

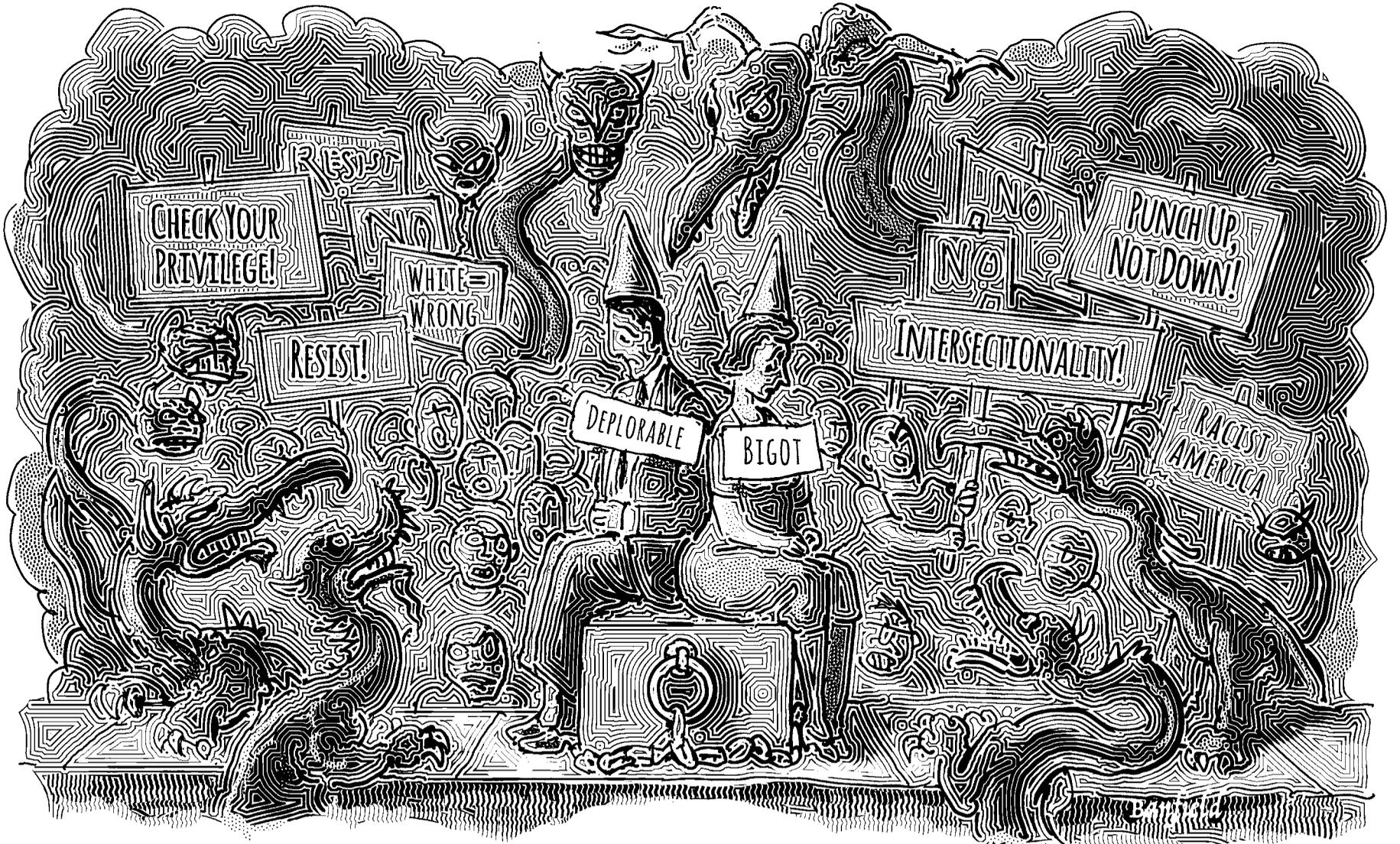
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Book Review by Andrew E. Busch

WHY TRUMP WON

The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump, by Alan I. Abramowitz.
Yale University Press, 216 pages, \$35

The Great Revolt: Inside the Populist Coalition Reshaping American Politics, by Salena Zito and Brad Todd.
Crown Forum, 320 pages, \$28



DONALD TRUMP'S UNEXPECTED VICTORY in 2016 left most pundits scrambling to answer "why." Political scientist Alan Abramowitz's *The Great Alignment* and journalist Salena Zito and Republican political consultant Brad Todd's *The Great Revolt* offer distinct approaches to that question.

Abramowitz provides a long-term portrait of the American electorate's evolution from the New Deal to the present, relying heavily on survey data (mostly from the American National Election Studies [ANES] series from 1952 through 2016). "[T]he central underlying reality of American electoral politics," he posits, is that "today's electorate is strongly partisan because it is deeply divided along

racial, ideological, and cultural lines." These cleavages are mostly reinforcing, leading to much stronger levels of partisanship—both in the electorate and in governing institutions—than existed 50 years ago. Starker demographic division has led to starker geographic division as voter ticket-splitting has declined, causing states and counties to be more likely, and repeatedly, won by the same party, and by lopsided margins.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN REPUBLICANS and Democrats have intensified in each of the three dimensions. Racially, while the percentage of nonwhite Republicans increased slightly from 1976 to 2012, the percentage of nonwhite Democrats grew

from 15% to 45%. Ideologically, the average Republican voter has become significantly more conservative, and the average Democratic voter significantly more liberal, since 1972. Self-described liberals comprised 29% of self-described Democrats in 1972 and 47% in 2012; self-described conservatives were 46% of Republicans in 1972 and 76% in 2012. Culturally, there was virtually no difference in Republicans' and Democrats' church-going habits in 1972; by 2012, Republicans were nearly three times more likely to be religiously observant than Democrats.

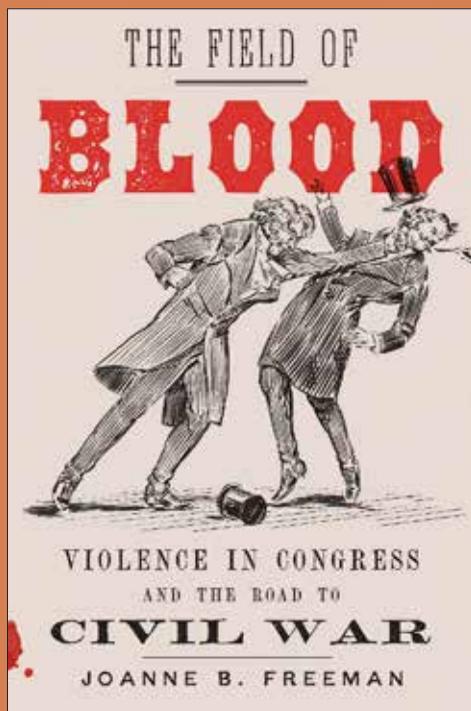
Abramowitz believes this multifaceted increase in political division has led to "affective polarization" and "negative partisanship." Voters today are more likely to dislike the oth-

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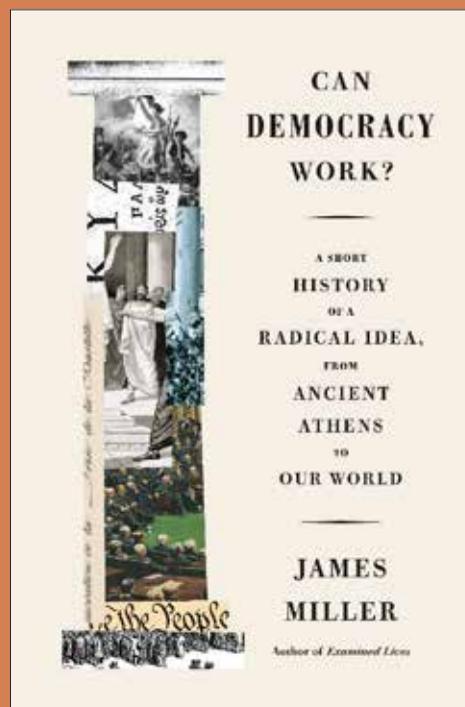
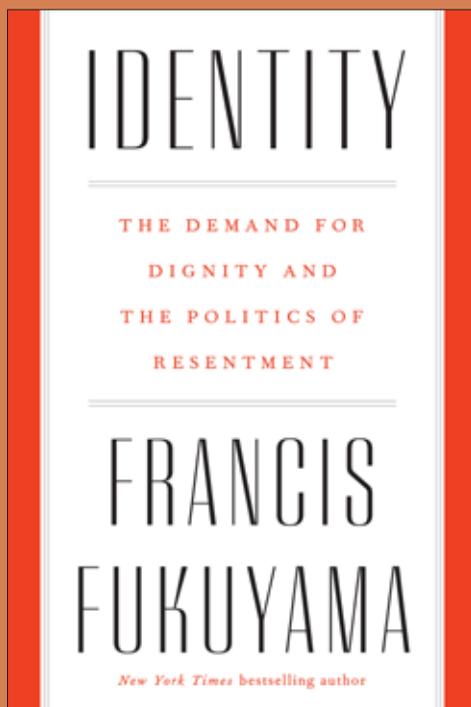
—*Publishers Weekly*

“Thought-provoking and timely.”

—Brendan Driscoll, *Booklist*

“A cogent analysis of dire threats to democracy.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*



“This is a bold, eloquent, and utterly convincing history of what democracy has meant and should mean—from the Assembly of ancient Greece to the anti-Trump resistance. James Miller has produced one of the wisest reflections on the glories and limits of popular rule I have ever read.”

—Michael Kazin, author of *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*

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er party intensely than they are to like their own party or party's candidates intensely. The nationalization of elections has been both cause and effect of this polarization.

At its best, *The Great Alignment* provides a concise historical review of how we got to this moment in American political development. Abramowitz shows how presidential, congressional, and even state elections have become closely intertwined, after being quite separate for decades. He also argues cogently that in 2016 Trump particularly benefitted from negative partisanship, insofar as "Republican elites, during and after the primaries, were far more divided than Democratic elites about their party's eventual nominee." The party's voters stuck with Trump out of deep antipathy toward Hillary Clinton, despite receiving mixed signals about him from other Republican leaders.

Abramowitz disagrees with Stanford political scientist Morris Fiorina that polarization is an elite phenomenon without mass resonance. Marshalling data showing the increasing ideological polarization of ordinary voters, Abramowitz concludes that "[t]here is no 'disconnect' between political elites and the American public: America is a polarized country whose leaders reflect the diverging priorities and values of the constituents who

elected them." Overall, *The Great Alignment* offers a portrait of political continuity. The coalition that elected Donald Trump was not radically different from the one that nearly elected Mitt Romney in 2012. Today's conflicts are a predictable extension of trends that had their origins several decades ago.

THE GREAT ALIGNMENT'S ANALYSIS suffers from some weaknesses. The author accepts too uncritically Brookings Institution scholar Thomas Mann's argument that ideological polarization is disproportionately found among Republicans. This analysis is based entirely on self-reported ideological identification scores, which depend powerfully on context. A gay marriage opponent in 1996 could easily have seen herself as moderate on the issue; in 2016, with a completely unchanged position on the issue, she might describe herself as conservative, because the environment had shifted so far to the left. A quick look at other domestic issues over that time period makes it difficult to argue that Republicans have actually changed more ideologically. Democrats, after all, went from welfare reform as a presidential imperative to "democratic socialism" as a popular approach, from the Defense of Marriage Act to forcing bakers to

make cakes for gay weddings, from abortion as "safe, legal, and rare" to merely "safe and legal," and from bolstering the death penalty to embracing Black Lives Matter. From 1996 to 2016, Republicans went from opposing government health care to opposing government health care, from shutting down the government to force spending cuts to shutting down the government to force spending cuts, and from opposing abortion and gay marriage to opposing abortion and gay marriage. Given that reality, it is reasonable to wonder whether the survey statistics fail to capture something important.

Another place Abramowitz's analysis is weak is in its treatment of race, which he holds to be the key to understanding Trump's victory. There were indeed instances during the 2016 campaign when Trump seemed to engage in forging a kind of white identity politics to counter the nonwhite identity politics long practiced by Democrats. But unsavory as this aspect of his rhetoric was, it is difficult to demonstrate that a decisive segment of voters was actually moved by it. Abramowitz has to stretch hard to do so, claiming as evidence things that do not prove what he says they do.

For example, he touts Republican voters' support for Trump's proposed deportation of illegal immigrants and ban on Muslim immi-



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gration as evidence of the importance of race. Islam, of course, is not a race but a religion and, for some, an ideology that dictates political attitudes and actions. And many voters oppose illegal immigration because it is, well, illegal. Elsewhere, Abramowitz argues that Trump voters were driven by “racial resentment,” though the battery of ANES questions used to define “resentment” may not indicate anything more than a refusal to accept the Left’s preferred race narrative. (One of the questions asks whether the respondent agrees with the statement “Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.” Agreement is defined as evidence of “racial resentment.”) The results Abramowitz cites may indicate merely that Trump rallied voters who were reacting against political correctness and racial double standards. Ultimately, there is one enormous difficulty with the racial interpretation of the 2016 election, unacknowledged by Abramowitz: Trump won the election largely because he won over a crucial subset of white working-class voters in Rust Belt states who had voted for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012.

TRUMP VOTERS IN SEVERAL KEY STATES that switched from Democrat to Republican in 2016 are the subject of *The Great Revolt*. A survey of 2,000 Rust Belt Trump voters serves as the book’s foundation, but its heart is interviews with 21 voters from ten counties that swung from Obama to Trump in Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The interviews identify several Trump voter archetypes.

“Red Blooded and Blue Collared” had suffered economic loss since 2009 and were attracted to Trump’s promise to restore manufacturing. “Perot-istas” were non-ideological independents who closely mirrored Ross Perot’s supporters from the 1990s. The “Rough Rebounders” were voters “who had experienced a setback in life and saw the same kind of vulnerability and recovery in Trump as they had experienced.” Women who supported Trump’s Second Amendment defense—a key, in their view, to self-defense and empowerment—represented “Girl Gun Power.” The “Rotary Reliabilities” were small businessmen and women—pillars of their communities—who somewhat reluctantly came to see Trump as the only logical choice in the general election. Similarly, the “King Cyrus Christians”

typically supported other candidates in the GOP primaries, but concluded Trump was the best hope for preserving religious liberty against the progressive onslaught. Finally, “Silent Suburban Moms,” though distraught by Trump’s reported (and self-reported) sexual hijinks, decided to take a chance on him—usually without telling their friends. This disparate coalition of enthusiasts and hesitant supporters allowed Trump to win in places like Macomb County, Michigan, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, and Ashtabula County, Ohio, the latter of which went from giving Obama 55% of its vote in 2012 to giving Trump 57% in 2016.

ZITO AND TODD MOVE BEYOND THE data to ask Trump voters what was on their minds. Neither approach—the quantitative nor the qualitative—offers a complete picture. And despite their methodological differences, Zito and Todd share some of Abramowitz’s analytical framework. Like Abramowitz, they appreciate that 2016 did not come from nowhere. The two studies also tend to agree that Trump voters represented, in the words of Zito and Todd, “a culture craving respect.”

Nonetheless, Zito and Todd’s interviews reveal some very different currents than those highlighted by Abramowitz. For one, they show a widespread appreciation for Trump’s relatively non-ideological approach, offering a counterpoint to Abramowitz’s description of American politics as increasingly ideological. Indeed, whereas the Tea Party and candidates like Ted Cruz incorporated outsiderism as part of their conservatism, Trump turned outsiderism into an alternative to ideology. Perhaps the rise of ideology described by Abramowitz created a demand for someone like Trump who—like Perot—promised results rather than ideology.

ZITO AND TODD’S INTERVIEWS ALSO provide little evidence that race was a driving factor, and much that Democratic extremism was. Several interviewees had voted twice for Obama, and they described their gradual disillusionment as economic troubles persisted and Obama proved wedded to extremely liberal social positions, an entitlement mentality, and an apologetic foreign policy. (In the survey of Rust Belt Trump voters, one in five voted for Obama at least once.) More generally, former Demo-

crats among them detailed their shift as they came to believe that the Democratic Party had abandoned their values of hard work and faith. Even if one wrongly assumes that support for a border wall invariably indicated racism, only 7% of survey respondents saw the wall as Trump’s most important campaign promise—far behind bringing back manufacturing jobs (34%), protecting Medicare and Social Security (30%), and putting conservative justices on the U.S. Supreme Court (28%).

Perhaps most significantly, whereas Abramowitz thinks Trump’s message divisive and dark, many of the interview respondents saw an element of optimism in their vote for Trump. As one put it, “Yes, we were angry, but we were and are hopeful, aspiring for a better life, a better town, a better country.” Even among those suffering the “Blue Collar Blues,” 84% said they were optimistic about their own career path or financial situation.

Many respondents recognized that coastal elites were puzzled by the 2016 results:

[W]e voted for ourselves and that is the thing they missed. That is the thing they still miss. I turn on the television and they talk about how [Trump] brags, or this or that about him, and they still don’t talk to us. They still don’t hear us. They still don’t get us. We are a part of America, too, and we are a part of America that wants to be part of something that takes everyone forward. Takes us all together.

Nearly all those interviewed in *The Great Revolt* maintain that the 2016 election was no fluke, and was about much more than Trump, whom many see as an imperfect vehicle. In their view, a broad movement is afoot—one called it an “awakening”—that will not be going away anytime soon, whatever the results in the 2018 or 2020 elections. That we are in a moment of conflict that seems fated to continue for the foreseeable future is something on which *The Great Revolt* and *The Great Alignment* can agree.

Andrew E. Busch is Crown Professor of Government at Claremont McKenna College, and the co-author (with James W. Ceaser and John J. Pitney, Jr.) of *Defying the Odds: The 2016 Elections and American Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield).

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