

The 2016 Presidential Election
Jack Kurzweil (with thanks to Matthew Hallinan)
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The arc of the 2016 Presidential Election, the primaries, the conventions, and the November election can be viewed through the lens of popular uprisings against the establishments in both the Democratic and Republican Parties. Directed from the left against the banks, the corporations and economic inequality, these same concerns were demagogically mixed with racism, nativism, and misogyny on the right.

Donald Trump defeated the Republican establishment, but eventually brought most of them back into his fold. But his popular vote was not substantially different than the Republican votes in 2008 and 2012.

Bernie Sanders challenged the Democratic establishment to address issues of income inequality and economic dignity. The unexpected breadth of his support should have been a positive signal to the Democratic establishment.

Hillary Clinton, commanding support from communities of color and women but also recognized to be a figure of the Democratic and Wall Street establishment, failed to sufficiently channel the progressive energy of the Sanders campaign. This was due in part to her historical support of “politics as usual” and in part to pure, albeit sometimes covert sexism on the part of voters who were not going to tolerate a woman president. Her vote was 9 million less than Obama’s 2008 vote and 4 million less than his 2012 vote.

This is the political background against which the structural peculiarity of the Electoral College translated a real but modest popular vote majority for Clinton into an election victory for Trump.

The pivotal question for progressives and for the Democratic Party is why the Democratic vote went down so much and what has to be done to restore that overwhelming majority.

Barack Obama won a hard fought battle to become President, a battle that was carried by the promise of what he represented – a new hope, change, a new era for America. Confronted with the Bush economic disaster, Obama passed the Affordable Care Act, the stimulus, and Dodd – Frank bank re-regulation. This trajectory ended with the Republican sweep of 2010. The remaining Democrats in the House were more progressive as the centrists were swept away. By virtue of the emergence of the Tea Party, Republicans in Congress turned to the right. Government became stalemated.

And then along came Trump, channeling the depth of anger on the Right, anger fueled by racism, nativism, and misogyny. He also articulated the anger of many white

working class voters at not only being left behind by the new economy but also disrespected by the establishments of both parties. Feeling disrespected can lead people into powerful anger and action.

That switch in white working class votes may have turned the corner for Trump in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. In either of the first two, had Jill Stein's votes gone to Clinton, those states would have turned Democratic and we would now have President Clinton. Just saying.

I suggest that the more systemic question for Progressives is why the Democratic vote grew by 10,000,000 from 2004 to 2008 and then shrank by 9,000,000 in eight years.

Some of this shrinkage, particularly in the South, is undoubtedly a consequence of the 2013 gutting of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court and the systematic disenfranchisement of African American voters. The Democratic Party seems to have been asleep at the switch.

But more generally, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that Hillary Clinton's politics and program and the Democratic Party organization that supported her were simply inadequate to the task of motivating people to register and vote.

She was arguing for a continuation of the Obama era, with no new uplifting vision of a better future, even though the whole mood of the country was for change. She had no populist credibility; she was seen as the essence of establishment; she could not recover from decades of vilification. Despite the historic nature of her candidacy, a whole lot of working people and young people just walked away.

So now we're dealing with President Trump from the vantage point of California, an overwhelmingly Democratic State. And I suggest that we should prepare ourselves for resistance, for the organization of alternatives to reactionary policy, and for regrouping for the 2018 Congressional and 2020 Presidential Elections.

So here is a very incomplete – and not original – list of thoughts.

1. Should Trump initiate mass deportations of immigrants, every decent minded section of society needs to be organized to engage in political and street action to prevent each and every local, county, and state police force from cooperating, even at the potential cost of a loss of Federal Aid.

2. The predictable escalation of Trump inspired hate crimes and police violence needs to be repudiated by the broadest sections of society. An open season on African American, Latino, and LGBTQ brothers and sisters is not to be tolerated.

3. If the Affordable Care Act is gutted, the broadest section of politics and civil society needs to challenge and persuade the California Legislature and the Governor to take up the slack so that all Californians have proper health care.

4. California's role as climate leader is now a matter of existential importance. The California Legislature needs to be pressured to adopt, and all regulatory bodies in the state to implement, the fastest and strongest possible programs to combat global warming.

5. The California Democratic Party needs to be convinced to support the proposal from Senators Charles Schumer and Harry Reid that Congressman Keith Ellison become head of the Democratic National Committee.

6. Our Senators have to be encouraged with our love (even if you don't like some of the things that they have done or not done) to filibuster right wing nominees to the Supreme Court and not give up, just as John McCain promised to do if Hillary Clinton became president. They meant it, and so should the Democrats.

7. Our Democratic Representatives and Senators have to be pushed to continue to advance progressive taxation and broad infrastructure programs, sticking it to the Republicans on a day-by-day basis and **giving us the political basis for registering new voters, bringing them to the polls, and defeating Republican incumbents in 2018 and 2020**. Progressive initiative got rid of Richard Pombo in 2010. That can be done again in California, Nevada, and Arizona.

8. There needs to be organized expression from all quarters of the progressive movements that the opening to Cuba, the Iran Nuclear deal, the climate action agreements, and the auditing of the Pentagon Budget need to be supported and that military intervention in Syria needs to be opposed.

9. Finally, the left and progressives have really got to learn to love this country and convey that love in our politics. Yes, we continue to learn about the historic injustice and crimes as well as the struggles to right those wrongs. But if that's our story, it will fall on deaf ears as we organize outside of comfort zone.

Ours is an intensely patriotic country. Rejecting that patriotism and starting from anger is exhausting, limiting, and ends up with a left that largely speaks to itself. So progressives need to figure out how to love this place that we're in. Our lives depend on it.

Act locally. Be connected nationally. Build a new politics.

Recent Presidential votes:

2000	Bush	50,456,002
	Gore	50,999,897
2004	Bush	62,040,610
	Kerry	59,028,444
2008	McCain	59,948,323
	Obama	69,498,516
2012	Romney	60,933,504
	Obama	65,915,795
2016	(final count yet to be determined)	
	Trump	60,961,185
	Clinton	61,963,234