

Our Wisconsin Revolution: If the shoe doesn't fit

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Imagine if shoes came in only two sizes. Most people would have unhealthy relationships with their footwear. Many would go barefoot. There almost certainly would be a national shortage of podiatrists.

Thankfully, our shoes aren't like that. But our politics are. America has at least four distinct and incompatible factions shoehorned into two political parties. Leaving a whole lot of people feeling unrepresented and trapped in an unhealthy relationship with their own society, and leaving the parties increasingly fractured and on the verge of disintegration.

Our country has its **Old Money** faction. These Americans are economically privileged, socially conservative and politically elitist. They've had it good and want to keep it that way. They are open to some social change, but not too much and not too fast. They see democracy as mob rule and want political power kept in the hands of ruling elites.

America also has a **New Money** faction that is economically comfortable, socially liberal and politically bureaucratic. Members of this faction value fairness and are troubled by inequality, but their affluence makes them prone to prioritizing social causes over economic justice. As for governing, they favor cautious incrementalism. They believe in democratic institutions and are sticklers for process.

Then there is an **Old World** faction that is economically vulnerable, socially nostalgic and politically authoritarian. Its members used to be comfortably middle class but aren't anymore. They want to turn back the clock and return to what they consider the good old days. They are profoundly distrustful of governing elites but also drawn to powerful authority figures.

Finally, there is a **New World** faction made up of the economically exploited, socially countercultural and politically rebellious. They feel left out and held down, and want dramatic economic and social change. They challenge authority and want political power broadly shared.

All four factions are sizeable. The Old and New World factions are populist, the Old and New Money factions are establishment. While the two populist factions share many of the same economic grievances, one is authoritarian and the other anti-authoritarian, and they have irreconcilable differences on social issues. The two establishment factions are both economically advantaged but likewise have clashing socio-political values.

More or less aligned social views have the Old Money and Old World factions struggling to overcome vast economic differences and uncomfortably co-existing within the Republican Party while the New Money and New World factions are awkwardly sharing the Democratic Party. Looking at it through this lens, you can see why Donald Trump has such a grip on the Republican Party. Trump straddles two factions. He embodies Old Money while his nativist and autocratic populism appeals greatly to Old Worlders. But his embrace of white nationalism and the ongoing threat he poses to the GOP's hierarchy alarms the Old Money faction and is splitting the party apart. You also can see why tensions are so high on the Democratic side and why establishment Democrats have gone to great lengths to marginalize insurgents like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Each of America's four factions is different enough and large enough to be a party in its own right. Given current conditions, our country probably should have four major parties, not two. But we have a political set-up that rigorously enforces a two-party arrangement, which forces unnatural alliances that have an awful lot of people walking around in some mighty ill-fitting shoes.

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