

# MuckrakersBulletin

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by providing some otherwise missing background information.*

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MEXICO.*

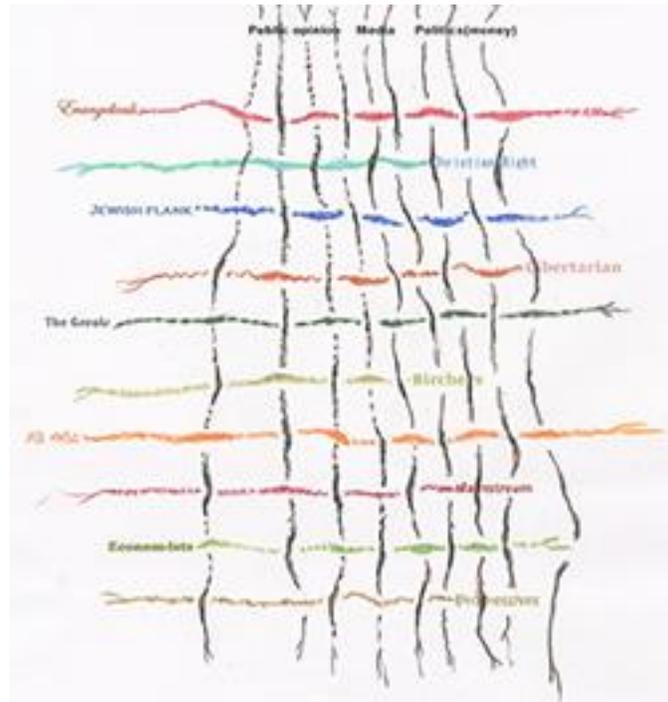
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## Right Thinking



### As we see it:

- Discussions about which ideas and people constituted the bloc that voted for Donald Trump. Our project here is different.
- We undertook to explore the thinking on “the right” in the USA.
- Like everyone, we casually refer to “the right” as if it were easily identifiable and cohesive groups of people and/or ideas.
- We found that “the right” is no less fractured than “the left”.
- Spokespeople and critics do speak in the name of “the right”. Grand narratives (e.g. “make America great again”) are the bread and butter of politics and media. They imply at least a coalition if not a basic agreement. There is almost unlimited financing for “the right” in all its many variants.
- At a surface level, then, it is quite possible to create something that looks and sometimes acts as a cohesive and powerful bloc, something reasonably called “the right”.
- Of interest in this Bulletin is what lies beneath. We wanted to understand who and what is out there.
- For us, “the right” includes those who self-identify as such. We provide only a sampling of the various stands, drawing a picture of their ideas mainly from their own sources.



### The religious strands:

#### *Evangelicals:*

- *Evangelicals* think of the world as a truly sinful place, one that is headed soon for a fall. People are sinful and wayward, but individuals can redeem themselves and be forgiven through personal belief and commitment to Jesus.

It is not surprising that Donald Trump is supported by *Evangelicals*. In the *Evangelical* code, *all* sins can be forgiven and *all* people can come into a “state of grace” no matter how heinous their sins.

- Belief is central. All thinking is strictly governed by reference to a single text, the Bible, considered to be divinely-given. Only the Bible offers explanations and prescription for behavior. Every piece of evidence, action, political position and prescription is supported by reference to the Bible. This counts as being evidence-driven.
- Emphasis is on the personal, not the social. Only those redeemed are “chosen”. However, *Evangelicals* proselytize. So while *Evangelicals* have traditionally not been engaged in politics, *Evangelicals* believe they have a mission to bring each and all individuals into their community of believers. This community of believers is the center-piece of their identity, not allegiance to country or political party.
- The *Evangelical* community is made of many groups. Nothing in the core beliefs of *Evangelicalism* dictates racism, nativism, denigration of the poor, or mistrust of the state. However, some **but not all** *Evangelicals* are fundamentalist, and research suggests that 80% of fundamentalists embrace prejudice.
- For all, gender/sexual issues are seen through the prism of the Bible.
- People are seen to be responsible for their own welfare, meaning their own salvation as well as their own economic well-being.
- Most *Evangelicals* strongly support Israel.
- Jimmy Carter, George W Bush and Mike Pence are/were *Evangelicals*. Trump is deeply committed to advancing their cause, although not an *Evangelical* himself. *Evangelicals* see him as having delivered politically.



### Christian Right:

- The relatively recent origins of the *Christian right* (it gained steam about 1990) lie in a court case about the funding and tax status of private/religious schools. The “enemy” was (and remains) the IRS and its policy makers, especially the US federal government.
- Easily a political bridge was built between **some** *Evangelicals* and the more authoritarian side of the Catholic Church. Abortion was their common cause. It became center-piece of their political rhetoric. For the *Evangelicals*, abortion (and birth control) serve as a prime example of the sinful state of the world. For

the Catholic Church, these issues serve as a bright line separating the Catholic Church from its adherents of liberation theology and its North American equivalents.

- From its amalgam of some *Evangelicals* with the Catholic Church, the *Christian Right* also picks up views toward gender and sexual issues (everything from definitions of marriage, for example), proselytizing, and respect for hierarchy and authority.
- The *Christian Right* is characterized by a cluster of different but interlocking views, with one exception: christianity.
- Christianity (however understood differently within the *Christian Right*) defines the common identity (“we are Christians”), and thus easily lends itself to nativism and even supremacist views.
- A common emphasis on self-reliance and mistrust of government supports a strong belief in the value of accumulation of wealth.
- At its core, the *Christian Right* is a political grouping. Its spokespeople have included Barry Goldwater, Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell and Sarah Palin.



### **JEWISH FLANK:**

- The cluster of issues uniting some *Evangelicals* and the *Christian Right* includes the notions that individuals are responsible for their own welfare (regardless of the inequality that results) and that government is the enemy (particularly the tax system). Thus, it should not be surprising when a cluster of people and groups identifying with Judaism joins political forces with *Evangelicals* and, even in some cases, with the *Christian Right*.
- The *Jewish flank* and the *Evangelicals* share an unbending commitment to Israel. The *Jewish flank* is politically engaged as is the *Christian Right*.
- That there should be something akin to nativism within the *Jewish flank* is not surprising as nativism resonates with some strains of Judaic thought. Nativism easily shades into racism, and in some cases, shades further into white supremacy. Israeli politics today feed back into the picture.

- However, the *Evangelicals*, *Christian Right* and *Jewish flank* do not necessarily share views on gender and sexual issues. With some exceptions, the *Jewish flank* is also unlikely to think of an impending crisis or the sinful state of society.
- Primary allegiance to Israel helped spawned *Commentary*, first a vaguely “left” and later a publication of “the right”, some of whose founding members (Kristol, Howe, Podhoretz) had roots in Trotskyist or Communist politics.
- A few *Jewish flank* supporters are readily observable as spokespeople and financial supporters of “the right”, e.g. Adelson (but not the Koch brothers, who are Catholic or the Mercers). Needless to say, many Jews and congregations are not wealthy donors, but also constitute part of the *Jewish flank*.



### The anti-statist Strands:

#### Libertarian:

- Had Ayn Rand not written such engrossing novels, *libertarianism* (which has long existed) might not have achieved such a mainstream presence. True, Ron Paul proudly calls himself a *libertarian* but his influence (and the influence of expressly *libertarian* groups and institutions) is historically been on the lighter side in formal politics.
- If they are true to Rand’s philosophy, *libertarians* see morality (and the best of modern society) as derived from an assertive individualism, an individualism that equates both value and intelligence with the capacity to generate business and especially personal wealth.
- That those who profess allegiance to Ayn Rand are hostile to state intervention and not likely to favour interventionist policies should be obvious. That they are deeply unsympathetic to inequality, to the poor or to anyone or group which is socially and economically disadvantaged goes almost without saying. Affirmative action is immoral! Immigration must be curtailed because it brings precisely such people to the USA.
- What confuses the picture is the fact that Ayn Rand was fiercely atheist, and a strong supporter of abortion rights, while many who profess commitment to Ayn Rand’s approach are anything but.

- Major political figures – Justice Clarence Thomas, Paul Ryan, Ted Cruz, Alan Greenspan, and perhaps Goldwater and Reagan before them - are or have been fans of Ayn Rand, and thus *libertarian* in some sense. Ayn Rand is considered a major inspiration for the Tea Party.
- There is another element to the *libertarian* strand, this one less associated with individuals and formal politics but much more influential. It is found among the early proponents of the Internet, in opposition to any form of Internet regulation today and, strangely enough, in proponents and sometimes the participants of the gig-economy.
- What unites this disparate group is an ethos. The ethos is strongly individualist. It is against any government involvement that has an impact on individual decision-making, and it is inherently pro-capitalist.
- On other issues, such as abortion, militarism etc. there is little agreement. Because this variant of *libertarianism* is an ethos, such differences do not matter.
- The *libertarian* ethos has so permeated society to the extent that now it is barely recognized as a distinct viewpoint.



### **Trumpkin:**

- Some Trump influences come from “west coast Straussians” who seek to provide intellectual foundations for today’s politics by harking back to the philosopher and classical scholar, Leo Strauss.
- The *trumpkin* approach is best understood as a reaction to traditional conservatism (i.e. conservatism before Trump) and to a reading of the failures of the Weimar Republic in Germany between the wars.
- The US Declaration of Independence is crucial to this way of thinking, with its theological bent and its reference to the Founders’ vision for America. The Declaration offers a solid and enduring set of values that must serve as the foundation for “American greatness”.
- This foundation for “American greatness” has been undermined by political correctness, procedural fetishism (over-regard for due process), and the growth of

the administrative state, all of which now reach each into every corner of American life. They create a crisis and destroy the potential and the original vision of American greatness.

- Economics and social science have unjustly overwhelmed politics. The lessons of classical philosophy and morality have lost out to so called expertise and “progressive liberalism”. The result is felt on the streets (drugs, crime etc.), in the sorry state of schooling, and by the newly disadvantaged (the old working class). It is evidenced by the rise of a drug-soaked, morally ambivalent culture.
- The crisis is cataclysmic, not something to be ameliorated by halfway measures. It demands a wholesale re-writing of virtually all policies and all governing institutions now associated with the past (including conservative policies but especially remnants of the New Deal and policies enacted by the Obama administration) and thus associated with decline.
- If it would take a benevolent authority to deliver significant relief from the crisis, so be it. The so called will of the people must be harnessed to the overthrow of corrupt and intellectually bankrupt elites and the regime they have created.
- At its core, this approach is openly nativist. Its idealization of the **pre-**administrative state of the US, it lends itself easily to support of white sovereignty, vigilantism and so called family values. The goal is a rupture with the past decades of more or less liberal or hesitatingly conservative governance. As such, in foreign policy, this approach is isolationist at times, interventionist at others.
- Harry Jaffe and Claremont College, Hillsdale College, even Newt Gingrich and a website called *American Greatness* are among the key proponents, but so too is Justice Clarence Thomas (included among libertarians, above).



### Birchers:

- Historically and today, *birchers* (who may or may not be members of the John Birch Society) are among the strongest proponents of an anti-government stance. Ironically, there were decades when it was commonplace for members of the John Birch Society to be closely aligned (if not the same people) as local and regional governments throughout the USA.
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- *Birchers* always have been opposed to inter-governmental, international initiatives however. The UN and all its agencies, all trade agreements, the Civil Rights Act and any gun control measures are viewed with a vitriolic disdain.
- The tenor of *bircher* talk is conspiratorial, so that even the most seemingly neutral sounding descriptions of institutions and events are seen as indications of governance being forced upon individuals.
- *Birchers* today claim that they are neither anti-Semitic nor racist, and note that the John Birch Society today counts Jews among its members. Obviously, it is hard to square such declarations with the historical record. Even today, *birchers* are proudly ethnocentrically nativist, often supremacists and hold up the notion of a Christian society as an ideal. *Birchers* are also likely to be isolationist in terms of foreign policy, strongly anti-immigration and hugely patriotic.
- In the decades pre-Trump, the influence of *birchers* is said to have declined. That said, Ted Cruz and some other Republicans are said to be at least sympathetic to *birchers*, and membership in the John Birch Society has grown substantially since 2016.



### *Alt right:*

- The *alt-right* is a term of political rhetoric, a label not a description of a particular point of view.
- Under this label can be found a disparate collection of both individuals and groups who espouse strongly anti-government views, white supremacy, populism, and anti-Semitism. It has been claimed that there are affinities between the so called *alt right* and a few strands of the alt left.
- Some called *alt right* advocate violence, some hold anarchist aspirations, some subscribe to a far-reaching libertarianism. Some are simply “(young) rebels without a cause”. There are few reliable estimates of the size of the *alt-right* (for obvious reasons)
- Steve Bannon, and separately *Breitbart News*, are often said to be the voice of the *alt-right*. A better way to put it might be that both, each in their own way, provide a platform for some **but not all** of disparate views that fall under the label of the *alt-right*.



## The old right strands:

### Mainstream:

- To the extent that the *mainstream right* is rooted in anti-communism, hostility to any over-reach of the state is not surprising. Similarly, any control imposed on thought, speech or on the accumulation of wealth is opposed.
- The *mainstream right* is not libertarian, nor is it anti-government *per se*. It favours trade, free trade and globalization, all involving governments and all are seen as wealth generators.
- In the past, the *mainstream right* hearkened back to an older form of conservatism with its valorization of tradition, classics, civic institutions, religion, social order, and conventional morality but few of these preoccupations are prominent in its rhetoric or publications today.
- The *mainstream right* is seen by some others on “the right” as being part of eastern establishment elites, and thus is opposed by those who align with *the trumpkins* (see above).
- Interestingly, many in the *mainstream right* wanted little to do with Trump, some even mounting a concerted opposition. Today, the *mainstream right* waivers between supporting “the many important things Trump has accomplished” (unweaving of liberal policies, tax cuts etc) and decrying others (budget deficits, trade wars, nativism shading into white supremacy etc.). It sees it sees itself as very pragmatic.
- About gender/sexual issues, the primary concern of the *mainstream right* is political correctness not a particular viewpoint, say on abortion.
- Originally, this strand of the *mainstream right* had a strong taint of anti-Semitism, but the *National Review* editors never aligned themselves with the John Birch Society, considering it too extreme and pro-violent. In recent years, *the mainstream right* claims to have abandoned anti-Semitism and denounced racism, although it favours strong controls on immigration.
- The *mainstream right* values academic expertise; it is not populist.
- William Buckley was a founding leader of the *mainstream right* including *The National Review* and also Young Americans for Freedom. The *mainstream right*

has always been solidly Republican, though increasingly it has squeezed out adherents of the *progressive right* (see below) and moved closer to other groups (e.g. the *Christian right*) in recent years.



### **Econom-ists:**

- Initially, many from the *economic right* dismissed Trump. Today, they exert a strong (but not overwhelming) influence on current policies.
- The goal of the *economic right* is the promotion and valorization of unfettered wealth accumulation by corporations and individuals. Freedom (from regulation) is necessary to achieve this goal.
- Social, religious, gender/sexual issues do not figure heavily (or at all) into the *economic right*. Indeed, one might be surprised to find some from the *economic right* taking up issues that are more commonly associated with *progressive right* such as criminal justice reform.
- Although other strains of “the right” advocate military engagement and global expansion and integration of capitalism, the *economic right* is their strongest proponent. These are globalists to the core, and would call themselves realists.
- They also think of themselves as promoting democracy (throughout the world) and anti-corruption, both of which are seen to be strongly associated with economic development (defined in capitalism terms). This orientation puts them at odds with the Trump government.
- The *economic right* is neither populist nor anti-intellectual.
- Only some adherents have a strongly anti-immigrant bias. Their view seems to be less based on explicit racism than on a sense of what is needed to promote economic interests. Similarly, only some support militarism.
- The Koch Bros. and the Mercers (among others) are strongly aligned with the *economic right*, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Foundation and many other “think tanks”, foundations and major organizations.



## Progressives:

- If we think of “progressive” as being concerned about inequality and disadvantage in all its forms, and as seeking at least a modicum of redistribution of wealth and/or power, there are certainly progressive thinkers on “the right”.
- The *progressive right* is strongly anti-Trump. It is not nativist. It is divided in its views on gender/sexual issues.
- It thinks of itself as patriotic, but supports capitalism’s globalist initiatives as creating wealth and social benefits for both rich and poor countries.
- The *progressive right* does not support militarism. It opposes the drift towards authoritarianism in the US and elsewhere. It decries US support for authoritarian regimes.
- Many among the *progressive right* espouse the so called conservative values of tradition and stability. Many conceive of politics as properly having a moral basis. The *progressive right* has, however, an incremental approach to politics.
- Ross Douhat, David Brooks, and The *Economist* are examples of the *progressive right*.



## Summing up:

- Fundamentalism can be found along a continuum within almost all of the strands of “the right”. The fanatically fundamentalist are at one extreme, often espousing extreme measures even violence as a means of achieving their ends.
- Nativism is also found on a continuum within all strands: Nativism ranges from the implicitly racist and vaguely patriotic on one end of the continuum to the overtly supremacist on the other.
- We define militarism as being support for tough law and order regimes, for a stronger military and for no or little gun control. Support for militarism ranges along a continuum in each strand too.
- There are “hawks” within each strand of “the right” (and of “the left”, interestingly), again arranged along a continuum from “doves” to the mildest

“hawk” to the most extreme. Support for regime change in other countries is also found along a continuum.

- The differences between the various strands of “the right” are significant. However, we emphasize again that there are many conditions where a seemingly coherent whole can be woven to act through the media and/or political realm or in favour of a single specific issue. That many people are inattentive to the details of politics (for good reasons and bad) is not insignificant.
- Individuals, groups, institutions, and indeed Trump may draw (even “cherry pick”) from one, some or all of these strands of thinking (and others) without thinking of themselves as being inconsistent.