

## Trumpism and the Movements He Made<sup>1</sup>

The outcome of the 2016 election was unlike others in many respects, but its most important distinction was that – like the triumph of Lincoln in 1860s – it was not so much the success of a party but that of a movement. If we want to understand the unexpected success of Donald Trump in that election and the extraordinary loyalty of his “base” in the four years that followed, we will do best to see them as the result of a social movement. Trump started to claim that he represented a movement early in his campaign, when he told a New Hampshire audience that “The silent majority is back. We really are in a position we haven’t been in a long time. The people are speaking. It’s an amazing thing. *It’s like a movement*” (italics added, quoted by Merciera, p. 188).

I am not the first observer to liken Donald Trump to a leader of a movement. “Trump,” as Jennifer Merciera notes, “liked to describe his presidential campaign not merely as a ‘campaign’, but as a movement” (2020, p. 187). “More than other candidates,” writes Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Donald Trump fits the classic description of a charismatic leader, as Weber defined it . . . . Trump offers himself . . . as the *personal messenger* of his followers” (Hochschild 2018). Many of the puzzles about the Trump administration, as well as its aftermath, can be traced to the fact that its leader saw himself as the leader of a movement and not of a party or a government.

This was a hybrid of plutocratic and populist components. As Paul Pierson wrote of it in 2017:

What has emerged in the United States [in 2017] is not populist governance but a peculiar hybrid – one quite distinct from what might emerge in other national contexts. Initially,

<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws upon the Introduction and chapter 9 of David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement*, 2018.

key features of the American setting played a critical role in amplifying the populist impulse, catapulting a populist candidate into a central political position. (2017: 5106)

Some scholars have emphasized the “populist” face of Trumpism. When Trump lost the national election of November 2020, Mark Lander and Melissa Eddy wondered whether his loss meant a decline in global populism.<sup>2</sup> Others, like the historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, insisted on the importance of the plutocratic elites who had joined his administration, “thinking that he can be controlled as he solves their problems” (Ben-Ghiat 2020: 13–14). As we will show, both were correct, but although Trump’s support from organized business eroded toward the end of his mandate,<sup>3</sup> his populist base continued to support him, leading to the insurrection at the US Capitol in January 2021.

In Chapter 6, I argued that the insertion of the “long new right” into the Republican Party led to the partial “movementization” of that party. Trump’s takeover of the GOP after his election in 2016 crystallized the movement elements within the party and provided them with a charismatic focal point. But it also led to some of the important incongruities that scarred Trump’s administration. While Trump aided the rich by giving them enormous tax breaks and access to the White House, he also catered to his populist base by replacing free trade with protectionism, attacking people of color, castigating undocumented immigrants and Muslims, and demolishing the internationalist foreign policy that most conservatives had endorsed. These factors converged to bring out the contradictions in Trump’s movement during his years in power.

Was there a dominant strain in this composite movement? “In the realm of rhetoric,” writes Pierson, “right-wing populism remains robust. In actual government, the interests and concerns of plutocrats have typically prevailed” (2017: 5106). With respect to Trump’s policy agenda, Pierson’s 2017 prediction proved to be prophetic. From the vast tax reform that benefited the very rich to the deregulatory program that stripped the administrative state of much of its regulatory capacity, to the opening up of national forest lands to oil exploitation, to the replacement of career civil servants with lobbyists and business titans: Trump and his enablers attacked the national state that has been built up since the New Deal.

But the populist elements in Trump’s movement had continued purchase even as his support from business constituencies began to wane. In earlier collaborative work, I argued that collective claims fall into three categories: *program claims*, *standing claims*, and *identity claims* (Tilly & Tarrow 2015). Standing claims say that an actor belongs to an established category within a regime and deserves rights and respect (*ibid.*, p. 110). As Parker writes, much

<sup>2</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/world/europe/trump-populism.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/10/world/europe/trump-populism.html)

<sup>3</sup> This was especially true of the Koch network, whose leaders had never been happy with Trump but who were shocked by the events of January 6, 2020, into declaring that Republican lawmakers’ behavior during the riots would “weigh heavily” in the network’s future financial support. [www.politico.com/news/2021/01/13/koch-network-capitol-riots-459143](http://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/13/koch-network-capitol-riots-459143)

of Trump's base experienced a loss of standing in American society – what he calls “status threat” (2021: 6–7).

Pierson's diagnosis of the plutocratic policies of the Trump administration mainly addresses the first two – program and standing claims – but elides an important part of movement politics – addressing identity claims. Identity claims declare that an actor exists. That actor may have existed before the episode began or it may be *constituted* in the course of the episode (Tilly and Tarrow, p. 111). Trump's populist constituency had roots in earlier particularist movements (Smith 2010); in the racialization of small government, anti-welfare ideology we saw in the long New Right; and in the strain of racial resentment found by Arlie Hochschild as Trump was coming to power, but he personalized these resentments and provided followers with a target for them in his claim to represent the “pure people” against a corrupt elite.

First, in contrast with his European parallels, Trump founded a populist movement within a party, one that could build on decades of right-wing incursions (Roberts 2018). He had an assist from the fact that he found himself at the helm of a movementized party, one in which the transactional elements of party politics coexisted uneasily with the ideological drive of the movements that had been absorbed into the party in previous decades.

Second, although Trump's particular brand of nationalism and racism found a ready audience in the Republican base he inherited, he added to it an almost unique ability to manipulate the media and a willingness to strip off the carapace of civility that had disguised the racist resentment he found in parts of the Republican base.

Third, Trump's “base” was not alone: Because of the incursion of a new wave of elected officials – many of them coming out of the Tea Party (see Chapter 7) into the party – Trump found an elite ready to do his bidding. No one who watched 121 members of the House of Representatives vote to overturn the certification of the votes in Arizona and Pennsylvania only hours after the Capitol had been invaded by a Trumpist mob in January 2020 could believe that his movement was a strictly plebeian one. As Lance Bennett writes of the January 6 coup attempt, “None of this could have happened without the majority of national Republican officials enabling Trump.” But as Bennett also notes, “Nor could it have happened without the unwavering support of the large plurality of citizens who voted for him and then cheered his efforts to overturn the election.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Lance Bennett, “We the People? Time for Truth about Democracy in America.” <https://cjmnd.com.uw.edu/we-the-people-time-for-tritj-about-democracy-in-america>; also see Jeff Goodwin, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Donald J. Trump.” [www.pwsc.us/conflicted-the-pwsc-official-blog/blog/the-eighteenth-brumaire-of-donald-j-trump?fbclid=IwARoNuirjoSzaH7Dc\\_ZbsA4t-N-v2g2OCACYrug\\_YrAWUl-j3jkWkAXbwOMU](http://www.pwsc.us/conflicted-the-pwsc-official-blog/blog/the-eighteenth-brumaire-of-donald-j-trump?fbclid=IwARoNuirjoSzaH7Dc_ZbsA4t-N-v2g2OCACYrug_YrAWUl-j3jkWkAXbwOMU)

This was a conglomerate movement that, after winning the election in 2016, Trump was at pains to service and which he attempted to energize after his electoral loss in 2020. From his kind words for the Neo-Nazis who rampaged in Charlottesville in 2017, to his hostility to Mexicans, Africans, and African Americans, to his offensive comments about his political opponents, the president continued to play to this base. Why it remained loyal during four years of his erratic and corrupt administration is the first puzzle I will examine in this chapter. How the reaction to Trump's shrill politics shaped a countermovement after his 2016 election victory is the second; the relationship between the countermovement and the future of the Democratic Party is the third; and the fourth is the possible futures of the Trumpian movement after the coup attempt of January 2021.<sup>5</sup>

## I THE TRUMP MOVEMENT

There were many factors that helped observers understand Trump's unexpected electoral victory in the 2016 elections: the distortions of the electoral college; the inability of the "hollowed out" Republican Party to find a candidate who could represent its institutional interest; the weakness of Hillary Clinton as a candidate and her inability to mobilize enough votes among key Democratic constituencies to defeat him; the intrusion of a popular progressive competitor – Senator Bernie Sanders – whose candidacy cut into her support among younger voters; and "conjunctural" factors, like FBI Director James Comey's last-minute intervention in the campaign when he chose to cast doubt on Clinton's honesty. But it was Trump's rhetorical and organizational ability to electrify the base of the party that explains its electoral support for him in 2016 and its stubborn loyalty throughout his presidency.

Trump's determination to reinforce his populist base could already be seen in his inauguration speech in January 2017. Gesturing at what he called abandoned factories, rampant crime, and a failed education system, Trump pledged that his presidency would bring about change. "This American carnage stops right here and stops right now," he proclaimed on the steps of the Capitol, electrifying his base and leaving both Clinton and former president George W. Bush aghast.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "coup attempt" advisedly, following the revealing parallel between the incursion to the Capitol and the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon that Goodwin draws (see note no. 4) and that the coup was a coup within a riot, the latter an expression of Trump's larger movement within the Republican Party.

<sup>6</sup> Clinton's reflection on the speech is worth quoting in detail:

"I thought: Wait a minute. It's not rational but it's also not politics. It's not what a president does," said Clinton. She had hoped to hear Trump make an attempt to reach out to nonsupporters. "I hoped I would hear a little of that, I didn't hear any of that. And that carnage in the street and the dark dystopian vision. I was sitting there like just, wow. I couldn't believe it. And George

Trump was certainly trying to tap into the economic discontent that had been roiling important parts of the electorate, as inequality soared and jobs disappeared overseas following the financial crisis of 2007–8.<sup>7</sup> There was also evidence that the authoritarian instincts of many voters had “the largest effect on white vote choice in 2016 than in any prior election” (Knuckey & Hassan 2020: 1; also see Hetherington & Weiler 2009). Then there was “Trump’s willingness to make explicitly racist and sexist appeals during the campaign” (Schaffner et al. 2018: 10).

The face of the Democratic leadership under Obama’s presidency reinforced these appeals. For example, Obama had worked closely with Nancy Pelosi, the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House, and with Representative Barney Frank, openly Jewish, gay, and chair of the House Financial Services Committee. Obama also appointed record numbers of women and minorities to visible positions in his administration. His defense of Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, who was arrested on his front porch by a Cambridge policeman, convinced many conservatives that the president was opposed to the police. If you tended toward racial resentment, gender hostility, and authoritarian instincts before Obama came to power, the composition and politics of his administration would have reinforced those tendencies.

Even before Trump entered the scene, Republicans had learned that they could benefit from the anger of people driven by racial resentment. Starting in 2010, with the election of the first Tea Party candidates, the GOP began to play to a populist base that would prove dangerous, first to Democrats, but then to the traditional Republican elite. Individual-level characteristics, attitudes, and actions undoubtedly contributed to Trump’s electoral success, but they elide the *collective mechanisms* that produced that result (Skocpol 2020: xxi–xxii). Trump took the elements of the New Right in the Republican Party and turned them into a *movement*, using an appeal to the same sector of American society that had nourished the rise of the Tea Party (Parker & Barreto 2013; McVeigh 2014) but stripping it of its civilized veneer. In seeking power, he combined the personal charisma of a movement leader with a diffuse organizational infrastructure in the mold of his populist predecessors in Europe and Latin America (Roberts 2018).

W. Bush says to me, “Well, that was some weird shit.” <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/326438-george-bush-after-inauguration-that-was-some-weird-s-t-report>.

Clinton recorded these impressions in an interview with *Inside Hook* in December 2019. [www.insidehook.com/daily\\_brief/news-opinion/hillary-clinton-reveals-george-w-bushs-reaction-to-trumps-inaugural-speech](http://www.insidehook.com/daily_brief/news-opinion/hillary-clinton-reveals-george-w-bushs-reaction-to-trumps-inaugural-speech)

<sup>7</sup> For a representative journalistic account, see Eduardo Porter, “Where Were Trump’s Votes? Where the Jobs Weren’t,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2016. [www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/business/economy/jobs-economy-voters.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/business/economy/jobs-economy-voters.html)

## A Charismatic Demagogue

In his historical study, *American Demagogues* (1954), Reinhart Luthin offered a list of characteristics that he had found in the public careers of selected American demagogues of the last century – those “masters of the masses” who, in their aspirations for political place and power, pandered to the passions and prejudices, rather than the reason, of the populace and performed all manner of crowd-captivating tricks, only to betray the people who had supported them. Like Huey Long, charismatic governor of and then senator from Louisiana, Trump applied a strategy of “bread and circuses” to wean his supporters from their traditional party affiliations with overheated rhetoric, vicious attacks on opponents, and policies aimed at appealing to their preferences and prejudices (Amenta et al. 1994). Like many of these earlier figures, Trump gave little attention to policy and more to “rallying” his base at set-piece demonstrations aimed at catering to their excitement at his presence.

Trump’s efforts to amplify the preferences of his base meant that he often played fast and loose with the facts. “Followers forgive, one after another, flagrant flaws in such a ‘messenger’, because he is their messenger and he recognizes their suppressed, as they see it, deep story,” notes Mercieca (*ibid.*). “Trump,” writes Ben-Ghiat, “does not lie about one or two things. Rather, facts on any subject that conflict with his goals of power and profit are degraded through rumor and innuendo or simply altered or denied” (Ben-Ghiat 2020: 116). This meant that it did little good for Democrats or the media to expose his untruths or offer rational arguments in attempts to convince his supporters to rethink their loyalty. This aversion to fact-based arguments continued even after Trump’s loss of the 2020 election by more than 7 million votes, when he claimed, without foundation, that he had only lost because the election was “rigged.”

Appeals to racial resentment – which had lain beneath the surface of Republican strategy for decades – were brought to the surface in Trump’s campaign. His 2019 declaration of a “national emergency” over the “invasion of our country with drugs, human traffickers, with all types of criminals and gangs,” which reprised the language of previous demagogues, expanded the “southern strategy” from attacks on African Americans to the denigration of Latinos, Muslims, illegal immigrants, and other minorities (Ben-Ghiat, p. 86). As Doug McAdam wrote in 2018:

The tumultuous onset of Donald Trump’s administration, to say nothing of the president’s outsize presence, has so riveted our attention that we’re in danger of losing historical perspective . . . . Trump is only the most extreme expression of a brand of racial politics practiced ever more brazenly by the Republican Party since its origins in the 1960s. (McAdam 2018: 27)

Pollsters pointed to the dependence of Trump’s appeal to non-college-educated working class voters. But when Brian Schaffner and his collaborators tested the

effects of economic motives and education on Trump's support among white voters in 2016, class was dwarfed by the effects of sexism and racism. Controlling for an individual's attitudes on racism and sexism, these authors found that the education gap between Trump and non-Trump voters became far less significant (Schaffner, et al. 2018: 30). Employing a newer dataset, Parker found that whether assayed by education or income, class has mostly no impact on contemporary reactionary politics (2021: 13).

## II A RHETORIC OF DIVISION AND MOBILIZATION

Although the press made much of Trump's tweets throughout his mandate, his rants and outbursts were not random. As in all populist movements, they revolved around the concepts of the "pure" people and the corrupt elite (Mudde 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, eds. 2012). But right-wing populism exhibits a third cornerstone, as David Snow and Colin Bernatsky argue in a thoughtful article. Drawing on the work of John Judis (2016), they point to the populist's need for a suspect non-elite group that functions as a "negative Other, that they use to frame the obstacles to the 'pure' or 'true' peoples' interests and rightful standing" (Snow & Bernatsky 2018: 3). As they write:

The anti-pluralism of right-wing populism takes the form of a Manichean project – that is, a dualistic worldview that provides clear contrast conceptions between "the People" and "the negative Others," and some configuration of enabling elites. (ibid., p. 4)

Trump's public style drew on some of the rhetoric of the Tea Party-backed members of the 112th and 113th Congress, whose attacks on opponents aggravated feelings of resentment, damaged the image of "establishment" politicians in the minds of voters, and normalized the uncivil rhetorical style that reached its nadir in Trump's campaign. As Gervais and Morris summarize the data they collected for their book, *Reactionary Republicanism*:

By the time the 114th Congress began in 2015 and would-be candidates began positioning themselves for the 2016 presidential election, conditions were ripe for an uncivil outsider, adroit with Twitter and willing to take advantage of (and further aggravate) high levels of resentment, to blaze a path to the Republican nomination, claim the White House, and effectively take over the Republican Party. (Gervais & Morris 2018: 65)

In a creative content analysis, Rachel Blum found a similarity between the subjects she found on Tea Party websites and Trump's rhetoric. Prominent among them were the media, American exceptionalism, law and order, foreign countries, and immigration (Blum 2017). What Trump added to the Tea Party repertoire was the rhetorical style and the tactical flexibility that allowed him to gain the active approbation of the right-wing social media and magnetized the attention of its competitors in the mainstream press.

But Trump's rhetoric went beyond the Tea Partiers' attacks on opponents. More than any of the right-wing movements that preceded his rise, his speeches

were infested with lies, half-truths, and deliberate disinformation designed to enrage and mobilize his followers (Bennett & Livingston 2020). This was not lying for lying's sake: When Trump promoted the idea that Barack Obama was not born in the United States, he was able to gain the simultaneous attention of both the legacy press and a then-emerging "alt-right" media system:

This media amplification fed back through mainstream and alternative communication channels as a disruptive and disorienting reverberation, reaching mainstream audiences" (Bennett & Livingston 2018: 124; also see Bennett & Livingston eds. 2020).

In her 2020 book *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump*, Jennifer Mercieca catalogued five rhetorical devices that Trump employed to attract his base and attack his opponents. These include, notably:

*Ad hominem arguments*, like his attacks on former President Obama with the false claim that he was not born in the United States;

*Ad populum* devices appealing to the wisdom of the crowd, as when he praised his followers for being wiser than the "corrupt political elites";

*Misogyny*, for example, attacking Fox News broadcaster Megyn Kelly, who asked him in a debate about his demeaning comments about women;

*Reification*, as when he attacked Hillary Clinton for what he called "playing the women's card"; and

*Xenophobia*, as when, in his first campaign appearance, he attacked Mexico for sending us bad people.

Many of these devices were designed to appeal to groups that existed well before Trump came on the political scene. For example, supporters of Men's Rights, Neo-Nazis, anti-immigrant groups, and right-wing websites like Breitbart "all supported Trump's denigration of women during the campaign, cheering him on through his most controversial moments" (Mercieca, p. 169). But critical to his strategy was the effort to create a movement around himself, pulling together these various strands of opinion and organization.

### Violent Rhetoric and Even More Violent Mobilization

Trump's rhetoric did not systematically elevate violence to a virtue, but it did emit an air of macho masculinity that occasionally lapped over into encouragement of violence (Ben-Ghiat, ch. 6). Trump's encouragement of violence against protesters and his comment that police stop being "nice" to those they arrest were cheered by the more boisterous participants at his rallies. More significant, when Neo-Nazi thugs bearing torches attacked protesters in Charlottesville, he judged that there were "very fine people on both sides."<sup>8</sup> And when armed protesters demonstrated against Governor Gretchen Whitmer's lockdown policy to combat the coronavirus in Michigan, followed by similar demonstrations in Richmond, Virginia, Trump

<sup>8</sup> [www.politifact.com/article/2019/apr/26/context-trumps-very-fine-people-both-sides-remarks](http://www.politifact.com/article/2019/apr/26/context-trumps-very-fine-people-both-sides-remarks)

tweeted, in all caps: LIBERATE MICHIGAN!<sup>9</sup> Those protests provided a template for similar armed protests in six other states and turned out to be a dress rehearsal for the attempted coup at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Like many demagogic movements in the past, Trump's appeals coincided with spasms of violence. Although it is impossible to demonstrate a causal connection between the tenor of his campaigns and right-wing terrorism, there was a stunning increase in such incidents after 2016. Based on an extensive dataset collected by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Seth Jones and his collaborators found a significant increase in attacks by right-wing extremists in 2019 and during the first half of 2020. Defining right-wing terrorism as "the use or threat of violence by sub-national or non-state entities whose goals may include racial or ethnic supremacy; opposition to government authority; anger at women; and outrage against certain policies, such as abortion," they found that the most significant threat "*likely comes from white supremacists, though anarchists and religious extremists inspired by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda could present a potential threat as well*" (Jones, Doxsee & Harrington 2020).

Trump's advent also appears to have triggered a rise in hate crimes. In a carefully documented analysis, Griffin Edwards and Stephen Rushin showed that Trump's election was associated with a statistically significant surge in reported hate crimes across the United States, even when controlling for alternative explanations of these crimes. Using panel regression techniques, their analysis showed that counties that voted for Trump by the widest margins in the 2016 election experienced the largest increases in reported hate crimes (Edwards & Rushin 2019). These authors argue that it was not only Trump's rhetoric that triggered the rise in hate crimes, but its validation by his election (*ibid.*, 2018).

Not only that: The growth of violent groups intersected with the growth of website-spawned conspiracy theories (Bennett & Livingston, eds. 2020). These emissions were not necessarily violence-producing (in fact, many were risible!), but toward the end of Trump's mandate, evidence began to accumulate that there was a linkage between conspiracy theorists and armed groups.<sup>10</sup> With the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, such groups began to mobilize at the local level.<sup>11</sup> The most prominent was the plot to kidnap Governor Whitmer of

<sup>9</sup> [www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/04/17/coronavirus-trump-calls-liberate-virginia-michigan-minnesota/5152120002](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/04/17/coronavirus-trump-calls-liberate-virginia-michigan-minnesota/5152120002)

<sup>10</sup> The juncture between the militia movements and merchants of disinformation was evident at a conference on Georgia's Jekyll Island in October 2020. There, well-known conspiracy theorists interacted with militia leaders like Stewart Rhodes, president of the Oath Keepers, which had acted as a vigilante squad at a number of Trump campaign rallies. Betsy Quammen, who specializes on both conspiracy theories and militias, commented: "As someone who's been studying militia maneuvering and conspiracy theorists, it's disconcerting to see these various groups uniting under a common banner of mistrust about coronavirus."

<sup>11</sup> The connections between the Q-Anon conspiracy network, violent far-right groups, and Trumpism have still to be adequately investigated at this writing. For a careful journalistic foray, see the analysis in *Politico* shortly before the 2020 election. [www.politico.com/news/2020/10/15/qanon-trump-maga-movement-429739](http://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/15/qanon-trump-maga-movement-429739)

Michigan and even put her on trial. Trump never disowned the plotters, and when the governor called him out for fomenting a climate of intimidation, he launched a verbal attack against her.

The connections between verbal and actual violence culminated in the attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021. In urging supporters to attend the rally, Trump said it “will be wild.” In addressing the crowd, Representative Mo Brooks declared that “Today is the day that American patriots start taking down names and kicking ass.” The president’s attorney, Rudy Giuliani, told the crowd that the fight over the certification of the elections would be a “trial by combat.”<sup>12</sup> And in Congress, pistol-packing newly elected representative Lauren Boebert tweeted that “Today is 1776.”<sup>13</sup>

When Trump urged his listeners to set off down Pennsylvania Avenue to demand that Congress support the objections to Biden’s election, he could not have failed to notice that substantial minorities of the crowd were armed. Many of these militants were conspiratorial figures, some of whom were arrested following the January 6 insurrection, but Trump’s public persona appealed to a much larger number of ordinary Americans who had substituted identification with him for their identification with the Republican Party. In a HuffPost/Yougov poll reported in the *Washington Post* after the January 6 incursion into the Capitol, when asked if they considered themselves mostly a Trump supporter or mostly a supporter of the Republican Party, 66 percent of his supporters said they were more a supporter of Trump than of the party.<sup>14</sup>

How did this happen? Though much was the result of the personal bond established between the president and his following, we should not underestimate the influence of the intermediate groups that turned a generic right-wing ideology into support for Trump’s movement. Among these were organizations associated with the Koch network, local churches, the National Rifle Association (NRA), groups that identified with the local police, and local Tea Party organizations. Sketching these links at the state and local level will provide evidence that Trump built his movement on a preexisting infrastructure and suggest that even if the movement he spawned passes from the scene, the themes he represented are likely to remain in American public space.

<sup>12</sup> For Trump’s “will be wild” quote, go to [www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/capitol-mob-trump-supporters.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/us/politics/capitol-mob-trump-supporters.html); for Brooks’ “kicking ass” statement, go to [www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/politics/republicans-capitol-riot.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/politics/republicans-capitol-riot.html); for the Giuliani quote, go to [www.businessinsider.com/giuliani-claims-trial-by-combat-comment-game-of-thrones-reference-2021-1](http://www.businessinsider.com/giuliani-claims-trial-by-combat-comment-game-of-thrones-reference-2021-1)

<sup>13</sup> Boebert later tweeted Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s location. [www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/1/10/2008012/-Congress-member-declared-Today-is-1776-tweeted-re-Pelosi-s-location-during-insurrection](http://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/1/10/2008012/-Congress-member-declared-Today-is-1776-tweeted-re-Pelosi-s-location-during-insurrection)

<sup>14</sup> Henry Olsen, “Opinion: New Poll: There Is No Singular Trump Voter,” *Washington Post*, February 5, 2021. [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/new-poll-there-is-no-singular-trump-voter](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/05/new-poll-there-is-no-singular-trump-voter)

## III A DISPERSED ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Since the foundational work of John McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald in the 1970s (1973, 1977), movement scholars have taught that “organizations deploy resources continuously, not just momentarily – and, over time, they can shift the balance of power in elections, public discussions, and governmental policymaking” (Skocpol 2020: xxi). Networks connect actors to one another to “help them concert their voice, plan activities and build collective resources” (ibid.; also see Diani 2015 and Diani & McAdam 2003). As a candidate, Donald Trump was such an outsized figure that the organizational infrastructure that helped to spread his message lay hidden in the background. This was less his own organization than what Bert Klandermans has called a “multi-organizational field” (1992).

Until recently, the few accounts of the Trump campaign organization focused on how poorly organized it was and on his dependence on the media. These generalizations are true, but much of Trump’s ability to mobilize his base depended not on his official campaign organization but on a spectrum of preexisting organizations that occupied social space at the state and local levels. Some of these, like Tea Party groups and parts of the Koch network, we have already encountered; the Trump campaign was able to “socially appropriate” others with very little direction from above (McAdam et al. 2001). Among them, these groups constituted the kind of “blended hybrid” I described in Chapter 7.

**Trumpian Republicanism: The Ultimate Hybrid**

Theda Skocpol, Caroline Tervo, and their collaborators put forward a similar thesis, focusing less on conventional national-level organizations than on the grassroots infrastructure that helped propel Trump to victory (2020; see, especially, Zoorob and Skocpol, ch. 4). As Skocpol writes in the preface to their volume, the Trump presidential effort “made deals to activate well-established networks that could spread Trump’s message across many states and localities, inspiring high turnout among conservative Christians and gun owners on Election Day” (Skocpol, p. xviii). Within states like North Carolina (Tervo 2020), Michigan (Marsh 2020), and Wisconsin (Hertel-Fernandez 2020), these networks combined grassroots and elite forms to create what I called, in Chapter 7, “blended hybrids.”

Part of the reason for this success was the result of necessity. So weakened was the Republican central organization by 2016 that had the Trump campaign relied on that party’s infrastructure, he would probably never have gained support from so many widely scattered places. I will draw on state-level studies from Skocpol and Tervo’s volume to show how the campaign assembled support from a wide variety of groups and organizations that

predated his appearance on the scene and that existed to advance aims other than his election.

Central to this infrastructure were groups associated with the Koch network. This may surprise readers who recall that the Koch brothers declined to support Trump in 2016 and were at odds with him over issues ranging from international trade to immigration to support for infrastructure (Skocpol 2020: 13). Central to these efforts were the widespread chapters of AFP. Created out of the breakup of Citizens for a Sound Economy, by the end of 2007, AFP “already had paid state directors installed in fifteen states encompassing almost half the total US population and their representatives in Congress” (Skocpol 2020: 9). As we saw in Chapter 7, AFP has a highly developed federal structure, with “grassroots directors” in most of the states in which it is active. But make no mistake; like the Leninist organizations after which it was modeled, AFP’s directors are selected from above and local efforts are centrally ordained and coordinated (*ibid.*). Thus, it is no surprise that AFP was at the center of Trump’s 2016 electoral success in states as diverse as Wisconsin (Hertel-Fernandez 2020: 30), North Carolina (Tervo 2020: 57), and Michigan (Marsh 2020: 108).

It is well known that Donald Trump executed a “transaction” – for that is what it was – with the leaders of the Christian Right in order to attract evangelical voters. In exchange for his promise to oppose abortion, this thrice-married serial philanderer received commitments from within the Christian conservative elite to support his candidacy. What is less well-known is that the groundwork for this transaction was laid as early as 2011, when Trump asked televangelist Paula White to convene ministers to “pray together” to help him decide if he should run for president in 2012 (Zoorob & Skocpol 2020: 81). In the event, he decided against that effort, but ties between the Trump organization and Christian conservative groups continued to expand during Obama’s second term in office.

Prior to the 2016 election, the evangelical Faith and Freedom Coalition carried out a massive mobilization campaign to garner support for Trump among its members. As Zoorob and Skocpol learned from their research:

Over the course of the election, organizers and volunteers from the group distributed thirty million voter guides, sent twenty-two million mailers, made fifteen million phone calls, ran twenty-six million digital ads, and canvassed more than one million religiously conservative households in twelve battleground states. (*ibid.*, p. 83)

The peccadillos and the sexual abuses in Trump’s history were not as well known at the time as would later emerge, but when the notorious “Access Hollywood” tape surfaced in the midst of the campaign, “redemption” became the name of the game for evangelical leaders. Megachurch preacher Jerry Falwell Jr. shrugged off the revelation: “We are all sinners,” he declared. Praised as an “instrument of God” who had appeared to help Christians defend their faith in an increasingly secular world, Trump “provided rhetorical fodder

for preachers, advocates, and [Christian] broadcasters sending a constant barrage of messages to congregants right through Election Day” (Zoorob & Skocpol, p. 84).

Somewhat less bizarre than the support that Trump received from the evangelical community was his support from two thematically and politically linked groups – gun enthusiasts and (largely white) police support groups (*ibid.*, pp. 86–96). In states with large gun-owning populations, mainly in the South and the center of the country, it took little effort on the part of the NRA to convince its membership that a President Clinton would threaten their Second Amendment rights. The NRA spent more than \$30 million in the 2016 election, most of it on the Trump campaign. It wasn’t the NRA alone that helped Trump with gun enthusiasts; Zoorob and Skocpol point out that “nominally independent but officially sanctioned state NRA affiliates do lobbying and sponsor shooting contests, gun training and safety programs, community events, and youth programs” (*ibid.*, p. 89). These local networks provided outlets for the NRA to spread its political preferences at election time.

Police support groups, such as the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), were at first wary of Trump but came around to supporting him after the Republican convention decried a (largely fictitious) rise in violent crime under Obama. Trump himself visited numerous police lodges during the campaign, assuring FOP members that while he was the “law and order candidate,” Hillary Clinton was “against the police” (Zoorob & Skocpol 2020, pp. 92–93). The Trump/police union alliance would become even closer in the wake of a spate of police killings of young black men and women during his mandate, culminating in the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and the sometimes-violent protests against it. But none of these parts of the Trump infrastructure were as central as the activists he inherited from the Tea Party movement.

### Tea Party Roots of the Trumpian Movement

We saw in Chapter 7 that the Tea Party did much to pave the way for Trump’s electoral victory (Gervais & Morris 2018). Of course, the term “paving the way” admits of a multitude of meanings, ranging from the anodyne “came before” to the much more forceful term “caused to happen.” Between these extremes we can imagine a spectrum of direct and indirect connections between Tea Party activists and the Trump movement, including the election of a cadre of Tea Party–supported members of Congress in 2010, many of whom later became the corporals and lieutenants in Trump’s administration. It is no accident that the minority whip of the Republican Party in the House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy, and Trump’s final Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows, were both backed by Tea Party groups in the 2010 midterm elections.

When Trump intimated that he might run for president, his campaign was met with indifference from Tea Party activists, many of whom preferred the sunbelt politico, Ted Cruz, over a New York real estate wheeler and dealer.<sup>15</sup> But Trump's opposition to abortion, his fulminations against undocumented immigrants, and his red-blooded nationalism brought many Tea Partiers around to support his candidacy. His success in appealing to Tea Party supporters emerged from a Pew poll. As the Pew researchers concluded, "Republicans who had positive views of the Tea Party movement in 2014 or 2015 were among Trump's most enthusiastic supporters during the 2016 campaign. And, unlike Republicans who had mixed or negative opinions of the Tea Party, they continued to have very positive feelings about Trump through his first year in office."<sup>16</sup>

What was responsible for the shift of Tea Party supporters into Trump's orbit? Several campaign-linked factors converged to influence their recruitment. First, as Trump's Republican opponents knocked each other off in the primaries, he was able to play successfully for their supporters by appearing to be different from all the others with a common-man, outsider appeal. "He says what we're thinking and what we want to say," said a Trump supporter at a rally in Montana (quoted by Ben-Ghiat, p. 85). Second, Trump's conversion to an anti-abortion position helped him gain the support of practicing evangelicals throughout the South and West. Finally, his dismissal of African American voters ("What do you have to lose?") and his denigration of Mexican immigrants ("They send us rapists . . .") resonated with the racial conservatism of many Tea Party veterans.

But these general factors might not have produced a Trump victory in 2016, if not for the residues of the Tea Party networks at the state and local levels. Recall that, at its height, the Tea Party had almost a thousand local chapters. Although many of these groups went quiet in the years preceding the 2016 campaign, others remained active or were reenergized by Trump's rhetoric. In North Carolina, Caroline Tervo identified fifty-two Tea Party groups that still existed in forty-six of the state's counties in 2016. Many of these overlapped with the state's vigorous Christian right networks (Tervo 2020: 56). In Michigan, there were more than thirty Tea Party groups still active in 2016. By the end of the campaign, Tea Party-related congressional Republicans like Mark Meadows and former opponent Ted Cruz saw the writing on the wall and became fervent Trump acolytes. Tea Partiers were diverse sociologically and geographically, but Trump's naked racial nationalism and opportunistic opposition to abortion appealed to many of them.

The appropriation of these sources of support by the Trump campaign underscores the importance of the new forms of interaction between nonparty

<sup>15</sup> <https://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2016/09/22/tea-party-group-backs-trump-overcoming-earlier-doubts-about-his-ideas-proposals>

<sup>16</sup> Pew Research Center, "Trump's Staunch GOP Supporters Have Roots in the Tea Party," May, 2019, p. 2.

organizations and electoral outcomes that we saw in the last two chapters. From the local and state extensions of the Koch network to associations linking Christian conservatives, gun owners, and police supporters to the more frankly political Tea Party networks, the Trump campaign profited from the proliferation and extension of social movements and movement-like affordances to a political campaign that had had no hand in creating them. Nowhere is this connection between electoral success and movement-like agents seen more clearly than in the wide spectrum of “new media” sources that supported the Trump campaign.

### Digitizing Movement Organization

Like many earlier authoritarian leaders, Trump had a talent for the use of the media that helped bring him to power and supported his policies once he was elected. From the former journalist Benito Mussolini’s use of newsreels to Adolf Hitler’s mastery of propaganda to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s dominance of the TV networks, writes Ben-Ghiat (p. 95), “the strongman has turned politics into an esthetic experience, with him as star.” Like Mussolini, Trump “spent hours every day reading the newspapers, looking to punish critics and anyone who did not praise him enough” (ibid., p. 101). We now know how much time Trump dedicated to his interchanges with Fox News, an exchange relationship that was starkly revealed when the latter was trounced by the president for an early announcement of Biden’s electoral success in Arizona.<sup>17</sup>

Although both Mussolini and Berlusconi were masters of media manipulation (Ben Ghiat 2020), Trump was the first leader to take advantage of the most dramatic change in the relationship between movements and elections over the past few decades: the use of the Internet and social media in mobilizing support for campaigning (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Earl & Kimport 2011; Karpf 2012; Schradie 2019). As Boczkowski and Papacharissi write:

From the apparent disconnect of the agenda-setting media with a vast segment of the American voters to the deluge of fake news circulating on social media, and from the intensity of the confrontation between President Trump and these media to his constant use of Twitter to promote alternative – and often unsupported by facts – narratives, there is a sense that the matrix that used to tie politics, media, technology, and the citizenry in fairly predictable ways has moved far away from equilibrium (2018, p. 1).

I cannot add much that is new to a tidal wave of scholarly and journalistic attention to the role of the new media in shaping the ascent of Donald Trump. What needs to be emphasized here is not that “new media” have displaced “brick and mortar” movement organizations or the traditional tool of talk radio. The emphasis I have given to organizations and networks in this chapter may appear to reinforce such a dichotomy. But rather than substituting for collective action, such groups have become agents for *connective action*, to adopt the terminology of

<sup>17</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/11/04/us/politics/trump-fox-news-arizona.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/04/us/politics/trump-fox-news-arizona.html)

Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2013). It was the *interchange* between Trump's personal organization and the affordances of the new media that created and sustained Trump's movement with bonds of loyalty that went well beyond any modern candidate and his or her support base.<sup>18</sup>

Bennett and Segerberg argued that rather than displacing traditional "brick and mortar" organizations with digital platforms, access to the Internet has *combined* personal networks with organizations in recruiting people to take part in electoral campaigns and demonstrations (Bennett & Segerberg 2013: 172–73). As Bennett and Steven Livingston wrote in the wake of Trump's first election campaign:

these visible, heavily trafficked and often networked media link in and out of broader networks of political foundations, think tanks, grass roots and Astroturf political organizations, communication professionals and political organizers. This complex set of organizations advances an agenda that mixes tax and regulatory benefits for the wealthy, with disinformation about climate change, immigration, refugees, government waste and ineptitude, and a host of other issues aimed at stirring political crowds. (Bennett & Livingston 2018: 129; also see Bennett & Livingston, eds. 2020)

For example, the demonstration that was organized at the Michigan state capital to protest Governor Whitmer's plan to lock down her state to combat the coronavirus was organized by a small number of informal right-wing groups, but the De Vos-funded nonprofit group Michigan Freedom Fund (MFF) paid for two Facebook ads that took users to the Facebook event page of the protest.<sup>19</sup> (Betsy DeVos, in case readers don't know her name, was the Secretary of Education in the Trump administration.) This was only one of a myriad of connections between Trumpian political organizations and more scattered, but more volatile, political groups whose actions verged on, and sometimes crossed, the frontier into political violence.<sup>20</sup> When the FBI went down the lists of people who had come to Washington for the "Save America" rally, they found dozens who were on the Bureau's "Terrorist Watch List" – many of them members of white supremacist groups.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Focusing on the victory of the Trump campaign, Robyn Caplan and Danah Boyd make clear that social movements in the form of online communities like 4chan, 8chan, Voat, reddit, and Discord "used these affordances to coordinate the spread of memes and messaging in support of their candidate, first during the primaries and then during the general election of 2016" (Caplan & Boyd 2018: 53).

<sup>19</sup> [www.prwatch.org/news/2020/04/13562/devos-funded-group-organizes-protest-against-michigan-governor%E2%80%99s-stay-home-order](http://www.prwatch.org/news/2020/04/13562/devos-funded-group-organizes-protest-against-michigan-governor%E2%80%99s-stay-home-order)

<sup>20</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/23/oregon-portland-pro-trump-protests-violence-texts?utm\\_term=.092660321007cfe089614d125e471c09&utm\\_campaign=USMorningBriefing&utm\\_source=esp&utm\\_medium=Email&CMP=usbriefing\\_email](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/23/oregon-portland-pro-trump-protests-violence-texts?utm_term=.092660321007cfe089614d125e471c09&utm_campaign=USMorningBriefing&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=usbriefing_email)

<sup>21</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/terror-watchlist-capitol-riot-fbi/2021/01/14/07412814-55f7-11eb-a931-5b162dodo33d\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/terror-watchlist-capitol-riot-fbi/2021/01/14/07412814-55f7-11eb-a931-5b162dodo33d_story.html)

## IV THE CREATION OF A TRUMP-INSPIRED COUNTERMOVEMENT

What was happening on the ideological left as Trump was assembling a movement of “white supremacists, veterans, current and former law enforcement officers, a few elected officials, Christian evangelicals, and a motley crew of far-right conspiracy mongers?”<sup>22</sup> As we have seen throughout this study, movements often create their own antithesis, and this was clearly the case from the day after Trump’s inauguration, when millions of women and men demonstrated against his administration. This was the beginning of what came to be called “The Resistance” (Fisher 2019; Meyer & Tarrow, eds. 2018; Skocpol & Tervo, eds. 2020), which energized the Democratic Party’s campaign in the midterm elections of 2018 and contributed to Joe Biden’s victory in 2020.

**Movement/Counter-movement Interaction**

In their much-cited study, David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg examined the relationship between movements and counter-movements during earlier cycles of contention (1996). Defining movements as “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities,” they defined a *counter-movement* as “a movement that makes contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original movement” (ibid., p. 1631). “Movements,” they argued, have a “demonstration effect” for political counter-movements – showing that collective action can effect (or resist) change in particular aspects of society. Movements thus create their own opposition, which sometimes takes counter-movement form. Once a counter-movement is mobilized, movement and counter-movement react to one another (ibid., p. 1632).

In their article, Meyer and Staggenborg listed three conditions that promote the rise of counter-movements: first, that the movement [it opposes] shows signs of success; second, that the interests of some populations are threatened by movement goals; and third, that political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization.

Let us look briefly at how each of these claims applied to the creation of an anti-Trump movement:

*Movement Success:* Trump’s electoral success was certainly a triumph for the movement he had stimulated. Although his legislative successes were modest, his efforts to unravel the administrative state (Rose-Ackerman 2017) and to remake the federal judiciary were highly successful.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, by trumpeting the success of business claims that more expert

<sup>22</sup> See Goodwin, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Donald J. Trump,” p. 1, in note no. 4.

<sup>23</sup> [www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/06/26/trumps-200th-judicial-appointment-less-than-meets-the-eye](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/06/26/trumps-200th-judicial-appointment-less-than-meets-the-eye)

observers considered dubious, Trump was able to shroud himself with an aura of success to low-information and low-interest supporters. His claim to have restored economic prosperity after six years of Obama administration era growth in employment was a public relations success, if not a triumph of economic management.

*Threatened Interests:* During Trump's years in office, the Trump presidency threatened the interests and values of vast sectors of the population, from African Americans to Latinos, to women, to businesses dependent on international trade, foreign policy elites, and to the LGBTQ community. Each major policy initiative – from the refugee ban to repeal of the Affordable Care Act (i.e., “Obamacare”) to tax reform – appeared as a powerful threat to many sectors of the American population.

*Available Allies:* The “demonstration effect” that Meyer and Staggenborg referenced in their article helped Trump's opponents – despite various origins and commitments – to band together through a process that social movement scholars have called “intersectionality” (Fisher 2019: 52–53). If Trump did nothing else, he brought together a broad coalition of progressive Americans around a spectrum of claims that had more often divided than unified the progressive Left. But so outraged were Trump's opponents that these divisions were at least temporarily suppressed. Mobilization grew from the moment of Trump's inauguration in January 2017 to his electoral defeat four years later. This began with the widespread Women's Marches the day after Trump's inauguration, which illustrates how diffuse were the sources of the counter-movement and how it came together (Fisher 2019 and 2020a and b).

### The Centrality of the Women's March

Here is how the Women's Marches' organizers characterized their efforts: “On January 21, 2017,” they wrote,

people of all backgrounds – women and men and gender nonconforming people, young and old, of diverse faiths, differently abled, immigrants, and indigenous – came together, five million strong, on all seven continents of the world. We were answering a call to show up and be counted as those who believe in a world that is equitable, tolerant, just, and safe for all, one in which the human rights and dignity of each person [are] protected and our planet is safe from destruction. Grounded in the nonviolent ideology of the Civil Rights movement, the Women's March was the largest coordinated protest in US history and one of the largest in world history.<sup>24</sup>

What is remarkable about this statement is not that it was exaggerated – which it was – but that it was very nearly true! Consider the claim that the march was “the

<sup>24</sup> [www.womensmarch.com/the-march-1](http://www.womensmarch.com/the-march-1); quoted in David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, “Introduction” to *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement*, 2018, p. 1).

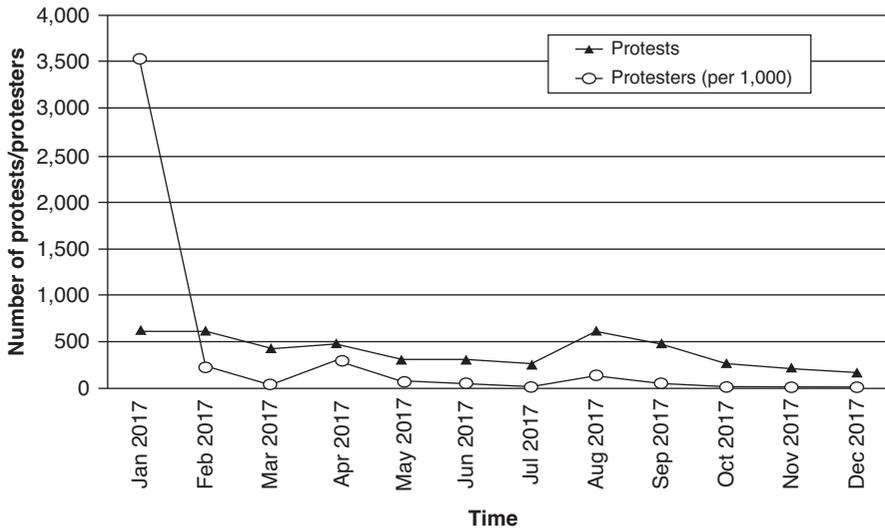


FIGURE 8.1 Crowd-sourced reports on participation in protest events after the 2016 election

Source: Unpublished data graciously provided by Chan Suh. Published in David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement*, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 2.

largest coordinated protest in US history.” A crowd-sourced archive of reports on participation in protest events following the election of Donald Trump tells the dramatic story. In the six-month period that saw thousands of protest events organized over a wide range of issues, the Women’s March towered over the rest, both for the number of citizens participating and for the diffusion of the events it inspired, as Erica Chenoweth and Marie Berry show in their “Who Made the Women’s March?” It was much broader than a march defined by gender, and its most important implication was to show how broadly distaste for Trump was diffused in the population. As Berry and Chenoweth note, after merely 9 weeks of organizing an estimated 4.5 million people were gathered in a mass demonstration around the world (2018: 76) as Figure 8.1 shows.

That march was only the beginning of a wave of rallies and demonstrations around the country. Fisher writes:

Since the 2016 election . . . progressives of all stripes have had much to yell about, and they have come out in droves: marching, chanting, and calling their elected officials regarding efforts made by the Trump administration around a range of progressive issues. (Fisher 2019: 18–19)

The day of women’s marches was followed by a series of national events with overlapping goals, beginning with a March for Science in April 2017, followed by a March for Racial Justice in October of the same year, a second Women’s

March in January 2018, a National School Walkout, a March for our Lives, a Families Belong Together March in July, and the protests against the Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination in September (Fisher 2019, p. 23). Though none of them came close to the first Women's March in turnout or enthusiasm, participation ranged from an estimated 75,000 at the second Women's March to an estimated 800,000 at the March for Our Lives 2 months later (*ibid.*, p. 34).

More remarkable than the breadth of the protests were the overlapping motivations of the protesters. Of course, the designated focus of each event was the most common motivation that participants gave for turning out. But many also reported being motivated by other reasons that spanned the progressive spectrum. Perhaps because of the actions of the Trump administration, "More than 40 percent of participants at the March for Science reported being motivated by women's rights ... , equality (45 percent), politics/voting (44 percent), President Trump (53 percent)." At the second Women's March, "the only motivations that received *less than* 50 percent were labor (46 percent) and religion (25 percent). These results clearly show," Fisher concludes, "that participants in the resistance in the streets are not aligning exclusively with one specific issue; rather, they are motivated by many intersecting and overlapping issues" (Fisher 2019: 51–52).

### Who Were the Resisters?

Who were these people? Participants in the women's marches, Berry and Chenoweth found, were not particularly radical, were disproportionately white, were on average middle-aged, well educated, and more likely to be female than male. Their median age ranged from thirty-seven to forty-two, although this varied substantially across the different marches. Although most marchers associated themselves with the Democratic Party, others were independents or even Republicans who opposed Trump's agenda. A staggering proportion were first-time protesters (Berry & Chenoweth 2018: 85). And although the majority of protesters were there to support gender issues against a president who was a serial denigrator of women (Fisher 2019, p. 45), a broad range of organizations supported the march (Berry & Chenoweth, pp. 76–80).

These groups ranged from purpose-created groups like the Pussyhat Project, which shared knitting patterns for the pink hats that many of the marchers wore, to long-term advocacy groups like the National Organization for Women, the Sierra Club, and the National Bar Association, to labor groups like the AFL-CIO and the SIEU, to the Indivisible network that grew out of a website created by former Democratic staffers (Fisher 2019: 24–25; Brooker 2018; Han & Okawara 2018). In response to particular Trump administration moves, professional groups also took part in collective actions, beginning with the lawyers who came to the airports to oppose his refugee ban in early 2017

(Dorf & Chu 2018). Like the Trump network it was created to oppose, the Resistance grew out of many organizational tributaries.

In the months that followed the women's marches, the press and pundits focused – as they often do – on the radical opponents to Trump's presidency. On the far left, a small and loosely organized “antifa” movement responded to his election with violent outbursts, particularly in places like Portland, Oregon, which had developed a thriving radical culture. Trump's victory also produced a revival of Senator Bernie Sander's left-populist movement, which unified a large number of “Bernie-Bros” across the country. In New York City, a young Latina progressive, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, won the 2018 Democratic Party primary against a moderately liberal Democratic stalwart in New York City, alongside a scattering of other progressive women of color who helped the Democrats take control of the House after those elections. These left-wing currents were fastened on by the Trump campaign as “socialists and communists” who could be expected to destroy American freedoms were the Democrats to be elected in November 2020.

But the Resistance was actually an aggregate of a number of different streams of contention. As Hahrie Han and Michelle Okawara write:

The Women's March on Washington was just one of many new resistance groups that emerged in the wake of the 2016 election. From groups like Swing Left to Flippable, Wall of Us to Indivisible, and People Power to Daily Action, the outpouring of resistance after Trump was elected spawned a host of new networks, apps, and organizations. (Han & Okawara 2018: 231)

Not only that: Trump's election victory galvanized a number of existing organizations into action, increased their donor and membership bases and – in some cases, like the ACLU – led them to shift into more grassroots forms of activity.<sup>25</sup>

### A Cycle of Contention

This maelstrom of movement activity raises a fundamental question: Given the vast range and diversity of the Resistance, was it simply an archipelago of unconnected progressive groups or was it an integrated “cycle of contention”? I use this term to indicate a sequence of heightened conflict across the social system, one that sometimes indicates a critical juncture – as in the New Deal and the 1960s – with a rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, and a combination of organized and unorganized participation (Tarrow 2011, ch. 11).

<sup>25</sup> [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/09/aclu-people-power-freedom-cities-trump-immigration-policies?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/09/aclu-people-power-freedom-cities-trump-immigration-policies?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

The anti-Trump resistance showed all five of these properties of a unified cycle:

- *Heightened conflict across the social system:* Soon after his election, hundreds of thousands of ordinary people went out into the cold to protest – none more dramatically than the US Army veterans who rallied to the side of the Native Americans protesting against the Dakota Access pipeline on their ancestral land.
- *A rapid diffusion of collective action:* A broader range of claims was adopted on the part of women’s groups that were originally mobilized against Trump’s abuse of women in the great January 21 Women’s March, as we learned from Dana Fisher’s surveys and from other sources.<sup>26</sup>
- *Innovation in the forms of contention:* When Trump was first elected, the normally slow-moving and legalistic ACLU responded as it always has: “We’ll see you in court,” they warned the new administration. But by early March, the ACLU had launched a “People Power” network in what it called “Freedom Cities” to resist the new administration.<sup>27</sup>
- *The creation of new or transformed forms of protest:* In the face of the new administration’s assault on undocumented immigrants, a large number of cities and counties declared themselves to be “sanctuaries” and ordered their police and sheriffs’ offices not to cooperate with federal agents seeking to detain these immigrants.
- *A combination of organized and unorganized participation:*<sup>28</sup> The town hall protests against the Republican health-care repeal plans brought together experienced activists with ordinary people, many of whom had never protested before.

Ingenuous efforts to unite these threads into a loosely coordinated national network were soon made. For example, after the 2016 election, a group of former congressional staffers published *Indivisible, A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda*.<sup>29</sup> To their surprise, the online guide attracted the attention of thousands of viewers and what had begun as a “how to” guide turned into a network, one that used social media and email communications to highlight innovations and reforms in local, state, and national government.<sup>30</sup> Many of the local groups that sprang up out of the women’s marches identified

<sup>26</sup> See Fisher 2020a and Adam Gabbatt, “Solidarity Sundays: Women Resist Trump with Monthly Activism Meet-Ups.” *The Guardian*, March 31, 2017. [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar31/trump-resistance](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar31/trump-resistance)

<sup>27</sup> [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/09/aclu-people-power-freedom-cities-trump-immigration-policies?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/09/aclu-people-power-freedom-cities-trump-immigration-policies?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

<sup>28</sup> For a general rundown of the major groups that have formed nationally to contest the Trump administration, go to [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/09/the-resistance-now-key-players-donald-trump?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/09/the-resistance-now-key-players-donald-trump?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

<sup>29</sup> [www.indivisibleguide.com](http://www.indivisibleguide.com)

<sup>30</sup> [www.cnn.com/2017/02/11/politics/indivisible-profile-trnd/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/11/politics/indivisible-profile-trnd/index.html)

themselves with Indivisible, but the composition, the goals, and the methods of the groups that constituted its “membership” were distinct from one another. They varied in how they framed their messages and in the forms of contention they employed, and they ranged from those that were part of the institutional landscape to those that were outside the gates of institutional politics. But that is exactly the point: They made up what Milkis and Tichenor call “a formative movement” with significant institutional and noninstitutional facets (2019), a variety of modes of action, and differential links to institutional politics (see Table 1.1). The anti-Trump movement also brought about a major development: overcoming one of the most enduring divisions of progressive social movements – between white people and people of color.

### Race, Racism, and “Law and Order”

An early glimmer that the enduring issue of race would play a role in the Resistance took place before Trump’s election with the killing of Trayvon Martin by a self-appointed vigilante in Florida and of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Soon after, when he was selling cigarettes on Staten Island, a man named Eric Garner was killed by a New York City policeman during an arrest. Most of the protests that followed these outrages were peaceful and were organized by the rising “Black Lives Matter” movement. But some were violent, like the riots that followed Michael Brown’s killing in Ferguson, and the murder of two police officers in New York by a man who claimed to be responding to the killing of Eric Garner.<sup>31</sup> But it was the murder of George Floyd by a police officer on the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020 that launched a national and international wave of protests around the theme of “Black Lives Matter.”

### George Floyd and Multiracial Resistance

The year 2020 was a terrible one for America’s black community. Apart from the coronavirus pandemic and the economic shock it produced, which disproportionately affected people of color, the murder of a black man by a brutal white policeman on the streets of Minneapolis exposed the glaring nature of the racial cleavage in American society. Not long before, another African American named Ahmaud Arbery had been shot dead by two white men who pursued him in a van while he jogged through their neighborhood.<sup>32</sup> Not long after, a young woman named Breonna Taylor was killed in her bedroom in

<sup>31</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/nyregion/two-police-officers-shot-in-their-patrol-car-in-brooklyn.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/nyregion/two-police-officers-shot-in-their-patrol-car-in-brooklyn.html)

<sup>32</sup> The murder was filmed by a third man who was later found to have been collaborating with the killers. [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/05/10/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-new-video-shows-georgia-jogger-did-nothing-illegal/3105123001](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/05/10/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-new-video-shows-georgia-jogger-did-nothing-illegal/3105123001)

Louisville, Kentucky, by three police officers executing a “no-knock” warrant.<sup>33</sup> But the culmination of this string of killings came on May 25, when Floyd was arrested outside a store in Minneapolis where he had been suspected of trying to pass off counterfeit money.<sup>34</sup> Caught on a cell-phone camera with his hands manacled, Floyd appeared to be complying with the arresting officers. But moments later, he was on the ground next to a police cruiser. When he complained that he couldn’t breathe, the policeman, Derek Chauvin, told him to stop shouting. As passersby pleaded with Chauvin to release him, Floyd cried out for his mother and died.

A video revealed the extent of the crime. Chauvin had kept his knee on Floyd’s neck for more than nine minutes while three of his colleagues looked on. The officer was charged with second- and third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter, while the other officers were charged with lesser offenses.<sup>35</sup> The murder led to a massive cycle of protest. Polls taken over the following weeks estimated that between 15 and 26 million Americans participated in demonstrations over Floyd’s murder. According to the *New York Times*,<sup>36</sup> on June 6 alone, half a million people came out to protest in nearly 550 different places. This would make the wave of protest the largest in the country’s history, according to scholars interviewed by the *Times*. “I’ve never seen self-reports of protest participation that high for a specific issue over such a short period,” said Neal Caren, editor of the prestigious academic journal *Mobilization* – more than the 3 to 5 million people who had turned out to protest Donald Trump’s inauguration four years earlier.<sup>37</sup>

Protests following police abuse had also occurred during the urban unrest of the 1960s. But in three respects, this new wave of protest was different:

First, the slogan of many of the protesters was institutional – a demand to “defund the police!” In a dozen cities, including Minneapolis, city councils voted reductions in police funding,<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/breonna-taylor-police-shooting-what-we-know-about-kentucky-woman-n1207841](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/breonna-taylor-police-shooting-what-we-know-about-kentucky-woman-n1207841)

<sup>34</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52861726)

<sup>35</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/us/derek-chauvin-criminal-complaint.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/us/derek-chauvin-criminal-complaint.html)

<sup>36</sup> Well worth reading is Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, “Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2020. [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html)

<sup>37</sup> Erica Chenoweth and Jeffrey Pressman, “This Is What We Learned by Counting the Women’s Marches,” *The Monkey Cage*, February 7, 2017. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/07/this-is-what-we-learned-by-counting-the-womens-marches](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/07/this-is-what-we-learned-by-counting-the-womens-marches)

<sup>38</sup> This happened in some of America’s biggest cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. The defunding bills included proposals to remove police as responders for “noncriminal” calls, homeless services, traffic enforcement, mental health emergencies, substance abuse, public transit, and other areas of social services. [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/15/defund-police-movement-us-victories-what-next?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/15/defund-police-movement-us-victories-what-next?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

Second, in part because a presidential election was imminent, the protests transitioned quickly into institutional politics. Across the country, city councils voted to remove, or to displace, statues of heroes of the Confederacy. Even the military began to study changing the names of bases named after Civil War generals. The impact soon spread to presidential politics, helping Biden to choose Kamala Harris, a mixed-race former attorney general from California, as his vice-presidential pick. And in the November presidential elections, a large proportion of voters told pollsters that – both positively and negatively – Floyd’s killing and the attendant protests affected their votes.<sup>39</sup>

Third, and most important, the new movement was multiracial. Outrage at Floyd’s murder spread from African Americans to white and Hispanic communities and to small towns and cities as well as to metropolitan areas. This was “a demographic mix that is far more varied than anything we have seen in recent years,” wrote Doug McAdam soon after. Indeed, writes McAdam, the mix is “far more diverse than anything we saw during the heyday of the mass Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.”<sup>40</sup> This resonated to a degree with the co-occurrence of civil rights and the antiwar protesters during Nixon’s 1968 campaign, but there was a sharp contrast. Though most of the 1960s’ antiwar movement was white, the movement that arose in 2020 over police killings of African Americans was interracial. Poll results across the country showed growing minorities of white voters expressing sympathy for injustice against African Americans.

After Floyd’s killing, Dana Fisher and Michael Heaney assembled a group of interviewers in New York, Washington, DC, and Los Angeles to survey pro-George Floyd protesters. To their surprise, as the *New York Times* reported, “White protesters made up 61 percent of those surveyed in New York over the weekend, according to the researchers, and 65 percent of protesters in Washington. On Sunday in Los Angeles, 53 percent of protesters were white. Many organizations and institutions embraced the protests, asking what the current moment demanded of them, or what changes could be made to advance social justice and racial equity.”<sup>41</sup> As Doug McAdam, who has done some of the best work on the demographics of civil rights protests, observed of the wave of protests in the summer of 2020:

This fact brings us to the most important, and potentially consequential, difference between the current protests and any we’ve seen in recent years: the racial and ethnic

<sup>39</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/11/07/us/black-lives-matter-protests.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/07/us/black-lives-matter-protests.html). As could be expected, while Democratic voters were outraged by the killing and were enthused by the protests, Republican voters were stuck by the violence and looting that accompanied the protests in some cities.

<sup>40</sup> Doug McAdam, “We’ve Never Seen Protests like These Before,” *Jacobin*, June 20, 2020. [www.jacobinmag.com/2020/06/george-floyd-protests-black-lives-matter-riots-demonstrations](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/06/george-floyd-protests-black-lives-matter-riots-demonstrations)

<sup>41</sup> For example, in the 2020 elections, five states had racial justice referenda on the ballot. [www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/racial-justice-ballot-these-5-states-november-n1243337](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/racial-justice-ballot-these-5-states-november-n1243337)

diversity of the current protest wave. Given this is an ongoing and young movement, it is hard to get a systematic handle on the demographics of the protesters, but there is simply no denying the diversity of those taking part (2020: 1).

How did Trump respond? Already in trouble with the electorate because of his chaotic response to the pandemic, he tried to use the George Floyd protests and the occasional violence they triggered to turn his campaign into a call for “law and order.” Even before his election, Trump had been quick to respond to the swelling threat of the new black movement: “I have a message to every last person threatening the peace on our streets and the safety of our police,” he warned. “When I take the oath of office next year, I will restore law and order to our country.”<sup>42</sup> In taking this line, Trump followed the playbook of Richard Nixon during the 1968 campaign, when he had famously coined the term “the silent majority” for those he hoped to mobilize against the antiwar movement.<sup>43</sup> But Trump’s racial appeals went further; he was willing to strip away the disguise that had hidden Republican racist appeals as, for example, when he warned suburban mothers that if Joe Biden was elected president, low-cost housing (*read*: minority) would be imposed on their communities.<sup>44</sup>

On July 8, 2020, following violent protests over Floyd’s murder and accompanied by his Attorney General, William Barr, Trump marched out of the White House to St. John’s Episcopal Church, which had been damaged by fire in previous days, waving a Bible. Because there were still protesters on the streets, the president ordered security forces to clear the square in front of the White House, employing tear gas to do so. Trump’s photo-op in front of the church came after he delivered remarks at the White House in which he declared himself “your president of law and order” and demanded that state governors deploy National Guard units to “dominate the streets.”<sup>45</sup>

In response to the repression of peaceful protesters on the streets of her city, Mayor Muriel Bowser renamed the square from which the protesters had been cleared “Black Lives Matter Plaza” and applauded the efforts by activists to paint the group’s name down the middle of the street. “In America, you can peacefully assemble,” Bowser said in remarks to the crowd. In New York City, protesters went a step further in linking the president to Floyd’s killing, painting a similar message in front of Trump Tower. Mayor Bill de Blasio joined the

<sup>42</sup> Perry Bacon Jr., “Trump and Other Conservatives Embrace Blue Lives Matter Movement,” *NBC News*, July 23, 2016. [www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2016-conventions/trump-other-conservatives-embrace-blue-lives-matter-movement-n615156](http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2016-conventions/trump-other-conservatives-embrace-blue-lives-matter-movement-n615156)

<sup>43</sup> Angie Maxwell recalls that “When Nixon used the phrase in 1968, his goal was to occupy a middle ground of voters between Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey and third-party candidate George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama.” Those were white voters who “liked their racism polite.” Trump’s appropriation of the term appeals more to openly racist voters.

<sup>44</sup> [www.politico.com/news/2020/08/23/trumplow-income-housing-suburbs-400155](http://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/23/trumplow-income-housing-suburbs-400155)

<sup>45</sup> [www.npr.org/2020/07/17/892277592/federal-officers-use-unmarked-vehicles-to-grab-protesters-in-portland](http://www.npr.org/2020/07/17/892277592/federal-officers-use-unmarked-vehicles-to-grab-protesters-in-portland)

activists in painting the letters “BLACK LIVES MATTER” on the street, adopting the language of patriotism to applaud the protesters. “When we say ‘Black Lives Matter’,” he pronounced, “there is no more American statement, there is no more patriotic statement because there is no America without Black America.”<sup>46</sup> “Black Lives Matter” paintings followed on the streets of a number of other cities and around the world.

### The Radicalization of Trumpism

Affronted by the protests and by the street painting of “Black Lives Matter” outside the White House, Trump fulminated but could do nothing against these symbolic acts. Republican officials, who had been following his dizzying navigations for the last three and a half years, had little to say about them either. But a spinoff of the Trump movement arose on the part of a spectrum of far right groups who were enraged by the chaos on the streets and by the apparent inability of the police to control it.<sup>47</sup> Some of these – like the so-called Proud Boys – were already in existence when Trump came into office but rose to become his ardent supporters when he urged them to “stand by and stand down,” a clear signal that he did not want to lose their support for his reelection campaign and beyond.<sup>48</sup>

In the course of the campaign, convoys of vehicles filled with armed right-wing activists began to thread through the streets of cities where there had been racial justice protests, waving their guns and occasionally shooting paintballs at protesters. In many of these places, following the playbook from Charlottesville,<sup>49</sup> far right activists adopted the tactic of ramming protesters with their vehicles. As of early July, more than 100 Black Lives Matter protesters reported having been rammed while marching.<sup>50</sup> As the president fulminated about his desire to defend law and order during his increasingly frequent campaign rallies, his most ardent supporters threatened to turn the cycle of protest into a spiral of violence.

As in many cycles of contention, the attention of the public following Floyd’s murder largely focused on evidence that the country was going through a crisis. And so it was, heightened by the tragedy of the coronavirus pandemic, the economy’s attendant decline, and the president’s increasingly erratic reactions. But beneath the radar, there were signs that the chaos and conflict of the summer and fall of 2020 were disguising deeper currents that might be fueling a galactic shift in American politics. This was first evident during the midterm

<sup>46</sup> [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/09/black-lives-matter-trump-tower-de-blasio?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/09/black-lives-matter-trump-tower-de-blasio?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

<sup>47</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/08/30/us/portland-trump-rally-shooting.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/30/us/portland-trump-rally-shooting.html)

<sup>48</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/10/02/opinion/trump-proud-boys.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/02/opinion/trump-proud-boys.html)

<sup>49</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40912509](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40912509)

<sup>50</sup> [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/07/08/vehicle-ramming-attacks-66-us-since-may-27/5397700002](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/07/08/vehicle-ramming-attacks-66-us-since-may-27/5397700002)

elections of 2018 and to the move from “the barricades to the ballot box” in both that year and in 2020 (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010).

## V FROM THE “BARRICADES” TO THE BALLOT BOX

Bolstered by the upsurge of militancy following Trump’s election, the Democratic Party won the 2018 midterm election by a whopping margin. While the Democrats lost 2 seats in the Senate, they gained 43 House seats, took control of 7 more governorships, and won 350 new state legislative seats. Among those elected to the House, 167 were women, compared to 89 in 2016, two of them the youngest women ever elected to Congress. Two others were the first Native American women elected to Congress, and two were Muslims. Among the total of newly elected Democrats, there were 23 people of color and 10 LGBTQ Americans. By any metric, this was the most diverse freshman class of any American Congress ever elected.<sup>51</sup>

The press was drawn to the election victory of an attractive young candidate, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who came from an immigrant family in New York City. Arriving in Washington in early 2019, “AOC” allied with three other progressive women of color in a group that called itself “the squad.” The press gave outsized attention to these four women, neglecting the fact that most of the Democrats who took seats from the Republicans in the 2018 election were moderates who had been elected from swing districts.<sup>52</sup>

Until these new Congress members had time to establish a solid voting record, the best way to calculate how radical or moderate the new cohort of congressional Democrats would be was by examining the endorsements they received from groups with different ideological perspectives. Based on the endorsements by one moderate group (New Dem PAC) and by three progressive groups (Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, and Brand New Congress), it seems clear that candidates who were endorsed by the moderate New Dem PAC both did better proportionately in both the primaries and the general election than those who were endorsed by of the more progressive groups. Table 8.1 summarizes these data from the lists of democratic candidates endorsed by these four groups in the 2018 election.

How much of the electoral shift in the 2018 midterms was the result of the mobilization of women politicized by the women’s marches is not possible to say. But what is clearly true is that many of the women returning home from that event transitioned from marching in the streets to mobilizing in the districts (Fisher 2019: ch. 4; Putnam 2020). These were not the “usual suspects” of progressive politics nor were they veterans of earlier protests. From her follow-

<sup>51</sup> These data come from [https://ballotpedia.org/Election\\_results,\\_2018](https://ballotpedia.org/Election_results,_2018)

<sup>52</sup> The ideological composition of the “class of 2019” is calculated from the endorsements offered to different candidates by political action committees associated with the Democratic Party. The data were collected by the self-declared “modern center-left group, Third Way. For the complete analysis, go to [www.thirdway.org/memo/2018-endorsement-scorecard](http://www.thirdway.org/memo/2018-endorsement-scorecard)

TABLE 8.1 *Endorsement of Democratic House candidates by four different political action committees, 2018 election*

Political action group	Number endorsed in 2018 primary	% of Endorsed candidates chosen	Numbered endorsed in 2018 election	% of Endorsed candidates elected
<i>Moderate:</i>				
New democratic PAC	37	86%	57	55%
<i>Progressive:</i>				
Our revolution	57	37%	35	14%
Justice democrats	74	31%	23	17%
Brand new Congress	27	30%	11	9%

*Source:* The data were calculated by the author from Third Way, which defines itself as a modern center-left group. For the complete analysis, go to [www.thirdway.org/memo/2018-endorsement-scorecard](http://www.thirdway.org/memo/2018-endorsement-scorecard)

up interviews with women who had participated in the marches, Fisher found that a third had never participated in a demonstration before and that many had little or no contact with any of the formal organizations that had backed the march (Fisher, *ibid.*, p. 47).

This was a new incarnation of the “amateur Democrat” movement that James Q. Wilson wrote of in the 1960s (1962), with the difference that these new activists were far more numerous and came out of a movement on the boundaries of institutional politics. As Lara Putnam, who studied many of these women’s groups up close, writes:

Far beyond blue metropolises, rural and rust belt counties with one-twentieth of the population of Queens or Brooklyn also saw cases of drama and insurgence around county committee leadership elections. Grassroots activists had decided that a seat at the table was worth fighting for, even though the national party that put the tables out in the first place seemed not to think they mattered much at all. (Putnam 2020: 184)

White educated women’s support for the Democrats continued to grow in the run-up to the 2020 election. Six weeks before that election, according to a *Washington Post–ABC* poll, Biden held a 65 percent to 34 percent advantage among likely female voters. Trump’s lead among men remained about the same as it had been in 2016, but Biden’s lead among women was

more than twice as large as Clinton's had been four years earlier.<sup>53</sup> Beneath the dramatic headlines regarding police murders, street riots, countermovement violence, and Trump's threat to refuse to step down if he lost the election, the deep story of the 2020 election was the unlikely combination of an interracial coalition protesting in the streets and middle-class black and white women getting out the vote in the districts (Fisher 2019).

Will these forces constitute a new movement/party hybrid – like labor insurgents did in the 1930s and civil rights activists did in the 1970s? Or will they disappear into the now-successful Democratic Party like the veterans of the anti-Iraq War movement we met in Chapter 7? This story had not ended as these lines are written, but there are signs that in the multiple crises set off by the Trump presidency and continuing in the form of the movement he founded the loud and bombastic Donald Trump may have met his match from a mass movement of ordinary Americans coming together across class, race, and gender lines in a movement/party coalition that brings to mind earlier such coalitions in American history.<sup>54</sup> But did Trump's loss of the 2020 elections mean the end of Trumpism? On the answer to this question may hinge the future of the American party system and of American democracy, in general.

## VI AFTERWORD: TRUMPISM AFTER TRUMP?

The invasion of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, was one of the most tragic days in American political history. Soon labeled by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and others “a day that will live forever in infamy,”<sup>55</sup> it is too soon to assess its long-term impacts on American democracy. But within the framework of this study, three features of the invasion of the Capitol stand out:

First, it showed how truly dangerous a movement demagogue can be in a democracy when given the instruments of power. This was not only true of Trump's politicization of the Executive Branch (Mettler & Lieberman 2020: ch. 9) but of his ability to use his “bully pulpit” to mobilize an army of followers.

Second, those followers were not simply an excitable “base,” as they have been characterized by the press and much of the commentariat: They were both coup plotters and rioters<sup>56</sup> who came from *a social movement*, with the properties of many of the movements we have encountered in this book: an extreme ideological commitment; a nonrational attachment to

<sup>53</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/poll-trump-biden-post-abc/2020/09/26/940ef678-ff7f-11ea-9ceb-061d646d9c67\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/poll-trump-biden-post-abc/2020/09/26/940ef678-ff7f-11ea-9ceb-061d646d9c67_story.html)

<sup>54</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/us/george-floyd-white-protesters.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/us/george-floyd-white-protesters.html)

<sup>55</sup> [www.radio.com/wcbs880/news/local/schumer-says-jan-6-2021-will-live-forever-in-infamy](https://www.radio.com/wcbs880/news/local/schumer-says-jan-6-2021-will-live-forever-in-infamy)

<sup>56</sup> See Goodwin, cited in note no. 4, for the argument that the invasion of the Capitol is best seen as both a coup and a riot.

their leader; and especially a willingness to transgress the institutional routines of ordinary politics to make their claims.

Third – and here I return to the central message of this book – the Trump movement was at the same time both anti-political and highly political. Its anti-political nature was built on fealty to a leader who claimed to be an insurgent force on behalf of the “pure” people against the corrupt elite, but its political nature is that it was mobilizable for political purposes by that leader and served as a wedge to help him to gain the fealty of a good part of the Republican Party.

How likely is it that the Trumpist movement will remain vital? As this book goes to press, it is far too soon to tell. On the one hand, in the maelstrom of recriminations and arrests that followed the invasion of the Capitol, there were signs that the Trump movement, and possibly the Republican Party itself, was heading to dissolution. But on the other hand, a small majority of Republican voters continued to claim that the 2020 election had been stolen, long after its results had been certified.<sup>57</sup> Given the widespread conspiracy theories and calls for rebellion on social media following the attempted coup, the United States may be headed for a long period of political violence.

Trump may be gone, but his remarkable success in melding a significant portion of the Republican electorate to himself has major implications for the relations between movements and parties.

First, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Trump didn’t need a well-organized political machine to get himself elected. His campaign infrastructure was largely made up of organizations that he did nothing to create and did not control, many of them emerging from the New Right and Christian Right movements of the preceding decades. The result may be that little of this infrastructure will be left behind when he is gone from the scene. Already, after the 2020 election campaign, campaign megadonor Charles Koch offered regret for the partisan ways of his organization. “Boy, did we screw up!” he declared to an interviewer.<sup>58</sup>

Second, the lack of a traditional organizational infrastructure made it unnecessary for Trump as president to expend resources maintaining it. Having won the presidency by the media and having governed through the media, his instinct as an ex-president will be to continue to rely on the media to transmit and amplify his message and attack his opponents. But this means that although he maintained a loyal – and indeed, a passionate – base after losing power, his “aura of specialness may dissipate as public opinion changes” (Ben-Ghiat, p. 13).

<sup>57</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/09/trump-twitter-protests](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/01/09/trump-twitter-protests)

<sup>58</sup> [www.economist.com/united-states/2020/11/19/charles-koch-offers-partial-regrets-for-his-partisan-ways](https://www.economist.com/united-states/2020/11/19/charles-koch-offers-partial-regrets-for-his-partisan-ways)

Third, Trump's bombastic appeals and his capacity to stir the fervor of conservatives of every stripe triggered the creation of an equally diverse countermovement. When the history of Trumpism is recorded in the history books, this countermovement may be forgotten. But its interaction with the Trump movement was one of the factors that led to the revival of the Democratic Party's campaign capacity and to Joe Biden's election. Whether it will endure after Trump's political demise is another question, one that depends very much on what happens to the relationship between his movement and the Republican Party and whether the latter will seek to return to the big-tent party of the past (Patterson 2020).

Much will also depend on how the Democrats respond to the opportunity afforded them by the end of the Trump presidency. Will the party work to delegitimize its opponents, as many Republicans claimed during the impeachment debate of early 2021? Or will it respond with an effort to reduce the polarization of the polity by encouraging the GOP to return to its older ways? Much depends on how the two main parties manage their relations with the movements that circulate on their margins. We will return to this question in the Conclusions after examining how three other countries – Italy, Chile, and South Korea – responded to their own crises of democracy.