**The challenge for democrats**

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Several economic, social, and political issues are important to the November midterm elections, but fundamentally the elections are about which party and candidate voters feel cares most about them and have solutions that address their most basic needs. Considering this, shockwaves should have gone through Democratic Party circles when Republican Senator Lindsay Graham crowed that while Democrats have become the “party of elites,” Republicans have become the “party of the working class.” Unfortunately, his comments largely were ignored.

Graham’s observations would be more accurate had he added “white” before working-class. Polls show that Democrats consistently out-perform Republicans among wealthier and college-educated Americans, and win strong majorities of Black, Latino, and Asian voters. Republicans receive strong support among whites without a college degree and with lower incomes. It’s a perverse inversion of the class conflict that once defined the two parties’ relationship. Democrats proudly proclaimed themselves the party of working people, organized labor, and ethnic immigrants who had come to America seeking opportunity and freedom. For decades, the Democratic Party embraced them, organizing a powerful voting bloc that won elections at all levels of government. Meanwhile, Republicans were the party of big business and small government, promoting free trade, fighting against unions, and working to reduce taxes, government spending, and regulation of business practices.

[Death toll from Indonesia football riot, stampede jumps to 174](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Oct-2022/death-toll-from-indonesia-football-riot-stampede-jumps-to-174)

How is the Republican Party with its principles of small government, less taxes, and deregulation, now winning support from the very working-class voters who need public services, a fair tax system, and health and safety protections? Race is the flippant answer, but also contains an element of truth. The unrest accompanying the civil rights movement created a white backlash that Republicans have callously exploited since Nixon. Preying on poorer whites’ resentments and insecurities, and without offering solutions, they still won much of their support.

During the 1960s and 1970s’ political and cultural upheavals, patriotism, traditional sexual mores, and gender roles, and the foundational myths of our history were all challenged in necessary, but nevertheless unsettling ways. Democrats correctly embraced these causes, but oftentimes in a manner that ignored the needs and concerns of white working-class voters. Democrats became the party of many social and cultural causes, while Republicans became the party exploiting the fears of white voters who felt ignored and victimized by these “causes.” A recent study showed that in 1996 counties that were “85% white and earned less than the national median income split evenly between Democrat Bill Clinton and Republican Robert Dole. In 2016, such counties went 658 for Donald Trump and two for Hillary Clinton.”

[Former finance minister Miftah Ismail terms decrease in petrol prices 'reckless' decision](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Oct-2022/former-finance-minister-miftah-ismail-terms-decrease-in-petrol-prices-reckless-decision)

Democrats have lost touch with white ethnic voters and pursued their own version of “either-or” politics—speaking to liberal “elites” and their “base,” but ignoring or insulting others. White working-class voters have lost jobs, seen their values called into question, and felt the “American Dream” now beyond reach. The issue isn’t race, per se, but rather feelings of abandonment and vulnerability, enabling Republicans to exploit race, immigration, or cultural change as reminders of their fear of being left behind by Democrats.

Donald Trump inherited these white voters after decades of Democrats’ neglect, stoking their fears and pledging to bring back jobs and restore the dream of prosperity while having no intention or plan to fulfill his promises. In office, he pursued policies detrimental to their’ needs, but retained their support. They believe Trump understands their anger and loss of control to economic, social, and political forces that leave them powerless. Trump’s appeal remains strong because he personifies their frustrations and aspirations. His victory was their victory; his defeat became their defeat. Trump’s clones, now running for office, continue his message and carry his mantle.

[Islamabad lawyers' body slams Imran Khan for attitude towards Judge Zeba Chaudhry](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Oct-2022/islamabad-lawyers-body-slams-imran-khan-for-attitude-towards-judge-zeba-chaudhry)

The challenge for Democrats is to recognize that this is bigger than Trump—and more than the social and cultural issues upon which they base their midterm strategies. They must fight for racial justice, women’s rights, immigration reform, and equity for the LGBTQ community. But their approach can’t be “either-or.” They must translate these issues to white working-class voters, making clear that their concerns are also central to the party’s agenda. Only an inclusive message and program can end the politics of polarization and demonstrate Democrats’ commitment to representing all Americans’ aspirations.