struggling to hold on against the seemingly unlikeliest of opponents—a Democratic socialist, completely unknown to anyone outside of Vermont prior to his candidacy, who rails at the way the wealthy upper classes have rigged the system in their favor. Clinton, unlike the Republicans, has been listening to what issues work for her opponent, and has pivoted to adopt Sanders’ positions, at least during this phase of the campaign, to her advantage. Donald Trump, while a member of the upper classes by virtue of his wealth, is also known to the public as a reality TV star, with a manner that makes him seem not like a politician, or a buttoned-up member of the elite, but a “regular” person.[[9]](#footnote-9) Like Sanders, he professes himself to be for the working class, he touts his not taking campaign money from Wall Street, and he is disinterested in prosecuting foreign wars. The working classes respond to Trump’s message that their problems are caused by foreigners who have penetrated our borders and are threatening our jobs and our safety, and his promise that he is a great dealmaker and will have no problem fixing things for them. Mark Levin, host of a syndicated radio show, during an interview with Trump on November 11, 2015, coined a phrase describing him as the “blue collar billionaire.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Whether or not this will meet the conditions of a classic realigning election—whether it will actually lead to the election of one of these two—it is a powerful sign that the electorate’s issue interests have undergone a profound change, and that change is one that caters to the interests of the working class.

The dramatic and unexpected Occupy Wall Street movement, as well as the Arab Spring,[[11]](#footnote-11) in 2010, suggest we should begin with this date as the one from which to proceed backward,[[12]](#footnote-12) looking for signs of class-based issue dominance appearing first in elections and public policy 32.5 years earlier, moving in reverse back to the beginning of our republic. While I realize that being so specific about the dating may raise a few eyebrows, it is simpler to see if the argument can credibly be made by elections within a few years of these starting dates.

The following are the dates I am proposing for the Electorate Issue Eras.

2010-2042 Working Class

1978-2010 Upper Class[[13]](#footnote-13)

1945-1977 Lower Class

1913-1945 Working Class (Realigning election 1932 – 19 years after the proposed issue change)

1880-1912 Upper Class (Realigning election 1896 – 16 years after the proposed issue change)

1848-1880 Lower Class (Realigning election 1860 – 12 years after the proposed issue change)

1815-1847 Working Class (Realigning election 1828 – 13 years after the proposed issue change)

1783-1815 Upper Class (Realigning election 1800 – 17 years after the proposed issue change)

**A Brief Examination of Electorate Issue Eras and Elections**

The “explosive election” of 1980 has been described as reviving Realignment Theory.[[14]](#footnote-14) I am proposing that this marks the first presidential election after the beginning of an electorate issue change favoring the upper class. As we all know, Reagan ushered in Reaganomics, with its “trickle-down theory,” embracing *laissez-faire* economics and the idea that government should give money (in the form of lower taxes or later, bailouts) to the rich, because it would trickle down to the poor. Democrats were unable to win a presidential election until they, too, bought into this theory. From deregulating corporations, to negotiating trade agreements like NAFTA, to dismantling Glass-Steagall, to dramatically lowering tax rates on the wealthiest people, economic policies benefitting the upper class have been the dominant political concern of this time period. Picketty, in his book, writes that inequality was reversed from the period between 1930-1975, but since that time has been increasing. Burnham and Ferguson (2014) describe the Republican coalition from that time in this way

As David Stockman, President Reagan’s Budget Director once all but confessed, in the modern era the party has never really pretended to have much of a mass constituency. It wins elections by rolling up huge percentages of votes in the most affluent classes while seeking to divide middle and working class voters with various special appeals and striving to hold down voting by minorities and the poor. As we move further into the next stage of our New Gilded Age politics, only the terms of the bargain will change that the party’s core donors and economic policymakers strike around election time with the gaggle of evangelicals, gun advocates, and anti-feminist and homophobic crusaders – not to mention sheer racists – that whip up their flocks. They will also serve, who only stand and bait.[[15]](#footnote-15)

But the terms of the bargain, in this 2016 election cycle, have done more than change. The bargain does not, if Trump’s candidacy is indicative of the direction of the Republican Party, any longer exist.

The Lower Class Electorate Issue Era that preceded this was, by the 1960s, unabashedly a period devoted to securing equal civil rights for the most oppressed in our society, focusing primarily on African-Americans. While this policy issue was not as obvious in the beginning of the Electorate Issue Era, in 1945, the inertia within a political system to advance the interests of its weakest members should not be underestimated. (It does not seem surprising that the issues of the wealthy elite should have so quickly led to a president and policies in 1980; only consider Schlesinger’s arguments on the natural advantage of the wealthy elite, on that score.)

Nevertheless, the next presidential election after 1945 is instructive. The election of 1948 has been given a lot of attention by realignment theorists. Some commentators in the media have suggested this election, in fact, was the last time there was a primary season as split ideologically as the present one. The Democratic Party became split into three different camps, a left, right and center, with candidates from each of these three branches choosing to run in the general election. Strom Thurmond ended up running on the segregationist States’ Rights (Dixiecrat) ticket, while former vice president Henry A. Wallace took some of the liberal left to the new Progressive Party. This happened when the Democrats actually had an incumbent president, Harry S. Truman, who won his party’s nomination as the moderate, but who was expected to fail miserably in the general election because of this disarray. That Thurmond ran on a segregationist platform suggests a defensive maneuver against a growing interest in racial justice.

On the Republican side of this 1948 election we had Thomas Dewey, who had been the establishment Republican candidate also in the 1944 election. Robert Taft, leader of the party’s conservative wing, ran against him in the 1948 primaries. Governor Earl Warren of California also ran, who was extremely popular with both Democrats and Republicans in his own state, and would go on to usher in the most liberal Supreme Court era we have yet seen, as Chief Justice. Warren, along with another governor, chose to follow the older tradition of not actively campaigning across the country. The most surprising aspect of this Republican nominating process was when Harold Stassen, a liberal governor who was dismissed as totally inconsequential, won the first primary in Wisconsin, followed by the primary in Nebraska, becoming the frontrunner to the disbelief of all concerned. In the end, Dewey became the nominee. But if we look at just the popular vote totals during this nomination process, we find Earl Warren leading with over 771,000 votes, Harold Stassen with over 627,000 coming in second, Robert Taft coming in at more than 464,000 votes, and Thomas Dewey only coming in 4th with the people of the nation, at a total approaching 331,000. Dewey garnered less than half of the votes of Warren, who hadn’t even bothered to campaign.

As we look at a Republican field in the current election where the establishment candidates have all trailed miserably, the unexpected leader for the nomination has been a wealthy celebrity who has bounced around between parties, only settling on the Republican Party in 2012, and who as late as 2015 stated he considered Bill Clinton the best recent president. His ideological positions on even such positions as abortion, previously considered a litmus test for any Republican candidate, has switched around and his lack of familiarity with the Bible seems not to worry evangelicals; there is not a pundit or political scientist who would have picked him as the frontrunner a year ago. Both Trump and Sanders seem as surprised as anyone at their successes, and as with the 1948 primaries, the expected litmus tests for candidates have been upended, with the ideological positions of the establishment suddenly of no particular interest to the voting public. Or, perhaps it should be said, the established ideological or “issue” divide is no longer the one of consequence. As can be seen from the vote totals for the Republican nomination of 1948, this doesn’t necessarily translate into providing a general election candidate in line with the interests of the people. If Warren had become the nominee, which clearly was the will of the majority of the voters, then we would almost certainly have had a Warren presidency, given the closeness of the general election where Truman eked out a win over Dewey. Imagine the public policies that might have resulted under Earl Warren, who within months of arriving on the Supreme Court secured a 9-0 decision for *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, requiring integration in schools, and whose impact on the Court otherwise is known primarily for landmark decisions protecting the rights of the accused—surely the most underprivileged group in our society. What might he have done to advance the interests of our lowest classes, the most oppressed in our society, had he become president in 1948?

Truman’s win over Dewey did not produce a profound shift in public policies favoring the lower class. Even so, while the shift in issue dominance may not seem as readily apparent—at least in comparison to the dramatic protests and public policies of the 1960s—it is nevertheless from this point onward that we see signs of the new issue divide focused on justice for the poor and oppressed. In a speech to Congress in 1945, President Harry Truman said, "Every segment of our population, and every individual, has a right to expect from his government a fair deal." Truman formed a committee on civil rights in 1946. Their 1947 report, *To Secure These Rights* said the federal government should use its authority to end segregation, to make lynching a federal offense, to eliminate the poll taxes that discouraged blacks from voting, and to create a Commission on Civil Rights. Truman called for the implementation of these recommendations in his State of the Union addresses in 1947 and 1948. He issued Executive Orders to ban segregation in the military and to guarantee fair employment practices in the civil service. Despite the dramatic indications in the 1948 election of a population dissatisfied with establishment politics, the coalition FDR had formed with labor and with the left largely remained in place, as unions continued to be supported more strongly by Democrats than by the Republican Party, if far less energetically. A realigning coalition—and not only with labor—by the time of a re-election campaign for a Republican Earl Warren presidency, however, might have easily been visible. Because it was the Democratic Party, and not the Republican Party, that became the party supporting African-American rights, traditional expectations about realignment were confounded, due to the way the Democratic Party was being used in the South as a way to repress African-American voting. The issue preferences of the national party were completely at odds with the issue preferences of the Democratic Party in the South. The establishment in the South of essentially a one-party system ensured that the new electorate issue would gain absolutely no traction or accommodation in the region. Split party voting by Southerners allowed them to vote according to their stance on the second-class citizenship of African-Americans. This was entirely consistent with the schizophrenic differences within the party, itself. Voters can hardly be blamed for not having strong party identification, if the party platform pushed by the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party was at odds with the “platforms” of local Democrats elected to office. Southern Democrats in Congress, having no desire to lose their seniority and leadership on committees, took their time in joining Republican ranks. But a realignment of the parties over the changed electorate issue did take place over this period, even if not through a single critical election.

Our next era encompassing a different Electorate Issue Cycle, going backwards, ran from 1913-1945, and favored the issues of the working class. We again see indications of profound change through examining voter behavior in an election of about that time.

In 1912, Republican Teddy Roosevelt ran as the ProgressiveParty nominee. He won 27.4% of the popular vote, carrying six states for 88 electoral votes, becoming the most successful third party candidate in American history. Teddy Roosevelt, of course, had already served two terms as president, from 1901-1909, after coming to office as a result of the assassination of President McKinley—not because the establishment was comfortable with him as president. The establishment had given him that position because they thought that he might be a spoiler in the election of their desired candidate in the 1900 election (he was a popular war hero), so he was offered the powerless position of vice president. So Roosevelt’s rise to president in 1901 was not, as far as one can tell, the result of an electorate issue shift, but luck. The policies Roosevelt wanted to advance, when he was unexpectedly thrust into the presidency, involved offering a “Square Deal” to the average citizen and breaking up the trusts. Like Bernie Sanders, he railed against the large corporations controlling the country. This was, of course, prior to the period when we would anticipate a shift from upper class to working class rule. While Teddy Roosevelt was effective at breaking up trusts, his proposals to raise taxes fell on deaf ears; the Congress actually lowered taxes during his time in office.

When Teddy Roosevelt left office in 1909, he believed that William Howard Taft would fight for his Progressive agenda, but by 1911 was attacking him for continuing “the guiding principles of the Gilded Age.” Roosevelt ran against Taft for the Republican Party nomination. Roosevelt’s platform was “to see the wage-worker, the small producer, the ordinary consumer, shall get their fair share of the benefit of business prosperity.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The party saw Roosevelt as a dangerous radical and Taft said that “because of his hold upon the less intelligent voters and the discontented” he was the most dangerous man in American history, and if he won there would be “a forced division of property, and that means socialism.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Roosevelt ran against Taft for the Republican Party nomination, dominating the primaries where he won 278 of the 362 delegates. He won 9 of the 12 states, 8 by landslides, while Taft won only Massachusetts by a small margin, and Senator Robert M. La Follette, a reformer, won the other two states. Roosevelt had 411 delegates, Taft had 367, with 540 needed to secure a win. The remaining delegates were chosen through state or district conventions controlled by party bosses, leading to the RNC awarding 235 of these to Taft and just 19 to Roosevelt. Roosevelt protested that lawfully elected delegates had been stolen, to no avail. Denied the nomination, Roosevelt founded the Progressive Party. Their primary interest was in dissolving what they saw as the alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics, calling for strict requirements on political campaign contributions, the registration of lobbyists, a federal income tax, a tax on inheritance, primary elections, a minimum wage for women and social security. All very similar to the things we are hearing today from Bernie Sanders. All things that were only prevented from becoming part of the national agenda, at this point where working class issue dominance was desired by the electorate, because of the obstruction of the Republican Party establishment in allowing its’ members to choose their preferred candidate for president. Teddy Roosevelt ran the most successful third-party campaign in history, but this split within the Republican Party led to the Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, coming into office. One member of the Republican establishment stated that “We can’t elect Taft and we must do anything to elect Wilson so as to defeat Roosevelt.” [[18]](#footnote-18) It seems not unlikely that there will be Republicans counseling people to vote for Hillary Clinton, should Trump and Clinton be the nominees.

It is also during this transitional period that we see the rise of the Socialist Party of America. While third-party national campaigns have proven out-of-reach even when mounted by candidates with an enormous pre-existing following, the temper of the nation and the policy preferences of the people may often be better understood through looking at local politics. Prior to 1909, two mayors were elected under the banner of the Socialist Party of America. In 1911, the Socialist Party of America elected 74 mayors to office. Between 1912 and 1917 an additional 91 Socialist Party mayors were elected. Eugene V. Debs got 6% of the vote in his best election total, in 1912. The same year in which Berkeley & Pasadena in California, Milwaukee in Wisconsin and Flint, Michigan were among the cities then being run by a Socialist Party mayor.[[19]](#footnote-19) It seems likely that almost all political scientists would have predicted a year ago that a candidate proudly declaring himself a Democratic Socialist would never stand a chance at getting nominated by the Democratic Party. This provides some insight, I think, into why they were wrong.

Under Wilson, we actually do see progressive policies passed that would not be matched again until FDR’s New Deal. This legislation included the Clayton Antitrust Act (anti corporation), the Federal Farm Loan Act (pro middle class), and the Adamson Act which imposed an 8-hour workday for railroads (pro worker). But lest you think Wilson is looking a lot like Bernie Sanders, we find also with this president the scapegoating of African-Americans, similar to Trump’s appeal. Woodrow Wilson praised the movie “Birth of a Nation” when it came out in 1915. During his time in office he re-segregated the federal government for the first time since Reconstruction. The hatred for minorities can be seen even more clearly in the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan, following the movie. The Klan’s influence in politics was pervasive in both state and local politics throughout the nation, though particularly in the South and Midwest. There were areas where 40% of all white, Protestant native-born males were members. Across the country, 15% of all males who weren’t among the targeted groups were members of the KKK in the 1920s.[[20]](#footnote-20)

A working class agenda focused on providing security for the working class, instead of targets for anger, may have begun in a limited sense at this point in the national government, but it was almost by default. A champion of those progressive ideals was desired by the public, but obstruction within his own Republican Party had kept that champion from the 1912 nomination. Moving past the second term of Wilson—an advantage of incumbency that has been common throughout the 20th century, suppressing voter shifts—we come to the election of 1920. This was when it was expected that Teddy Roosevelt would regain the Republican nomination and lead the country to break up the banks and prevent Wall Street from falling off the cliff that it went on to do in 1929, to the detriment of the country and the world. Most progressives had rejoined the Republican Party by 1920, planning to vote for Teddy Roosevelt, who was the overwhelming favorite for the nomination. The political history of this country, and possibly the world, changed, when Roosevelt died suddenly in 1919. The entrenched establishment chose their nominee, Harding, on what has become known as the night of the “smoke-filled room” at the Republican convention. The issue preferences of the electorate continued to be thwarted throughout the 1920s, and it was only as a result of the precipitating crisis of the Crash of 1929 that we finally saw the critical realignment of 1932.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The period of 1880-1912 was an era where the electorate issue favored was the economic advancement of the upper class. This period in America, historically, is known best as the time of the Second Industrial Revolution, usually dated as beginning in 1870 and ending in 1914.

The driver of the “obscene” wealth that we find in today’s “billionaire class” has been both Wall Street and economic production. The period since about 1980 has been named by some as the Third Industrial Revolution, with the invention of venture capitalism creating companies like Apple and Fed Ex, and the growth of and consolidation of massive corporations, and “too big to fail” banks, with CEOs and investment bankers paid enormous salaries. In 1978, CEOs made about 35 times the pay of the average worker in their company. In 2001, they made over 500 times the average worker’s pay. The same conditions were occurring at the end of the 19th century, when a new class of hugely wealthy people, who became known as “captains of industry” or later, “robber barons,” came into being. These included John D. Rockefeller, a founder of Standard Oil, who bought up oil refineries until he had almost complete control of oil production in the U.S. His net worth peaked in 1913 at $900 million, equivalent to more than 2% of the U.S. Gross National Product, a share that would equal about $190 billion today. (Almost twice what Michael Bloomberg, who not long ago was considering entering the presidential race as a third party candidate, is worth.) J. Pierpont Morgan, financier and banker, in 1912[[22]](#footnote-22) was found by a subcommittee of Congress to have a dominant interest in 100 companies with assets of over $22 billion. One economic historian has described him as “the greatest financial power in the history of the world.” The 5,000 richest families in the United States today are those with over $100 million in assets. (The Clintons have approximately $111 million, so qualify as part of this group who are part of the richest .01%.) Average income today is $50,756. This is roughly comparable to what was true a century ago, when the average income in 1912 was $592, and the 1910 count of millionaires in the U.S. was 5,000.[[23]](#footnote-23)

This period should have begun at about the time of the election of 1880. Periods centered on economic benefits to the wealthy elite are not always dramatic departures from the past, but this was further complicated by the impact of the aftermath of the Civil War. Ulysses S. Grant served two terms from 1869-1877, during which he continued to try to implement Congressional Reconstruction. The election of 1877, which featured a great amount of repression of the African-American vote in southern states, and additional questionable conduct elsewhere, left the Democrat, Samuel Tilden, in the lead by 19 electoral votes, but with 20 electoral votes still disputed. What I think is instructive here is how this was resolved. Congress agreed to end Reconstruction in what is called the Compromise of 1877, in exchange for having all 20 of the disputed votes given to Rutherford B. Hayes. The passion that Congress had previously displayed for implementing civil rights for African Americans was abandoned.

The aim of the Hayes Administration and those that followed was centered on how to benefit business. Using tariffs to protect domestic manufacturing from foreign businesses and arguing over whether currency should be backed by gold took center stage. The election of 1884, brought in Grover Cleveland, who would win the popular vote, over the course of his career three times, in 1884, 1888 (when he lost in the Electoral College), and 1892. Cleveland was the leader of the Bourbon Democrats, that branch of the Democrats committed to fiscal conservatism in support of business. During this period, Democratic and Republican candidates were considered largely indistinguishable in their platforms. The Realigning Election of 1896 ushered in William McKinley, and Republicans gained control of the government. McKinley continued in the same vein of promoting American industry. It was in the election of 1896 that the Democratic Party began expressing anti-business sentiments; and it was from this point onward that it lost elections. As I indicated before, the ease by which the upper class gain their agenda interests in the government is hardly surprising, given their easy access to the corridors of power, when compared to the difficulties facing working and lower class constituencies. Thus the realigning election, despite its consolidation of power within a single party, was not critical to bringing about the policies favoring the upper class, which began a few years before our expectation of the change to this issue agenda.

The Electorate Issue Era of 1848-1880 focused on the most oppressed members of our society: slaves.

The change can be first seen in the platforms of the 1844 election. In the 1840 election, just as today, there were political differences between the north and the south. Slavery was not, however, an issue of any particular concern in presidential contests or in party planks in 1840. The 1844 presidential election, however, was suddenly bristling with questions about slavery, and the balance of power between the slave and non-slave states. This can be attributed, in part, to the annexation of Texas, but to assume that was the only reason for this change is hard to credit. Was there truly some outsized economic advantage for the north to justify its trying to get rid of slavery, and to fear that Texas would profit from it, or would share economic interests with cotton-growing states? In the previous decade, abolitionists traveling in both the south *and the north* had been met with ridicule, derision, and even death. Why did the cause of slavery, despite the best efforts of abolitionists, find no takers despite having been eliminated in the north, until the 1840s?

A new anti-slavery Liberty party was founded in 1840. That year, it pulled less than 7,000 votes in the presidential election, but in 1844, it received over 62,000 votes, for a total of 2.3% of the popular vote. When we get to the 1848 election, which is when we anticipate the issue change to go into full effect, we find a three-way race with Zachary Taylor of the Whig Party against Martin Van Buren of the Free Soil Party, and Lewis Cass of the Democratic Party. The Free Soil Party was a single-issue party with its leadership the anti-slavery party composed of former members of the Whig and Democratic parties. The party was successful enough to send two senators and fourteen representatives to Congress in 1849. Their presidential nominee, Van Buren, received over 291,000 in the general election—far more than the anti-slavery Liberty Party had garnered during its short life. The Whig Party collapsed after the following election of 1852, because of the tensions that had suddenly emerged in the last decade over slavery. It was replaced by the new Republican Party, founded in 1854 by anti-slavery activists. The election of 1860 is regarded as the realigning election of this period, not surprisingly, as this brought Lincoln into office on the Republican ticket, and led to the Civil War, and unsurprisingly Republican Party domination. The issue dominance focused on improving political rights for the lower class led to government policies that ended slavery and gave African-American men the vote.

The period from 1815 to 1847 is one where the electorate issue was focused on the interests of the working class. This one does not begin with the election of 1816, but it should be remembered that the working class did not yet have the vote. Because each state handled this differently, there is no one date that signals the removal of property qualifications for white male voting. New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, North Carolina, Delaware, Virginia and Connecticut all modified their voting requirements toward allowing greater participation of working class white males between 1818 and 1850. While the purview of this paper does not include looking at how policies within state legislatures reflect the electorate issue changes, this obviously fits in with the thesis of an Electorate Issue Cycle affecting government policy. In 1812, presidential electors were chosen by the state legislatures in half of the states. In 1824 this had changed to just one quarter of the state legislatures. By 1832, South Carolina was the only state that hadn’t changed to a system of choosing the presidential electors through a popular vote. But it doesn’t take until 1832 to see the effect this change had in the ability of the working man to express his issue preferences in presidential elections.

The first sign of this in presidential electoral politics came in 1824. Andrew Jackson acquired the most electoral votes of any candidate, but he did not have enough to avoid having the election thrown to the House of Representatives, which selected John Quincy Adams. Adams was the epitome of an establishment candidate, wealthy since birth, the son of a former president[[24]](#footnote-24) highly intelligent and extremely accomplished in the area of foreign policy, fluent in several languages, having gone on a diplomatic mission to Russia at age 14, negotiated a treaty with Sweden at 15, and at 18 returned to the United States to attend Harvard.

We may see a similar impediment to issue electoral change if superdelegates determine the Democratic candidate in the current election cycle, favoring Hillary Clinton with her law degree, foreign affairs credentials, wealth, and membership in the Clinton political dynasty. But perhaps even more striking is the similarity to plans of the Republican establishment, if the rules allow, to pick a different candidate than Trump at the Republican convention, one who, most likely, would not have even run for the nomination. The reason the Republican establishment is so concerned about Trump seems not to be primarily because of his xenophobia, misogyny, bullying character, or narcissism, but because his policy positions do not align with the free market conservatism that has come to be their defining ideology for so long. They will actively work to ensure that the populist, ignorant candidate, who will tarnish the party with his lack of refinement and put an end to the ideology it stands for*,* is stopped at all costs. We saw this very thing happen to Teddy Roosevelt, as well, at the Republican convention, when he was denied the nomination despite his overwhelming popular support among Republican voters, where establishment Republicans decided they would much prefer that they not win the presidency (knowing he would run as a third party candidate) than risk his changing the ideology of the party to reflect his progressive ideas. (If Teddy Roosevelt had succeeded, the Republican Party would almost certainly be the party of the left today, and the Democratic Party of the right.)

Andrew Jackson in 1824 was a popular Indian fighter—a general who had won numerous battles to drive Native Americans off of their land. His exploits may have been nearly as entertaining to follow in the press as listening to Donald Trump proclaim “You’re fired!” on his television show. As with the “authenticity” that has been talked about with both Sanders and Trump in our current campaign season, Jackson was regarded as one of the people. In 1828, in a realigning election, he became our first president to be born in a log cabin. The time period from 1828 to 1850 is called the Jacksonian Era, even though Andrew Jackson was only president for the first eight years, because the politics that came into play beginning with his election lingered on. This period is seen as ushering in the “rise of the common man.”

The platform that Jackson campaigned on was a promised to oppose the American aristocracy—the “speculative class”—and the corruption he said these elites had brought to the White House. The “laboring classes” deserved equal opportunity to benefit from government. Jackson also said that he would get rid of the National Bank which he claimed had been constructed to support rich stockholders and rich borrowers. (A platform resembling Teddy Roosevelt’s and Sanders, as well as having been coopted to a certain extent by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.)

While Jackson did, indeed, destroy the National Bank, he and those who followed during this working class issue era, also gave the country the demonizing of minorities that we have seen in the rhetoric of Trump and several other Republicans vying for the nomination.

Andrew Jackson as president pursued an anti-Native American agenda, securing the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. It was his actions that led to his successor’s forcible removal of the Cherokee in 1838, along the Trail of Tears, on which thousands of Cherokee died during the forced march from their lands.[[25]](#footnote-25) We have heard similarly xenophobic suggestions coming from Donald Trump, with his enthusiasm for a wall to keep out Mexican “rapists,” and his talk of banning all Muslims from traveling within the United States.

It is perhaps instructive, given our current election cycle, to talk a little more about some of the characteristics of Jackson’s 1828 campaign and presidency.

The intensity of the enthusiasm by many in the electorate for Jackson had never been seen before. Noah Webster wrote of Jackson’s inauguration day that, “A monstrous crowd of people is in the city. I never saw anything like it before. Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger.” Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story wrote that at the reception that followed the inauguration, the president “was visited by immense crowds of all sorts of people, from the highest and most polished, down to the most vulgar and gross in the nation. I never saw such a mixture. The reign of King MOB seemed triumphant.” The shift in the popular mood was as incomprehensible to these members of the establishment in 1828, as they are in 2016, where we have seen massive crowds turning out for both Sanders and Trump, with political commentators bemusedly confounded at what they are seeing.

Jackson was the first president to claim that he was the direct representative of the American people. Or to paraphrase Bernie Sanders: it’s not about me, it’s about us. Jackson is seen as one of America’s great presidents, because he expanded the power of the executive branch. This expansion of presidential power appears to be a usual feature of working class issue eras. “King Andrew” was an epithet used to describe Jackson by his political opponents, because they questioned his authority to destroy the bank and remove from office cabinet secretaries; these could have been offices that were as inviolate as the members of the Supreme Court, but because of Jackson, they are not. During this issue era in the 20th century, Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson both expanded presidential powers, with FDR going the furthest in the transformation to the modern “imperial presidency,” where public policy is made not in the Legislative Branch, as specified by the Constitution, but in the Executive Branch. Just as these working class issue eras tend toward governments that are more monarchical in their operation,[[26]](#footnote-26) we see a corresponding move toward more oligarchic rule during periods favoring the upper class (as Picketty and others have suggested occurred over the last 40 years), as well as increased democratic elements in policy decisions that take place in lower class issue eras.

There were several other developments in political parties over this period in the 19th century which are indicative of working class interests overturning the interests of the upper class. In 1826, our nation’s first third party was organized: the Anti-Masons. The Anti-Masons believed that Freemasons were a wealthy elite who controlled the country, favoring other Masons over the common people. This is the central theme of the 2016 campaign that has overnight gained immense popularity. It is Sanders’ central platform: to stop the “billionaire class” from having their policy preferences enacted in our government, a fight he has been championing for 25 years in Congress without ever before gaining any attention, outside of Vermont. But we have also seen Donald Trump taking up this suggestion, accusing his opponents of being in the pocket of special interests, unlike himself, because he is too rich to be bought.

Beginning in 1828, though their presence may not show up significantly in presidential electoral politics, additional new parties were being formed that for the first time promoted working class interests. The Philadelphia Workers’ Party was founded in 1828 and the New York Workingmen’s Party started the following year, with other cities also sprouting parties for the working man. The Philadelphia party put 20 of its candidates into office in its first year. The *Working Man’s Advocate* was the newspaper that was the voice of these workers’ parties — it was in circulation from 1829 to 1845. The issues “workies” concerned themselves with included universal male suffrage, a 10-hour workday, free public education, and greater financial security for the working classes. In the 2016 nomination process within the Democratic Party, free public education—college education—is a key component of Sanders’ campaign.

The period before the Jacksonian Era, from 1783-1815, is when we expect to see public policies favoring economic benefits for a wealthy elite. Since this precedes our first presidential election, I will simply comment on the evidence that policies and the economic atmosphere of the period suggest that this was very much in line with a period serving the interests of a wealthy upper class.

The Federalist agenda is generally acknowledged as one focused on serving the economic interests of northern businessmen. The anti-Federalists are more often characterized as preferring a less powerful national government, but this tends to obscure that “less government” at the national level may simply mean wealthy elites find their interests better met through state governments. The anti-Federalists were very much a party of the wealthy elite who controlled the South. The difference lay more in the basis of their wealth – one a landed aristocracy based on slavery, another mercantile, and later factory owning. Economic policies benefitting one group often harmed the other. The interests of the wealthy elite in modern America are no longer generally divided along geographic lines.

While it may seem only natural that a new country would of necessity involve itself in new economic enterprises, the initial plan of the Articles of Federation would not have led us to a National Bank (the one that Jackson destroyed) and a single currency. (Which we have seen, in this last upper class issue era, coming about in Europe, with the European Union and the euro.) I won’t go into all of the ways in which the National Bank was useful to business interests, except to say that it made the U.S. attractive to foreign investors and made it easier for businesses to transfer money between states. Its volume of deposits, loans and transfers made it the largest single enterprise in the United States at the time. Tariffs between the states were eliminated in this period, encouraging free trade. Businesses that previously couldn’t be competitive in neighboring states with tariffs now had an incentive to put more capital into their operations to increase production.

This was the period of the First Industrial Revolution,[[27]](#footnote-27) which historians consider ran in the U.S. from about 1790 to 1830. Our first stock exchanges were formed, capital in the National Bank went from 3 million to 137 million, and manufactures from 5.6 million to 52.8 million. Commerce and manufacturing made money for upper class northerners, and the invention of the cotton gin combined with the institution of slavery to make money for southern plantation owners, as cotton production went from 3-6 million pounds in 1790 to over 300 million pounds by 1820.

I think it suffices to say that the Revolutionary War period that preceded this one, in which we expect to see some interest in political equality for the oppressed,[[28]](#footnote-28) was the one which gave the world its first large-scale democracy, beginning with a manifesto, *The Declaration of Independence,* whose second paragraph begins, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” What we see is a rebellion against a government that imposes a second-class citizenship upon citizens within its colonies. This period realigned the country into two camps—those on the side of the establishment Tory government, continuing to bow to the rule of the British monarchy without representation, and those on the side of a a revolution to acquire equal rights for those denied them. The political lines drawn within the states clearly shifted at this time to embrace a new ideology that was either for the maintenance of this unrepresentative establishment or against it. This seems consistent with the issue agendas and the political rights fought for in the Civil War and the civil rights movement in the centuries that followed.

**Conclusions**

What I have suggested in this paper is an accompaniment to the theory or realigning electoral cycles. I introduce a complimentary theory of Electorate Issue Cycles, signaling when the electorate’s policy interests change, which may or may not be immediately accompanied by critical realigning elections. In this paper, I have first argued for the utility of such a theory in explaining both the evidence for regularly recurring cycles in voter behavior, and the apparent failure after the 1930s to produce critical elections at the anticipated times comparable to earlier elections. I have then gone on to argue that these periods are approximately 32.5 years in length, and I have chosen not to vary these dates, but to assume that they remain fairly firm, providing us with specific elections to examine for evidence of this change in electorate issue preference, policies, as well as external evidence of issue change. I have found evidence using this formula indicating these periods can be characterized as promoting policies favoring the different classes in our society, each in turn, following a repeating three-part cycle.

The Electorate Issue Cycle suggests an explanation for the rise of Trump and Sanders in the Republican and Democratic primaries of 2016. It has become increasingly clear to all observers that these two are generating enormous excitement among working class voters. Their followers line up hours in advance of their rallies, in numbers far outpacing those attracted to the campaigns of their opponents. Bernie Sanders has financed his campaign entirely through contributions from these enthusiastic supporters. Each spreads a message that resonates with members of the working class and each is described as authentic, or “telling it like it is,” by his followers. The evidence of earlier eras focusing on the working class suggests that until approximately 2042, the policies suggested by these candidates will continue to resonate with voters, and are likely to realign the parties around the two issue positions that Trump and Sanders represent: one party based on securing economic and social benefits for the working class through taxing the rich, the other party blaming the lack of economic and social benefits on minorities and foreigners. While the Sanders campaign may not be able to overcome the forces of the establishment on the left, the Trump campaign seems unlikely to be denied the nomination by the forces of the establishment on the right. This theory predicts that unless both parties manage to block their anti-establishment candidates from running under their banners, one of these two will be elected the next president. If that person is Donald Trump, as the first to frame what the new working class agenda will be in our national politics, then what the United States might become during the next three decades is a terrible thing to contemplate.

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1. Donald M. Freeman, p. 31 in William J. Crotty, ed. (1991). *Political Science: The Theory and Practice of Political Science.* Northwestern University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Crotty, p. 32, quoting Ellis Sandoz at the Caucus, as reported in George J. Graham and George W. Carey, eds. (1972). *The Post-Behavioral Era: Perspectives on Political Science.* NY: David McKay, p. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Perestroika Movement has failed, in my opinion, to do more than protest quantitative research. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Walter Dean Burnham in Byron E. Shafter, ed. (1991). *The End of Realignment? Interpreting American Electoral Eras.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 128-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Debbie Wasserman Schultz in a February 11, 2016 interview on “The Lead with Jake Tapper,” *CNN.* Retrieved from *YouTube* on March 14, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RawGr83DxpE> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The findings of the Tyndall Report, tracking the nightly news on NBC, CBS and ABC, looked at the total amount of air time given to the various candidates for president over all of 2015, leaving aside debate coverage. The most egregious example demonstrating the difficulty Sanders had to overcome as a complete unknown within the Democratic Party attempting to win the presidency is that ABC *World News Tonight* devoted 261 minutes to campaign coverage and only about 20 seconds of that time was devoted to the campaign of Bernie Sanders. (December 11, 2015) *Media Matters.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John Hudak (Feb 21, 2016). “If Clinton wins in November, she’ll have Sanders to thank.” Retrieved March 14, 2016. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/fixgov/posts/2016/02/21-after-nevada-sanders-still-important-hudak> Nicole Gaudiano (Oct 8, 2015). Bernie Sanders’ success may be pushing Hillary Clinton to the left.” *USA Today.* Michael Kaplan (March 1, 2016). How Bernie Sanders changed Hillary Clinton: Despite Super Tuesday loss, did Socialist candidate win?” *International Business Times.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I have split the difference between historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.’s 33-year cycle, who in highlighting the dates of half-cycles, has proven remarkably perspicacious in his predictions of the left or right lean of late 20th century elections, and the observations of realignment theorists in political science suggesting a 32-year cycle (Rosenoff, p.58). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Candidates during periods when the electorate issue supports the working class tend to do better when the person uses the language of the working class to express themselves, or resembles them in their history, dress, etc. Admiration for the class that dominates commonly reveals itself in the entire society taking on the fashions of that class; as when jeans became popular during a lower class issue era, and designer clothing in an upper class one. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Mark Levin interviews Donald Trump – Nov 11, 2015.” <http://www.donaldtrump2016online.com/2015/11/mark-levin-interviews-donald-trump-nov.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Because the Electorate Issue Cycle that I am describing is not actually tied to elections, but largely revealed by elections, it is not bound to American politics alone, or even to elections, though the ability to discern patterns in countries that do not hold fair elections, or are from earlier periods of history, is made more difficult. My observations suggest, so far, that it is likely that all nations participate in these cycles, but that they have not all participated in them in tandem. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This is also the date which the Schlesingers identified as the beginning of a half-cycle, and which my own unpublished research in 2007 had already suggested to me would produce this change. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I have not added in additional elections that have been suggested as realigning or dealigning because of a lack of consensus, though dates in the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s have been suggested by various political scientists. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Theodore Rosenof (2003). *Realignment: The Theory That Changed the Way We Think about American Politics.* NY: Rowman & Littlefield, p. xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Walter Dean Burnham and Thomas Ferguson (Dec 18, 2014). “Americans are sick to death of both parties: Why our politics is in worse shape than we thought.” *Alternet.org* Retrieved March 6, 2016 from<http://www.alternet.org/americans-are-sick-death-both-parties-why-our-politics-worse-shape-we-thought> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Lewis L. Gould (August 2008). “1912 Republican Convention: Return of the Rough Rider.” *Smithsonian Magazine.* Retrieved on March 11, 2016. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/1912-republican-convention-855607/?no-ist> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. James Weinstein (1967). The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925. NY: Monthly Review Press. Reprinted in 1969 by Random House, pp. 116-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Shawn Lay (2005). “Ku Klux Klan in the Twentieth Century.” *The New Georgia Encyclopedia,* as referenced in “Ku Klux Klan.” *Wikipedia.* Retrieved March 14, 2016. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ku_Klux_Klan> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The restlessness of the working class during this period can perhaps best be seen by looking at strikes. In 2005, our last era where the interests of the upper class dominated, there were 22 strikes in this country that involved more than 100 workers. In 1919, there were 3,630 strikes across the U.S. affecting over 4 million workers. The 1920s were filled with massive strikes, but it was only with the Great Depression and FDR’s New Deal that working class issues were finally addressed in government policies. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Notice how the date is 1912, which was when the issue agenda during the election cycle decidedly indicated a shift away from corporate interests, even if it was not as rigorously applied in the political sphere, as it would have been under Teddy Roosevelt. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Kevin Phillips (1990). *The Politics of Rich and Poor.* NY: Random House, Appendix A. Clarence D. Long, (1960) *NBER: Wages and Earnings in the U.S., 1860-1890*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Consider the success of George W. Bush in 2000, during an issue era favoring the upper class oligarchy, as contrasted to Jeb’s abject failure in the 2016 nominating process, when conditions were no longer as favorable for the selection of a member of the upper class political aristocracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Minorities with different customs, religions, and languages are invariably seen as a threat during these eras when working class issues are ascendant. While lower class issues tend to focus on individual political egalitarianism, and upper class issues on corporate economic elitism, working class issues seem to favor group social “security” or “identification.” Identification as a member of the working class intensifies, but also identification with other social constructs, whose purity is threatened by outside influences. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. David Brooks of the New York Times, in a recent interview, said that Trump “represents a more authoritarian-style, and as political scientists have pointed out that the number one trait that correlates with Trump supporters is authoritarian belief in the structure of power. And so he represents something fundamentally new.” “NPR: Opinion: Week in Politics: Super Tuesday, GOP Rift.” (March 4, 2016). *All Things Considered.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. My research indicates that cycles prior to about 1800 were longer: approximately 44.5 years. Nations where we saw a confluence of industrial revolutions, communication revolutions, and increased democracy were the first to adopt the shorter 32.5 year issue cycle, while many other nations have only changed to the shorter cycle more recently, or possibly have yet to do so. For this and other reasons, even though it seems likely that all nations have these cycles, it is clear that all have not been in the same issue cycle at the same time. Russia, for example, until about the time of Gorbachev had a different class’s issue agenda dominating their politics than those of other major nations, most likely making it far more difficult for our policy analysts to comprehend their internal politics and concerns. Interestingly, when nations do embrace the global economy, we seem to see issue preferences synchronize with those nations that preceded them. Identifying which countries are not yet synchronized with leading Western democracies like our own can be difficult, especially when colonialism and interventionist politics come into play. During the Arab Spring, there were some nations that easily threw out despotic wealthy rulers who were unconcerned with job security for the working class. Those that did so through peaceful middle class demonstrations suggest the emergence of working class issue dominance. However, several nations in the region, where civil wars have resulted, are likely tied to lower class issue dominance, because prolonged violence is a common feature of lower class issue eras. Interventionist policies and the presence of neighbors where the issues of the working class dominate can spill across porous borders. Working class periods historically have tended to favor intense religious awakenings, so the rise of ISIS in countries with working class agendas and their ability to take their recruits into a neighboring nation ravaged by a civil war of the lower class against a despot, may partially explain the very different path we have seen in Syria. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The Revolutionary War, more than the other two similar issue eras, was clearly not about simply rights for the lower classes. This is one of the reasons why I have described the issue agendas as ones that tend toward having *the result* of benefitting a particular class, but without suggesting that these consequences are intentional, when they may merely be the by-product of other causes. It seems worth noting that this period produced an anti-slavery movement among Quakers and Calvinists in the north, beginning about 1758. Between 1774 and 1786, almost all of the states made the importation of slaves illegal. (Georgia would hold out until 1798.) Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and Benjamin Rush were Founding Fathers who wrote essays against slavery or headed anti-slavery societies in the 1770s and 1780s. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)