The current demographic and social evolution toward diversity in the United States has played out alongside a trend toward greater economic and social inequality. These parallel but distinct developments are inextricably bound together. The entrance of the marginalized into the workplace, the commons, and the body politic—achieved through litigation and legislation—spawned reactionary limits on their legal standing and restrictions meant to block their complaints and prevent remedies. The natural antidote to this condition is not a retrenchment to amorphous, universal descriptors devoid of context or nuance. Instead, Americans must thoughtfully pursue an expanded, identity-conscious politics. New, vibrant, noisy voices represent the strongest tool to manage the growing pains of multicultural coexistence. By embracing identity and its prickly, uncomfortable contours, Americans will become more likely to grow as one.

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Identity Politics Can Lead to Progress

John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck

Francis Fukuyama argues that "identity politics has become a master concept that explains much of what is going on in global affairs." He attributes a variety of political developments in the United States and abroad—especially the emergence of populist nationalism—to identity politics. In Fukuyama's telling, the rise of identity politics constitutes a fall from grace. For him, most of "twentieth-century politics was defined by economic issues." But in the 1960s, he writes, the civil rights, feminist, and other social movements embraced identity politics. Later, he claims, forces on the political right followed suit, adopting "language and framing from the left." Fukuyama warns that if democratic societies continue "fracturing into segments based on ever-narrower identities," the result will be "state breakdown and, ultimately, failure."

Identity is indeed a "master concept" for understanding American politics. But identity politics has a much longer history than Fukuyama describes. And in the United States, identity politics hasn't led to the breakdown of democracy; rather, it has helped democracy thrive.

ORIGIN STORY

In Fukuyama's telling, identity politics first emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, Americans have been engaged in identity politics since the founding of the republic. If the fight for civil rights for African Americans was fueled by identity politics, then so was the fight to establish and ensure white supremacy via slavery and Jim Crow. In other words, identity politics isn't behind only the efforts of marginalized groups to seek redress: it also drives the efforts of dominant groups to marginalize others.

Fukuyama believes identity politics went too far when groups such as African Americans began to "assert a separate identity" and "demand respect for [their members] as different from the main-

stream society." Leaving aside whether that statement correctly characterizes the goal of such groups, it is important to acknowledge that identity politics also defined who was and who was not part of "mainstream society" in the first place.

In Fukuyama's telling, U.S. politics were healthier when Americans—especially those on the left—organized around economic concerns that transcended ethnic categories. "In past eras," he writes, "progressives appealed to a shared experience of exploitation and resentment of rich capitalists." But there is no period in U.S. history when economics were so cleanly divorced from identity. For example, as the political scientist Ira Katznelson has documented, the key social welfare programs of the New Deal era were predicated on racial discrimination: U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt relied on the support of white segregationists, which he won by allowing southern states to prevent blacks from enjoying the New Deal's benefits. Identity, and especially racial and ethnic identity, has always been intrinsic to fights over economic opportunity and equality.

This is not to say that today's identity politics is the same as its historical forebears. What makes it different is how tightly Americans' views about racial, ethic, and religious identities are now bound up with another salient American identity: partisan affiliation. Well before 2016, Democratic and Republican voters had begun to diverge in their views of immigration and racial equality. Democrats became more supportive of immigration and more willing to attribute racial inequality to discrimination. Republicans became less supportive of immigration and more willing to attribute racial inequality to a lack of effort on the part of African Americans. This divergence sharpened during Barack Obama's candidacy and presidency, as whites' racial attitudes became more closely tied to their partisan identities.

This trend might have accelerated even faster than it did had major political leaders tried to exploit it. But Obama actually talked about race less than other recent Democratic presidents and frequently used rhetoric that sought to unify Americans of different racial backgrounds. Meanwhile, Obama's Republican opponents in the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012, John McCain and Mitt Romney, chose not to stoke racialized fears of Obama.

Donald Trump was different. His provocative statements about race, immigration, and Islam helped define the 2016 election. Partly as a result, Americans' views on such issues became stronger predictors of how they voted. For example, compared with in earlier elections, it was easier to determine how people voted in 2016 based on whether they wanted a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants or believed that racial inequality was just a matter of minorities "not trying hard enough." Meanwhile, economic issues achieved more political potency when refracted through race. As far back as the 2016 Republican primary, whether voters supported Trump depended less on whether they were worried about losing their own jobs than it did on whether they were worried about whites losing jobs to ethnic minorities.

WHOSE CHOICE?

Since the election, this alignment of partisanship and attitudes about race and immigration has grown even stronger,

What democracy looks like: new members of the U.S. Congress, January 2019

BRIAN SNYDER / REUTERS

and it has an important implication for Fukuyama's argument. Fukuyama's favored political agenda closely resembles that of Democratic voters and the Democratic Party. He supports remedies for police violence against minorities and the sexual harassment of women, endorses birthright citizenship, and wants an American identity based on ideals rather than on "blood and soil" nationalism.

The most forceful opposition to such ideas has come from the Trump administration and its Republican allies and supporters. Yet Fukuyama does not put the onus on Republicans to reject Trump. In his view, the "major choice" belongs to the Democratic Party, which must decide whether to double down on "the mobilization of . . . identity groups" or "try to win back some of the white working-class voters . . . who have defected" to the GOP. But if Fukuyama wants federal action on his policy agenda in an era of divided government and narrow congressional majorities, the real onus is on Republicans to support his ideas. And if he wants an American identity based on shared values and open to all citizens—even those who hail from what Trump reportedly called "shithole countries"—then he will need at least some Republicans to stand up to Trump.

Fukuyama may be against identity politics, but identity politics is also critical to the success of the agenda that he supports. History has shown that progress toward equality doesn't come about because of happenstance, a sudden change of heart on Capitol Hill, or the magnanimity of dominant groups. Instead, progress comes when marginalized groups organize around their shared identities. Their fight is often unpopular. In one 1964 survey, conducted a few months after the passage

of the Civil Rights Act, of those polled, 84 percent of southerners and 64 percent of Americans living outside the South said that civil rights leaders were pushing too fast. But pushing was their only recourse, and pushing helped change the country's laws and attitudes.

Fukuyama wants a unifying American identity, what he calls a "creedal national identity." But the country is already fairly close to having one. According to the December 2016 Views of the Electorate Research, or VOTER, Survey, 93 percent of Americans think that respecting U.S. political institutions and laws is somewhat or very important to "being American." Far fewer believe that it's important to be born in the United States (55 percent) or to have European heritage (20 percent). Moreover, most Americans actually place identity politics at the center of the American creed: the vast majority (88 percent) think that accepting people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds is important to being American.

There is no necessary tension between identity politics and the American creed. The question is whether identity politics will help Americans live up to that creed. Historically, it has.

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A Creedal Identity Is Not Enough

Jennifer A. Richeson

Francis Fukuyama argues that identity politics is eroding national unity in the United States and Europe, undermining the kind of civil discourse essential to the maintenance of liberal democracy. He also claims that "perhaps the worst thing about identity politics as currently practiced by the left is that it has stimulated the rise of identity politics on the right." This is highly misleading. Identity politics was part of the American political discourse long before liberals and leftists began to practice it in the 1960s and 1970s. Think of the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s and the white-supremacist Ku Klux Klan during the first half of the twentieth century. What were such groups if not early practitioners of a brand of white identity politics?

But other parts of Fukuyama's argument are more persuasive, and he is right to focus on the role that identity plays in the health of American democracy. Fukuyama makes one particularly useful point in the closing passages of his article:

> People will never stop thinking about themselves and their societies in identity terms. But people's identities are neither fixed nor necessarily given by birth. Identity can be used to divide, but it can also be used to unify. That, in the end, will be the remedy for the populist politics of the present.

What Fukuyama gets right here is the fact that human beings have a fundamental need to belong—a need that their collective identities, be they racial, ethnic, religious, regional, or national, often satisfy. Such affiliations, which psychologists call "social identities," serve multiple psychological functions. These include, for example, the need for a sense of safety, which social identities satisfy by reducing uncertainty and

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