

Ruy Teixeira Seeks To 'De-Brahminize' the Left

 realclearpolitics.com/articles/2025/03/30/ruy_teixeira_seeks_to_de-brahminize_the_left_152574.html

Peter Berkowitz

COMMENTARY

Politics, as the cliché goes, makes strange bedfellows. This well-worn wisdom, however, seemed lost on devastated Democrats following the 2016 presidential elections.

They heaped scorn on Donald Trump and the voters who enabled the swaggering billionaire to eke out an upset victory – the difference was around 77,000 votes in three swing states – over Hillary Clinton. Democrats decried the working-class men and women who formed the backbone of Trump's support as deluded or hypocritical for supposing that the loud and proud New York City real estate tycoon could represent their concerns and advance their interests. Few were the progressives to whom it occurred that their signature convictions, attitudes, and policies had played a major role in driving millions of voters into Trump's camp.

In January 2020, three years into Trump's presidency, unemployment was low, wages were rising, and the stock market was soaring. No new wars had erupted. Both Special Counsel Robert Mueller's Russia collusion investigation and the House impeachment over a phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had failed to convict Trump of wrongdoing. The 45th president seemed well positioned to win a second term. But for the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic – the coronavirus likely leaked from the Chinese Communist Party-controlled Wuhan Institute of Virology – he might well have.

In November 2020, however, Trump lost to Joe Biden, but by an even narrower margin – 44,000 votes in three swing states – than lifted Trump above Clinton in 2016. Nevertheless, Trump's working-class support remained strong and, contrary to the myth that white supremacy explained his popularity, he increased his numbers among African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. The Biden administration, however, paid little heed to these electoral facts. Despite a narrow victory, it advanced a hard progressive agenda including a porous border, inflationary federal spending, and promotion of race-, gender-, and identity-based policies.

Democrats hoped that the four criminal indictments brought by Democratic Party prosecutors in 2023 would end Donald Trump's political career by putting him behind bars. Appointed by Biden administration Attorney General Merrick Garland, Special Counsel Jack Smith indicted Trump twice on federal charges – in Washington for trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election, and in Florida for mishandling classified documents and obstructing justice. New York City District Attorney Alvin Bragg indicted Trump for falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments to a former adult-entertainment star. And Fani Willis, district attorney of Fulton County in Georgia, indicted Trump for attempting to overturn the

2020 presidential election results in Georgia. Smith dropped both federal cases after the election. Bragg won a conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records before the election but in January 2025, Judge Juan Merchan granted Trump an unconditional discharge on all counts. And Willis' case, owing in part to her own shady dealings, is currently in limbo.

The Democrats' lawfare backfired. Instead of convincing voters of Trump's toxicity, progressive prosecutors and their sometimes farfetched legal theories reinforced the conviction among many – and not just Trump's base – that Democrats would rather abuse the criminal justice system than allow Trump to persuade American voters to return him to the White House.

In November 2024, Trump cruised to victory over Vice President Kamala Harris by winning all seven swing states. For the first time in three tries, he also won a plurality of the popular vote – 49.9% to Harris' 48.3%. However, for the third consecutive presidential election, more than 50% of the votes cast went to other candidates.

Democrats could not deny Trump's victory. But they could taint his return to the White House and obscure the reasons for it by denouncing the electorate as too racist and sexist to elect a non-white woman as president.

Ruy Teixeira believes that enough is enough with such self-delusion. A longtime denizen of D.C. and prominent progressive commentator, he maintains that Democrats wrongly blame the American people for their party's woes. The real cause, he contends, is the restricted appeal of the Democratic Party's signature convictions, attitudes, and policies. "The Democrats have become and remain today a "**Brahmin Left**' party" (emphasis in original), he wrote mid-month at The Liberal Patriot, a Substack newsletter that he co-founded and where he serves as political editor. Like many "Western left parties," Democrats are "increasingly bereft of working-class voters and increasingly dominated by highly educated voters and elites." Whereas in 1948 a sizeable majority of Democratic votes came from the working class, in 2024 – and especially since 2012 – a sizeable majority have come from university graduates.

In 2022, Teixeira parted ways with Washington's establishment left because of its "relentless focus on race, gender, and identity." Although he relocated from the Center for American Progress to the conservative American Enterprise Institute where he is a senior fellow, he did not turn right. He remained, he said at the time, a "social democrat" focused on "the economic system" and "class." However, his respect for the facts and sympathy for working-class concerns about inflation, decline of manufacturing jobs, immigration, DEI, and transgender ideology distinguish his thinking from much contemporary progressive orthodoxy.

Democrats' "Brahminization," Teixeira contends, "presents existential dangers to the party." Foremost among them is abandonment of ordinary Americans. "What does it even mean to be the 'progressive' party if the most educated and affluent voters are your most enthusiastic supporters?" Teixeira asks. "What does it mean to be 'progressive' if working-class voters think your party mostly represents the values and priorities of those educated and affluent voters not values and priorities?"

Teixeira recognizes the temptation "just to 'own' the Brahminization by (1) seeking to make up working-class losses with ever-increasing shares of educated voters (challenging since the college-educated are a much smaller group); and (2) redefining progressivism so that it centers around the cultural commitments of educated professionals and whatever economic program such voters feel comfortable supporting." Doubling down on what has thus far failed, however, won't work because "the electoral arithmetic of an all-in Brahmin Left strategy is very difficult, especially on a state-by-state basis, and Democrats still like to think of themselves as the party of the downtrodden rather than the political vehicle for America's educated class."

The proper option, according to Teixeira, is to "de-Brahminize a Brahmin Left party that's been evolving in the Brahmin direction for decades." Proclaiming itself "the tribune of the working class" won't suffice for the Democratic Party. Progressives must effect "a decisive break with the many Brahmin Left priorities that alienate the working class."

Democrats can learn from Republicans. "Just as Trump shook up the Republican Party and decisively changed its image and political base, Democrats need a political entrepreneur who will shake up the Democratic Party and decisively change its Brahmin Left trajectory," Teixeira advises. "That entrepreneur will have to be unafraid of the professional class blowback (accusations that you are racist, sexist, transphobic, a bigot, MAGA-lite, etc.) that will inevitably arise and aggressively push back against that class and its priorities."

The top priority, Teixeira counsels, is to repudiate the view of "social justice" beloved by educated elites, which focuses on group identity and group grievance, and concentrate instead on the kitchen-table issues that preoccupy working-class voters of diverse races and ethnicities. Progressives can do this, he argued at The Free Press last week, by embracing an "abundance agenda" that provides "more stuff people actually want, more of the time." The abundance agenda includes "steps to increase the supply of essential goods and services" and promotes "regulatory reform, efficient governance, and the rapid completion of public and private projects." While "Republicans and the center-right" have made these issues their own, "the supply of essential goods and services," transcends – or should transcend – partisan differences.

Even as he doubts the ability of the "actually existing Democratic Party" to adopt the abundance agenda, Teixeira overlooks the chief obstacle to reinvigorating progressivism, which is the nation's schools and, in particular, elite colleges and universities.

Often building on foundations laid in K-12 schools, the nation's most selective colleges and universities have for several decades resolutely cultivated illiberal and antidemocratic tendencies that mark the contemporary progressive sensibility. It is a sensibility that has been deprived of historical knowledge and cut off from the West's great literary, political, philosophical, and religious traditions. It is a sensibility disposed to vilify America. It is a sensibility that defines harmful speech as utterances and opinions that depart from progressive narratives. It is a sensibility that equates democracy with progressive priorities and fascism with opposition to them. And it is a sensibility that revels in its self-proclaimed righteousness, and which exhibits an intolerance and moral certitude that rival the zealotry that springs from other faiths.

The Democratic Party's signature convictions, attitudes, and policies, which have alienated America's multiracial and multiethnic working class, reflect the indoctrination that its most influential figures have undergone – and promulgated – at the nation's prestige universities. Progressives are unlikely to alter course until they recognize the character and costs of their miseducation and join conservatives in reforming American schools, colleges, and universities.

Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. From 2019 to 2021, he served as director of the Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. State Department. His writings are posted at [PeterBerkowitz.com](https://peterberkowitz.com) and he can be followed on X @BerkowitzPeter.