Bringing Class Back In:
Cultural Bubbles and American Political Polarization
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1. INTRODUCTION

The election of Donald Trump has given rise to an important debate about the fundamental sources of his electoral strength and the roots of populist trends in the West more generally. Both the scholarly and popular debates have been unhelpfully divided, however, between those that argue for the role of economics, on the one hand, or for cultural factors, such as racism or xenophobia, on the other. To fully explain the populist trend, political scientists need to develop a better understanding of the interaction between material circumstances and cultural identity, rather than seeing them as separate. As one way forward, I propose a focus on the cultural construction of class, specifically, the study of how the geography of inequality in a changing 21st century economy has created unprecedented political polarization in the US, making more likely Trump's rise. Drawing on the practice turn in political science, I offer a preliminary argument about how we might better account for the role of economic change in promoting political change, rather than relying solely on traditional political economy scholarship. Making class a social category grounded in practice, I posit the growing spatial separation of economic opportunity across the US a critical factor explaining today's politics.

As such, this paper represents a series of propositions meant to spark debate and move us towards understanding how economics and identity interact in today's world. By laying out the steps in my argument, I hope that our conversation will help make more precise my theoretical claims and causal mechanisms, while eliciting suggestions about how to go about testing the relationship between economic circumstances, social identities and political polarization.

2. THE PUZZLE

What explains the rise of anti-establishment anger and the striking political polarization that marked the election of Donald Trump? Trump was the candidate whose policy proposals and whose personal comportment seemed to fly in the face of everything as assumed about what voters want, yet he convincingly won the electoral college vote and thus the US Presidential election of 2016.[1] At a time of

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[1] Moody's analytics, for example, projected a resounding Clinton win; "Low gas prices and President Barack Obama's high approval ratings are key factors that favor Democrat Hillary Clinton winning the White House in next week's election,

overall economic growth, low national unemployment, and stable prices, why did voters turn out in support of a candidate who vowed to dismantle the "rigged" system of the US government, and delink the US from the broader world through policies of economic protectionism and "America First" policies? The assumption of pundits and political scientists alike is that voters are largely rational, self-interested people who vote for material gain, aside from a smaller group who might be single issue voters for a particular value, as with abortion. When a putatively populist candidate, with no government experience, who defies conventional norms about Presidential temperament, wins office in America, it creates a series of puzzles for us, separate from normative concerns about the implications of his Presidency itself.

Moreover, Trump's success is not a one-off event, as traditional left-right politics have been upended in Europe as well. Traditional politics could not explain the populist backlash evidenced in the UK's Brexit vote to leave the EU, or in the rising poll numbers for candidates like France's Marie LePen. The anti-establishment and nativist parties growing in support across Europe indicate something has profoundly changed in established liberal, western order. Once voters seemed content to support status quo candidates and their ongoing engagement with world markets, and their rhetoric (if not always policies) of liberal humanitarian values. Yet today, a deep cleavage seems to be opening up between populists and the tradition of cosmopolitan liberalism, a split that replaces the traditional left-right split (Norris and Inglehart 2016).

The unexpectedness of Trump's victory was a harsh wake up call to conventional understandings of the equilibrium tendencies of the established political order. Just as with the surprise pro-Brexit vote, the conventional wisdom among the chattering classes and in the polls was that Hillary Clinton would be the winner—literally up until the actual results started coming in. Some blamed polling errors, but it became apparent that a basic disbelief by elites regarding Trump's rise contributed to the shock of the results.[2] Reporting quickly turned to the rural, working class white voters who seemed to form the heart of Trump's support, in an effort to understand the attraction of a candidate who many on the coasts and cities of the US viewed as repugnant and likely to deeply disappoint those very same voters in his policies.

Now, as I write this, we are a country profoundly divided and polarized. A large percent of registered Republicans continue to support Trump even after a

according to a model from Moody's Analytics that has accurately predicted the last nine U.S. presidential contests." http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-research-moody-s-idUSKBN12W56J

[2] A friend who covers the White House for a major newspaper commented to me before the election that his reporter colleagues were barely even covering Trump during the primaries, as they simply could not envision him winning nor did they know anyone who would ever vote for him.

chaotic and contentious first month in office, while the Women's March the day after his inauguration saw historically unprecedented turnouts over the country and world against his Presidency, and calls to 'Resist' continue to build across those who find him a frightening authoritarian challenge to American democracy.

How did we get here? My own field of comparative and international political economy would seem to offer a useful start, as it purports to understand the intertwining of politics and markets. The dominant literature in comparative and international political economy today begins from an analysis of an individual's place in the global economy (Lake 2006; Lake 2009). The mapping of this position is the analytic foundation for the theoretical construction of the individual's interests and thus political preferences.   Open economy politics (OEP) scholarship focuses squarely on individuals conceptualized as belonging to key economic categories, and from these categories different positions in the global economy can be mapped. In the seminal literature in this approach, the unit of analysis, or primary category actors are within, is generally either factors, sectors and firms (Rogowski 1989; Frieden 1991; Milner 1988). The literature asks how opening or closure to international markets, the variable of central concern in this literature, impacts particular groups of actors and thus influences the path of politics. The standard OEP approach is materially oriented, with actors' interest purely the maximization of economic gain, and actors are assumed to know their specific interests in the global economy as defined by liberal economic theory. The background assumption is that actors will act in strategically rational ways to support politicians and policies that reflect those economic interests (Farrell and Newman 2015).

However, the initial data on the election does not seem to fit this underlying story. A very large Gallup survey by found little evidence that a simple coding of economic situation correlated with support for Donald Trump (Rothwell and Diego-Rosewell 2016). Instead, the results showed "mixed evidence that economic distress has motivated Trump support. His supporters are less educated and more likely to work in blue collar occupations, but they earn relatively high household incomes and are no less likely to be unemployed or exposed to competition through trade or immigration" (Rothwell and Diego-Rosewell 2016, 1). Neither did a traditional party politics story based on economic-based class partisanship seem to work, as the 2016 electoral outcome continued a ongoing trend of professionals moving towards the Democratic Party on one hand, and managers and self-employed towards the Republicans, with routine white collar workers (service, sales and clerical) and blue collar workers clustered in the middle (Hout and Laurison 2014, 1040).

The shortcomings of the initial pass at explaining the election with simple material economic correlations has caused many in political science and in the popular press to turn to a second, opposing (but equally monocausal) story: it is simple racism or xenophobia that has propelled Donald Trump to the White House. The nativist rhetoric and xenophobic policies were the appeal, in this view, for

Trump voters. Early reactions to Trump's win in op-eds and blog posts painfully and angrily took up this explanation. One Vox entry's title said it all: "Trump's win is a reminder of the incredible, unbeatable power of racism: He tapped into the most powerful force in America' (Desmond-Harris 2016), while another went beyond US borders to state baldly: "Donald Trump's victory is part of a global white backlash".

Anyone following the campaign, and now Trump's Presidency, can easily see how Trump's 'Make American Great Again' tropes can be readily understood as a call to the return to glory of white male privilege.   Some Trump supporters have displayed truly vile and norm breaking racism, sexism, xenophobia, and islamophobia at rallies, in multiple online fora and in comments to the media. The rise in hate crimes and the vandalism and threats against minority populations such as with the bomb threats on Jewish community centers are unacceptable and horrifying and seem to validate this racism story.

Yet the racism argument also falls short in capturing the entirety of Trump's victory, as it doesn't square with the initial data on the election. Many commentators have noted that millions of white working-class voters across the United States voted for Obama and then switched to Trump (Weigel 2016). It is also the case that Trump actually won a slightly smaller percentage of white voters than Mitt Romney (but prevailed because minority voters and the young did not turn out for Clinton as they did for Obama) (Ramakrishnan 2016; French 2016).

In addition to being unconvincing empirically, the argument that Trump's victory is due to racist hate has had an unfortunate and self-defeating effect, as it has brought many people to see any efforts to understand Trump voters as themselves abhorrent. While coastal elites have made J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* a best seller, and *New York Times* reporters have fanned out to talk to rural white communities largely ignored before the election, these activities have come under fire from liberals who are disgusted by the values on display by the Trump supporters. Some mock alternative arguments focused on economic anxiety and caution against the Democratic Party engaging with any of the issues that may be driving the Trump win, even as the same Gallup study finding mixed economic drivers found that "living in racially isolated communities with worse health outcomes, lower social mobility, less social capital, greater reliance on social security income and less reliance on capital income, predicts higher levels of Trump support" (Rothwell and Diego-Rosewell 2016, 1).

So, we are left with an unsatisfying explanation of the electoral success of Donald Trump and the broader transatlantic questioning of the very foundations of the post war order. How should we then begin to explain these very complicated politics, seemingly unprecedented in the postwar era?

3. THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF CLASS

In contrast to the accounts above, my contention is that the surprising and important political outcomes we face today cannot be understood simply in either/or terms—*either* the economy *or* cultural values of racism driving the outcomes. Much like the contemporary debate over the sources of Trump's victory, political science itself has long been embroiled in an unproductive division between accounts that monocausally focus on material interest *or* on ideational and cultural factors. This ontological and epistemological divide extends to methodology, as scholars in one tradition (qualitative or quantitative) often spurn those in the other, without appreciating that ontology and method need not go in lockstep (McNamara 2009). This divide makes developing a solid account of the politics of our moment even more difficult than it already is. We need theoretical models that instead describe how our interests are constructed in terms of material economic conditions as well as theories specifying the social processes at work in shaping our identities. Such models could provide a foundation for understanding political preference formation and the activation of collective groups around those preferences.

To construct one such model, it is useful to start with the basic and yet often underappreciated insight that social action has multiple logics. Unlike the assumptions of the dominant approach in political science that largely assumes narrowly defined rationality directed by material motivations, there are in fact a range of drivers and logics of human action. Scholars have developed various categories to express these different motivations. Max Weber laid out four "orientations" of social action: instrumental rationality, value rationality, emotion or affective rationality, and habit (Hopf 2010). Others have illuminated these logics by emphasizing the multifaceted human search for material rewards (wealth, income), emotional rewards (love, affection, sex) and symbolic rewards (prestige and social standing) (Massey 2007, 1).

Yet while many would agree that humans are always more than a simple story of *homo economicus*, they resist the notion that these logics can intertwine in causally important ways, or that this co-constitution is amenable to systematic study. Instead, most political scientists still clung to the notion that humans toggle between two operating systems in our calculations and behaviors: a "logic of consequences" versus a "logic of appropriateness," where the former is our rational, instrumental selves and the latter is a normatively driven state where instrumental rationality is overridden and put aside (March and Olsen 1984).

The separation and causal isolation of each of these logics certainly may make sense for some research questions. Inglehart and Norris for example, offer a important sustained and close analysis of the role of economic factors, and the role of cultural values, in the rise of populist parties across 31 European countries (Inglehart and Norris 2016). But isolating each factor can keep us from

understanding the interplay of the logics in producing outcomes difficult to explain otherwise. An effort to build an analytical model of how the two are intertwined and nested might explain the "mixed and inconsistent" findings about the role of economic insecurity in political preferences (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 4).

Sociology is one discipline that offers some useful ways of setting out a model of how economic rational materialism and cultural facts are intertwined. In essence, the argument is that our logics of appropriateness actually shape our logics of consequence. So, rather than the traditional political science notion that outcomes can be explain either by ideas or by interests, we can ask how ideas (or identities, norms, or culture) actively shape our sense of those own interests. The culture that we are a part of filters how we see our material realities and evaluate whether we are winners or losers from a particular policy or electoral outcome. While sociologists, particularly economic sociologists, are perfectly comfortable with this notion, the majority of political scientists would likely reject this approach.

Bringing Class Back In

Fortunately, in the area of political economy, we have ready made starting point for specifically understanding how material interests and identity interact: class. Although central to political science for decades, class largely fell off the radar of scholars in mainstream American political economy by the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. While class continued to be used in understanding the unfolding of politics in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere, it was not a focus of American politics, or the fields of international and comparative political economy, since the early 1990s.[3] The study of US voting and public opinion, according to one account, has no consensus about the role class plays, or does not play, in political preferences, even as most scholars agree economic circumstances matter. "The "class" thesis in public opinion research has, however, proven to be one of the more vexing questions in the field... While seemingly straightforward, the class thesis has generated theoretical controversy and conflicting empirical evidence from the very start." (McCall and Manza 2011, 552). Even in sociology, which never completely lost sight of class as a focus of study, class often was moved to the side in favor of the (important) study of race, gender and ethnic identities (Leicht 2016).

It is time to reconsider the role of class, as it gives us an important starting point for the question of how populist politics have come to the fore in the West. A focus on class shares with the open economy approach an emphasis on the role of material conditions in shaping politics, a crucial emphasis in light of the startling

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[3] For example the leading graduate text for international political economy in the 1980s, Robert Gilpin's *The Politics of International Economic Relations*, featured Marxism alongside realism and liberalism as the key approaches to understanding how markets and politics interact. In the 1990s, constructivism rose to replace Marxism in teaching and research as one of the three alternative theories to explain the nature of international politics.

growth of economic inequality in the US, as I will discuss in a moment. However, to avoid the limiting conceptual division of material and ideational factors, we need a conceptualization of class that is expanded to include identity and culture, where class is a social construct politically formed, not automatically generated, from material circumstances.

Below, after very briefly revisiting the scholarly genealogy of the concept of class, I argue for class as a social category, grounded in practice, that shapes people's sense of their own political identity and thus interests. Portraying class as such creates a way to bridge the material/ideational divide and begin to address the rise of populist politics in the US. With this model of how political preferences arise, we can start to develop a new way of thinking about the impact of economic transformations on politics that allows us to link to the unexpected rise of populism in the US and Europe. Instead of trying to draw a straight line from economic data about wealth or income to voters' preferences, I argue instead for a focus on how the geographic expression of inequality in American shapes everyday practices, producing class bubbles that have contributed to the outcome of the election of 2016 and the ongoing polarization surrounding it.

Class as an Economic Reality or a Social Status?

The most stripped down way of thinking about class is rooted in the historical materialism of the Marxist approach, which sees class as generated by the organization of production in capitalist society.[4] Relations can be simplified into two opposing and essential camps in capitalism: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, or the owners of the factors of production, and the workers on whose back profits occur. Each can be delineated into more specific classes, but all are determined by the relations of production (Bendix 1974.)

In this view, the material conditions of work are the ultimate factor shaping people's interests and their potential for collective action. Capitalism actually creates actors, defined by their place in the economy: "Labour does not only create goods; it also produces itself and the worker as a commodity" (Marx et al 1992). The logic of one's relationship to the means of production swamps any other logic in producing the political reality of one's identity, capitalist versus worker. Thus, the Marxian prediction that the dire exploitation of workers, and their subsequent deprivation, will inevitably cause them to revolt against the upper classes, ushering in socialism, and eventually, communism. In this historical materialist account, ideas and institutions are epiphenomenal (or merely the creation of false consciousness) and simply follow from relations of production.

Max Weber, in contrast, saw class as a multifaceted phenomena with a much wider differentiation of categories of class (commercial classes, landowners,

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[4] I am of course grossly simplifying, see Giddens (1973) and Bendix (1974) for two nuanced analyses of the relationship between Marx and Weber on the topic of class.

property classes and so on) and an emphasis on the importance of "life chances" in separating out classes. These other logics, besides the economic material ones, were important in establishing a hierarchy of consequential class categories in society. As Bendix writes, "Weber speaks of a social order in which status is an "effective claim to social esteem," founded upon lifestyle, formal education, heredity or occupation. Typically, the circle of social equals is defined by means of social discrimination. Marriage and hospitality are confined to that circle and only certain forms of acquisition and employment are considered socially acceptable" (Bendix 1974, quoting Weber, 1968: I, 305-6). This multifaceted meaning of class meant, contra Marx, that there will likely be significant barriers to the working class to identify with each other as fellow travelers and thus inevitably coming together to act collectively in political terms.

If we accept the Weberian view, the question then becomes how individuals who may be similarly situated in terms of the economy can view themselves as sharing common interests, even as their identities also are being generated out of the human search for prestige and status. This formulation gets at the key questions we are facing today, and the debate over whether economic anxiety or racial animosity better explains the rise of Trump and broader populist movements. But although Weber brings in social aspects in human behavior, his theory of social stratification less helpfully separated class from status, which was viewed as arising from noneconomic sources such as religion, prestige, and honor (Jacobs and Soss 2010, 352). Weber's implication that economic interests and status interests are oppositional thus does not provide a blueprint for the interaction between material and social motivations in creating class identity, even as it does provide a necessary foundation for the notion that people are far more in their identities, and thus interests, than simply labor or capital.

A huge literature in sociology has successfully refashioned the basic object of study from Marxian materially-determined class to the larger question of social stratification, examining a variety of elements, such as occupational differentiation and education, broadening out to race, ethnicity and gender. David B Grusky's masterful 1000 plus page handbook *Social Stratification: Class, Race and Gender in Sociological Perspective* offers a range of effective approaches to this question with seminal works by scholars spanning over a century (Grusky 2014). They are all worthwhile and important ways to study how our society is divided into meaningful class categories and socially stratified, and each strand of scholarship has generated literatures exploring the contours and consequences of this particular form of stratification. But how might we build on these categories in a way that would give us clues as to the nature of the political polarization that exists today? To do so, I propose anchoring our study of class as socially constructed through everyday practices, rooted in economic material circumstances.

Class as What We Do

Class can be usefully understood not simply as either a relatively set economic or social status category, as in the discussion above, but rather as something that is socially constructed using the raw materials of everyday realities of actors.   This means that it is not just the attributes such as wealth, education or occupation that matter, but the social interactions generated around those particular attributes. In this approach, everyday practices are the glue that binds together individuals and helps form their identities and thus interests and preferences. Practices can be defined simply as "socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world" (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 4). Recalling our discussion about the need for an expanded notion of the motivations that drive social logics, beyond the simplicity of the *homo economicus* or the separation of status from material logics, an analysis of the class cultures that arise from everyday practices allows for a new way of thinking about the US case.

The practice approach draws on Bourdieu's idea of practical reasoning, providing a way to understand the processes of class creation by highlighting the common-sense and inarticulate grounds for action, and demonstrate how cultural is consequential for outcomes (Bourdieu 1998).[5] For Bourdieu, culture is conceived of "not as a set of rules, but as deeply internalized habits, styles, and skills (the "habitus") that allow human beings to continually produce innovative actions that are nonetheless meaningful to others around them" (Swindler 2002: 314). Bourdieu assumes that people continually and actively re-create culture through their own strategic use of culturally privileged skills. But he further makes the point that because such cultural capital is unequally distributed, structures of inequality tend to be reproduced over and over in these practices. Bourdieu argues that "The distribution of different classes (and class fractions) runs from those who are best provided with both economic and cultural capital to those who are most deprived in both respects." (Bourdieu 1984, 114). The professions, office workers, skilled or semi-skilled workers, unskilled and farm laborers are the types of categories that class can capture, not only because of the occupational realities but in terms of the consumption patterns and social activities arising from those realities (Bourdieu 1984, 114).   Considering both economic capital and cultural capital allows for a social space within which class unfolds.   "Habitus" for Bourdieu is where a co-constitutive process of the creation of categories of class is "internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (Bourdieu1984, 115).

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[5] This is incorporation of practice into this area of comparative and international political economy is in line with the so-called practice turn in international relations, (Adler and Pouliot 2011, Pouliot 2008, 2010; McNamara 2015).

This practice way of thinking about class, and the emphasis on cultural capital, points to the potential causal importance of the various types of cultures that are generated by everyday practices among geographically co-located class groups.   By seeing culture as practices of meaning making, we are able to probe into the ways in which actors are making their worlds intelligible and manageable, in both emotional and cognitive ways (Wedeen 2002: 720). In this telling, our identities (and political preferences) are a function not only of where we are in the economy, but also the day to day experiences that create different ways of seeing the world and our place in it. That geography of everyday life includes how you spend 8 or more hours a day working (or not working, or as a stay-at-home caregiver), the physical reality of your living conditions, your neighborhood, how you spend your leisure time, the people you interact with, the church or synagogue you attend and so on. The practice of everyday life also includes the hierarchy of wealth, status and power that accrues differentially to participants in these social settings, and that are reinforced, or challenged, by daily practice. In such a view, our sense of political identity is created across our everyday realities in ways that are profoundly shaped by, but do not simply track income. These everyday practices that help construct people's sense of themselves are vital for also explaining the ways in which people ascribe meaning to the world around them, and how they communicate and share those meanings with others in their spheres of interaction.

Thinking about class as social construct has an additional advantage of allowing us to consider intersectionality, or the various social identities such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity that are also part of our everyday existences. Most scholars of intersectionality agree with the ontological claim that categories of difference such as race, gender, sexuality, and class are in fact co-constitutive: "So-called categories of difference like race and gender cannot meaningfully exist apart from each other because they mutually construct each other" (Hancock 2016, 20). If we focus on practice, we can potentially better capture the complexities of identity across all the important categories that shape our political identities and interests.

In sum, rather than flattening out people's economic circumstances into universal notions of "working class" or "export sector" or "middle income earners," we need to root the economic unit of analysis in a particular social context in order to understand the politics in play. One important way to do so is to recognize that this social context will have an inescapable spatial expression, as where and with whom we carry out our everyday practices matters for the shape and contour of those practices and their political repercussions for identity and thus political interests and preferences, as we will see next.

4. AMERICAN POLARIZATION & THE POPULIST BACKLASH

Now that we have the conceptual building blocks in place for an argument about how material and cultural dynamics intersect in practice, I want to suggest

that a key starting point for understanding the American populist backlash is the startling growth of inequality and its geographic expression in the United States. The cultural construction of class that I argue has helped bring about the political polarization that contributed to Trump's victory is rooted in that historic rise of inequality over the past few decades and its reshaping of class. But to link inequality to the political realities around us requires several steps, and some contingency.

The place to start is not just with the nation-wide changes in economic inequality over the post-war era, but rather with the specific changing spatial expression of that inequality. The US today is a place with dramatic differences in the economic geography producing, one the one hand, economically dynamic areas engaged in the 21st century economy, and on the other, low growth, deindustrialized areas largely shut out of such gains. This geography of inequality is important because the spatial expression of inequality generates very different social realities and thus everyday practices for its citizens, resulting in a social segmentation of increasingly extreme bifurcation. We can think of the result as a series of class bubbles, which in turn make polarization and the politics of populist backlash and resentment more likely. This is even more so when the established political parties do not seem to be able to visibly address the needs of those excluded from the gains of the new economy nor signal solidarity with their lives (Mair 2013).[6] I offer a preliminary unpacking of each of these steps, below, with an eye to developing a research design to empirically capture the process at work.

1. The Geography of Inequality

Most of us are familiar with the striking findings of the growth of economic inequality in the United States. Scholars have done seminal work providing longitudinal and cross-national studies to demonstrate the trends towards economic inequality in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, where the gains of growth have been concentrated at the very top of society, particularly in the United States (Piketty 2014; Alvaredo, Atkinson, Piketty and el Saez. 2013). Inequality in the US grew throughout the first era of globalization at the turn of the last century until 1929, when the Great Depression and the interwar period flattened inequality as the economy collapsed, bringing everyone down with it (Goldin and Margo 1992). The New Deal and the broad expansion of anti-poverty and social safety net programs, as well as the GI Bill, allowed for growth to combine with relatively broad distribution of the benefits of the post-war boom. As America took on its new role as the hegemon of the international system, with half of the

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[6] In Mair's prescient words from his posthumous book, *Ruling the Void*: "The age of party democracy has passed. Although the parties themselves remain, they have become so disconnected from the wider society, and pursue a form of competition that is so lacking in meaning that they no longer seem capable of sustaining democracy in its present form (Mair 2013, 1).

world's GDP and clear market advantages, the global rebuilding that occurred expanded US manufacturing and brought a new era of shared wealth to a rising middle class. That postwar era of liberal order and expansion coincided with relative easing of inequality with a compression in the distribution of earnings.

Starting in the 1970s, the transition to a post-industrial economy, based on the creation of knowledge and manipulation of information rather than the production of food, goods, and services, brought about an accelerating and irreversible shift in the distribution of income and wealth in the US (Devine and Waters 2004, Svallfors 2005). Those who worked in American manufacturing industries saw their stable, economically secure and politically prominent status begin to fall behind. Since then, in comparative terms, the US has had a striking disjuncture between who gets the gains for growth since the late 1970s, shown in the table below.

Table 1 : Income growth and inequality 1978-2015

Income group (distribution of per-adult pre-tax national income)	Total cumulated real growth 1978-2015		
	China	USA	France
Full Population	811%	59%	39%
Bottom 50%	401%	-1%	39%
Middle 40%	779%	42%	35%
Top 10%	1294%	115%	44%
incl. Top 1%	1898%	198%	67%
incl. Top 0.1%	2261%	321%	84%
incl. Top 0.01%	2685%	453%	93%
incl. Top 0.001%	3111%	685%	158%

Distribution of pre-tax national income (before taxes and transfers, except pensions and UI) among adults. Corrected estimates combining survey, fiscal, wealth and national accounts data. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two). USA: Piketty-Saez-Zucman (2016). France: Garbinti-Goupille-Piketty (2016). China: Piketty-Yang-Zucman (2016).

Source: Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez and Zucman, 2017.

After the global financial crisis and the Great Recession, data indicates that these trends have only worsened, as the top 1% of Americans initially captured all the income gains from the recovery over the first five years, although the gains are now starting to spread (Saez 2015; 2016).

As important as these numbers are, however, to understand the politics of today, they need to be put in the context of their spatial distribution. Over the past few decades, U.S. economic activity has grown increasingly concentrated in large, "superstar" metro areas, such as Silicon Valley and New York, and along the coasts of the US (Morrill 2015). A variety of data portrays a stark concentration in economic growth, new business creation, and the nature of employment over the

US. [7] The divide has accelerated after the Great Recession, as some areas have pulled away while others stagnate or fall behind (Florida 2016). In the years from 2011 to 2016, the top ten metros for job growth have been a mix of knowledge-based and service-based metros. As Florida summarizes: "The tech hub of Provo, Utah, tops the list with a 26.8 percent increase in jobs; Austin (21.9 percent), San Jose (21.3 percent), San Francisco (19 percent), and Raleigh (18.5 percent) also number among the top ten. Cape Coral-Fort Myers (25.8 percent), Orlando (19.6 percent), and North Point-Sarasota (18.9 percent) in Florida and Riverside (19.3 percent) and Stockton (18.2 percent) in California complete the top ten" (Florida 2016).

While striking, the numbers above lump together all types of jobs: the situation looks even more geographically divided when we separate out low from high paying jobs. A recent study by the National Employment Law Project categorizes jobs into 3 types: high-wage jobs which pay $21.14 per hour or more; mid-wage jobs which pay between $13.84 and $21.13 an hour; and low-wage jobs which pay $13.83 an hour or less (NELP 2012). These categories have been used to map job growth in the US, as seen in the following graphics, which look at the geography of job growth in America's 100 largest metros between 2011 and 2016 (Florida 2016). Note that the data only uses the 100 largest metro areas, out of a total of 382 possible metropolitan statistical areas in the US, so does not fully represent the entire economic geography of the US, which would likely be more extreme if it included the smallest counties.

The first map, below, zeros in on the share of high-wage jobs by metro area between 2011 and 2016. The graphical representation fits our intuitions that it is the technology and knowledge concentration in the Bay Area and the Boston-New York-Washington corridor that are drawing the most high paying jobs. The author summarize the data as follows: "San Jose is first, where high-wage jobs have accounted for more than 60 percent of jobs, followed by Washington, D.C. (57.1 percent), San Francisco (54.7 percent), Bridgeport-Stamford (51.2 percent), Boston (50.6 percent), Seattle (48.3 percent), New York (46.6 percent), Hartford (46.5 percent), Minneapolis-St. Paul (45.8 percent), and Denver (45.2 percent)." (Florida 2016).

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[7] There has been relatively little work on the link between increasing income inequality and the uneven geographic distribution of income groups, with a recent review noting "it is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon" and "the details of how and why it has grown have been much less thoroughly investigated than those related to income inequality." (Reardon and Bischoff 2011, 1934 CHECK).

SHARE OF HIGH WAGE JOBS

20 25 30 35 40 50 61

Martin
Prosperity
Institute
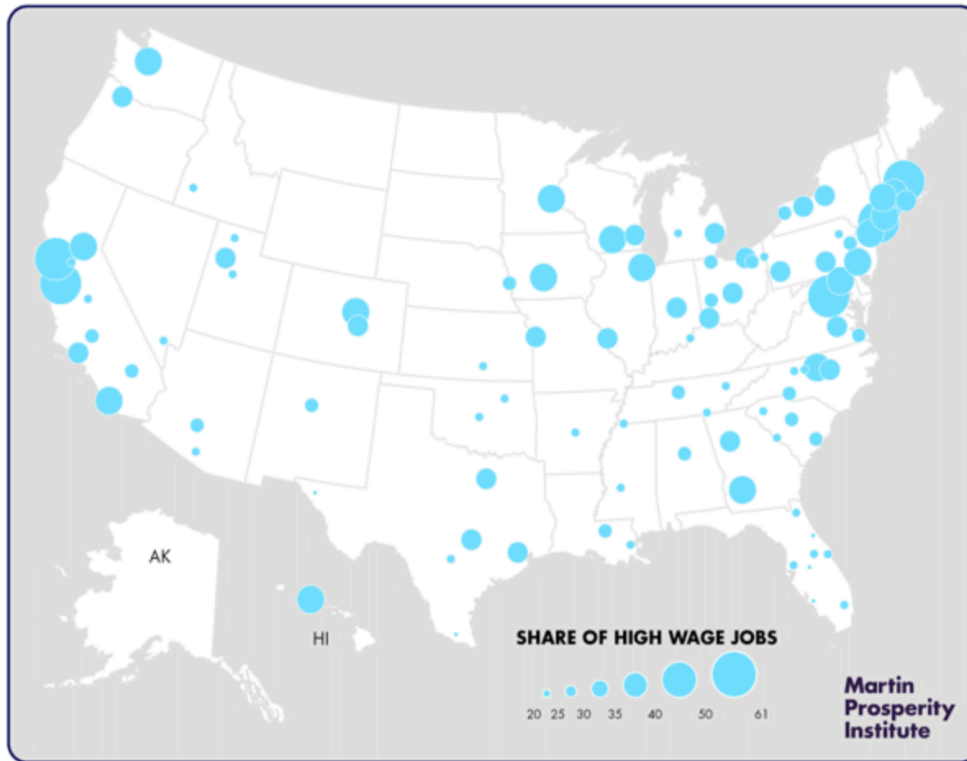
(Taylor Blake)

Source: Florida 2016.

The geographic reverse appears when low-wage jobs are mapped in the post-Great Recession era, as in the map below. The largest circles of concentrations of low wage job growth are in the South and some parts of the Rustbelt. Again, the author summarizes: "McAllen, Texas, has the largest share of low-wage jobs, with nearly 65 percent of its jobs falling into this category. El Paso (58.4 percent) and San Antonio (48.7 percent) in Texas also have large concentrations of low-wage jobs, as do Deltona-Daytona Beach Florida (56.3 percent), Orlando (49.8 percent), Lakeland (49.7 percent), North Point-Sarasota (49.0 percent) and Cape Cora, Florida (48.1 percent). The hard-hit Rustbelt metro of Youngstown, Ohio (49.9 percent) also numbers among the ten metros with the largest share of low-wage jobs." (Florida 2016). Middle wage jobs present a more mixed picture, but again present a mix of mainly Rustbelt and Sunbelt metros, as Allentown, Pennsylvania, has the largest share of mid-wage jobs (33.2 percent).

SHARE OF LOW WAGE JOBS

20 32 36 40 44 48 65

Martin Prosperity Institute
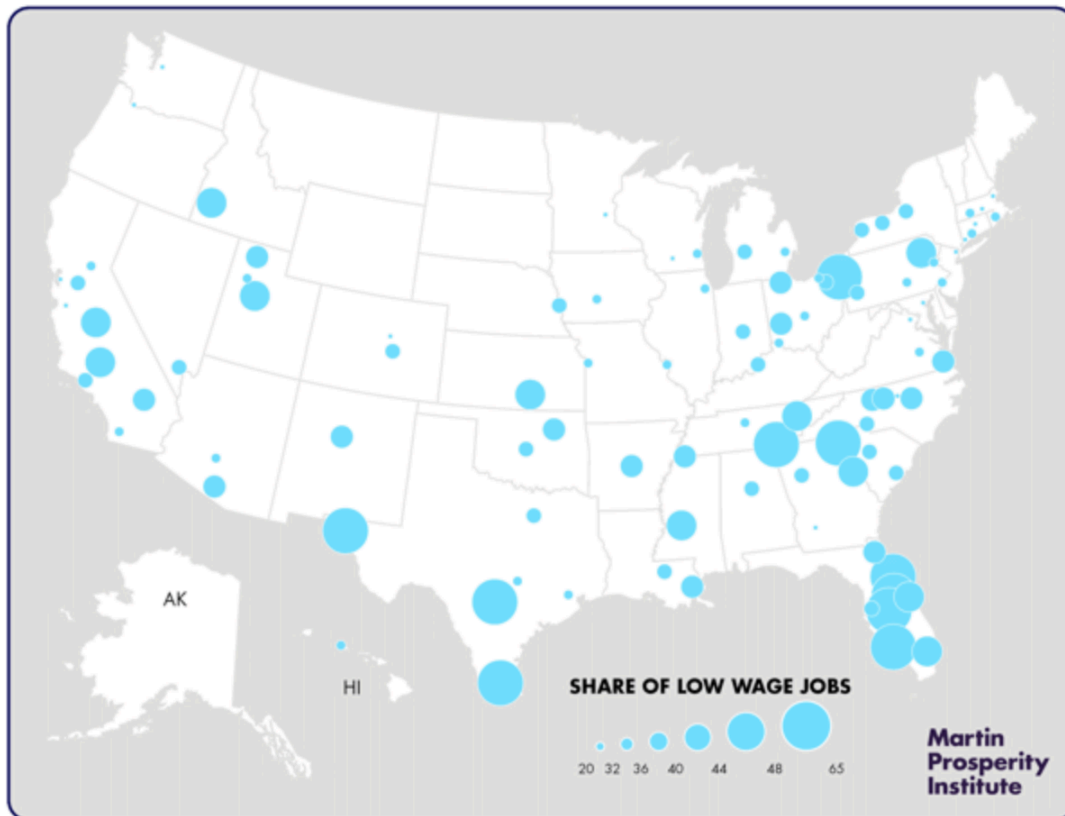
(Taylor Blake)

Source: Florida 2016

Taken together, these maps provide a stark picture of America's economic recovery. The recovery has been not so much jobless, but rather it remains divided into a group of winners and a group of losers when it comes to how good those jobs are. The geographically small group of winners—mainly knowledge and tech hubs but also some service-oriented metros—have accounted for the bulk of job growth overall and for most of the high-wage jobs, but also a good number of the mid-wage, and low-wage jobs. As Florida writes, "If anything, America's jobs divide has become even more pronounced in the past several years, with the gaps between a dozen or so big winners and the rest growing ever larger. America is not only beset by rising income inequality, it faces deepening regional inequality in jobs, wages, and opportunity as well" (Florida 2016).

This phenomenon is not perhaps surprising to some scholars, even as it is striking in how quickly economic concentration is accelerating over time. A robust literature in economic geography explains why economic activity is not spread out evenly, as the cost of spatial interactions among the factors of production means that returns to scale will drive clustering of economic activities in certain locations. Firms have found that it is more profitable, for example, to locate in places with good market access, which of course are places with large populations, which in

turn benefit from job growth when the firms' set up shop. Inward labor migration tends to occur to follow the jobs, and a positive feedback is set up, where population drives market size, firm location, higher wages, and rising population (Venable 2010, 743). This agglomeration cycle is subject to very strong cumulative effects, as the path dependency of the start of this cycle might be the siting of an early town on a seaport location, such as Boston, whose attractiveness to firms eventually far outstrips the original economic rationale for the location. In addition, there are a variety of externalities, such as the drive for robust institutions to protect economic activity or education to support an effective labor force, that are pervasive and add to the seemingly inevitable concentration of efficiency, productivity and growth (Venable 2008, 751).

The economic geography literature predicts that with full labor mobility, "income differences will be eliminated but activity will have a spatially lumpy distribution, as population becomes concentrated in cities." (Venable 2008, 751). But if labor is not fully mobile, which is the case in the real world, "the disparities may be manifested through spatial income inequalities." (Venable 2008, 751).   That labor mobility has fallen by half in the US since 1990 means that these inequalities have been exacerbated at exactly the time that the agglomeration effects have increased as well (Ganong and Shoag 2016). The path dependency and self-reinforcing mechanisms of this spatial inequality in economic activity set up a very particular electoral map in the US case, as we shall see.

2. How Economic Geography and Politics Interact

A recent Brookings study pitted this tendency towards geographically expressed inequality against the US Presidential results and found a startling result (Muro and Liu, 2016). Hillary Clinton carried counties across the US that made up 64 percent of the country's total output in 2015, while Donald Trump's counties generated only 36 percent of GDP—despite his electoral win. This economic difference is stark, and represents a new trend from earlier elections, where Democratic and Republican nominees had a more equal distribution in terms of the spatially expressed vibrancy of their economic base. The table below lays out the change from 2000 to 2016 in the number of counties won and their aggregate share of GDP. Whereas Al Gore won counties contributing just over half of American GDP in 2000, Hillary Clinton won counties constituting almost two-thirds of the GDP. Moreover, importantly for our story of geographic polarization, Clinton's aggregate GDP carried with *fewer* counties than Gore did (472 out of a total of 3,056 versus 659 for Gore). The trend of economic concentration seems to have ratcheted up in tandem with the political polarization between the Republican and Democratic candidates. The second empirical observation that is important for our story is the finding that the two candidates in this election also found their supporters in two very different geographic settings. Hillary Clinton won in fewer counties, but her counties were much larger in population size and density than Trump's counties.

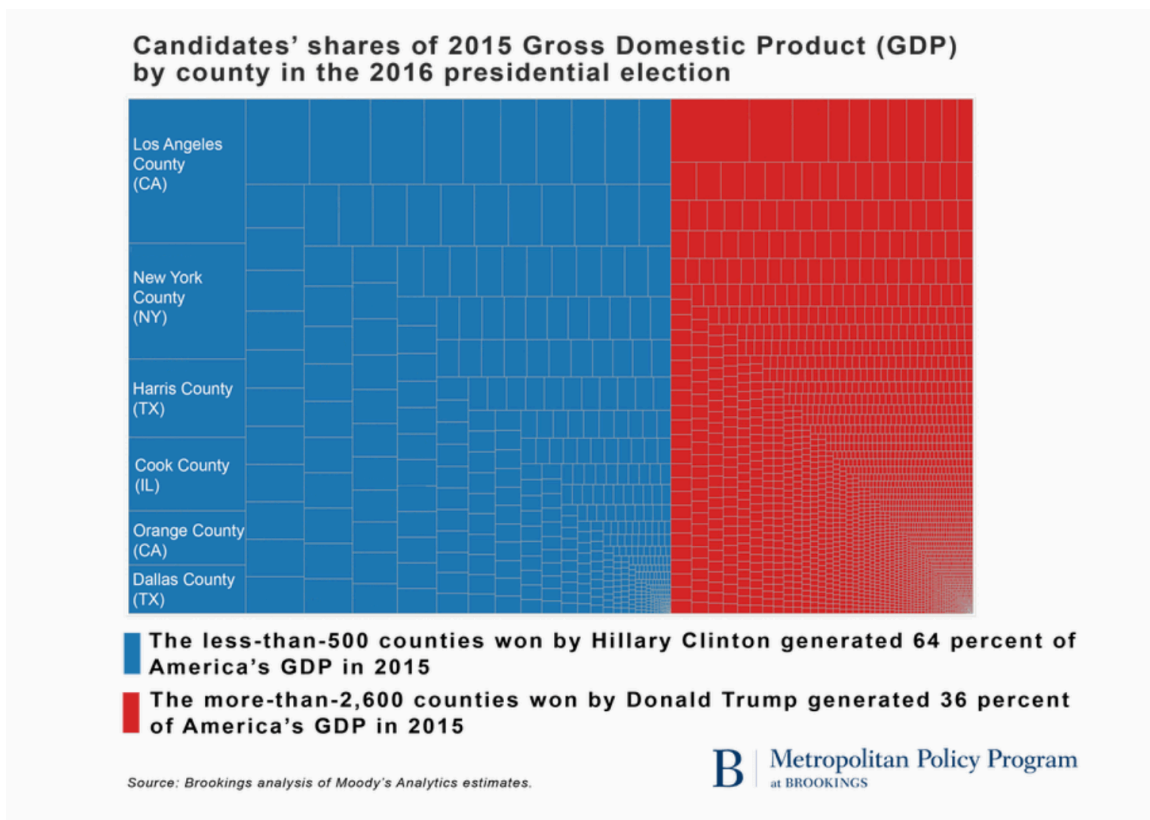**Candidates' counties won and share of GDP in 2000 and 2016**

Year	Candidates	# of Counties won	Aggregate share of GDP
2000	Al Gore	659	54%
	George W. Bush	2397	46%
2016	Hillary Clinton	472	64%
	Donald Trump	2584	36%

Source: Brookings analysis of Moody's Analytics estimate

Source: Muro and Liu, 2016.

Thinking in terms of the theoretical arguments made earlier, the everyday environment for Clinton voters is much more likely to be an urban and economically vibrant one, against the small towns, exurbs and rural everyday world that Trump voters live in. A graphic prepared by Brookings (below) illustrates the division very starkly, as the squares colored blue, which Clinton won, are large counties that make up the clear majority of the country's current GDP. The red squares are striking in their small size (aside for three blocks at the top, that represent parts of Long Island, NY, the Fort Worth Texas area, and the Phoenix area that went for Trump).   As the authors state: "Clinton's "base of 493 counties was heavily metropolitan. By contrast, Trumpland consists of hundreds and hundreds of tiny low-output locations that comprise the non-metropolitan hinterland of America, along with some suburban and exurban metro counties" (Muro and Liu 2016).[8] This distribution in voters represents a change from earlier elections, where the county-by-county analysis showed a much less stark difference between the percentage of American GDP going to the Democratic versus the Republican presidential candidate.
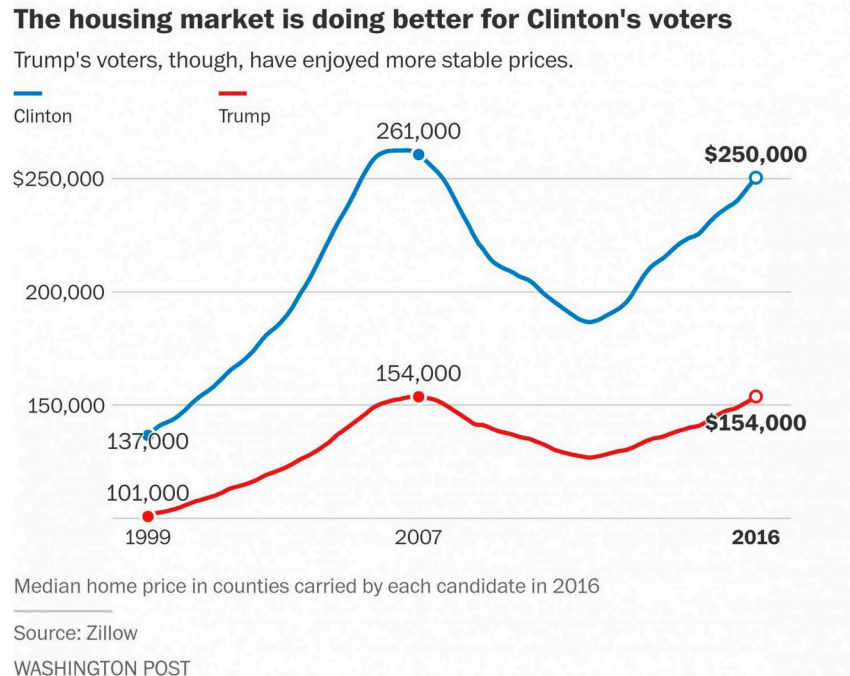
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[8] A useful journalistic account of the data analysis is at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/22/donald-trump-lost-most-of-the-american-economy-in-this-election/?utm_term=.241d9db61927

Candidates' shares of 2015 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by county in the 2016 presidential election

The less-than-500 counties won by Hillary Clinton generated 64 percent of America's GDP in 2015

The more-than-2,600 counties won by Donald Trump generated 36 percent of America's GDP in 2015

Source: Brookings analysis of Moody's Analytics estimates.

B | Metropolitan Policy Program at BROOKINGS

Source: Muro and Liu 2016.

More recent work by Jonathan Rodden has born out, at a more granular level, the split between the urban and the rural vote in this past election.   Rodden finds that democratic voters are found in majority Republican counties marred by post-industrial economic stagnation, but these red state democrats cluster in dense, urban settings: "…the same political geography found in big cities is also on display in smaller postindustrial towns. There is a fascinating fractal-like relationship between population density — which is the upshot of early industrial activity — and Democratic voting. As one zooms in to lower and lower levels of geographic aggregation, the relationship only reappears in finer detail." (Rodden 2016). Complementing these studies, research done by the National Association of Counties (NACo) also found that the majority of swing counties that voted Republican in 2016 are the counties more likely to be experiencing a weak job recoveries after a period of recession (for most counties, since 2009) (NACo 2017).

Real estate prices are another expression of the divergence in the economic geography of Trump versus Clinton voters. An analsysis by Zillow reported on by the *Washington Post* noted "A new analysis of housing prices reveals one way Hillary Clinton's and Donald Trump's supporters have been living in two economies, as shown below.

The housing market is doing better for Clinton's voters
Trump's voters, though, have enjoyed more stable prices.

Source: Ehrenfreund 2016.

The graphic above traces out county by county electoral results, showing a pronounced difference between the housing values of Clinton versus Trump voters. Clinton's voters median price increased since 2000 from $138,000 to $250,000, an increase of 82 percent, where the counties where Trump carried the day the price increased just 52 percent over the same period, from $101,000 to $154,000. Clinton's counties experienced more instability in prices with volatility and loses outstripping the Trump counties after the financial crisis, but a steep appreciation in the last few years.

A final empirical observation that bears on geographic inequality is a statistical analysis by *The Economist* shortly after the election that used county level data (compiled by The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington) "on life expectancy and the prevalence of obesity, diabetes, heavy drinking and regular physical activity (or lack thereof)" (Economist 2016). The analysis found that "Together, these variables explain 43% of Mr Trump's gains over Mr Romney, just edging out the 41% accounted for by the share of non-college whites" even when controlling for race, education, age, sex, income, marital status, immigration and employment. These findings echo those of Case and Deaton about the unprecedented downwards trend of American working class whites' health outcomes (Case and Deaton 2015). They also provide another example of the geographic differences in the lived experiences of Trump and Clinton voters.

All of this data suggests that rather than thinking about the US electoral pattern as pitting red states against blue states, it is more correct to think about cities versus rural and exurban areas when attempting to sort through the question

of class identities and the relative importance of culture and material circumstances.[9] As it is not the majority of the popular vote that elects US presidents but rather the electoral college, which like the Senate numerically inflates rural voters over urban, it is those spatially dispersed voters who take a privileged place in explaining the outcome.
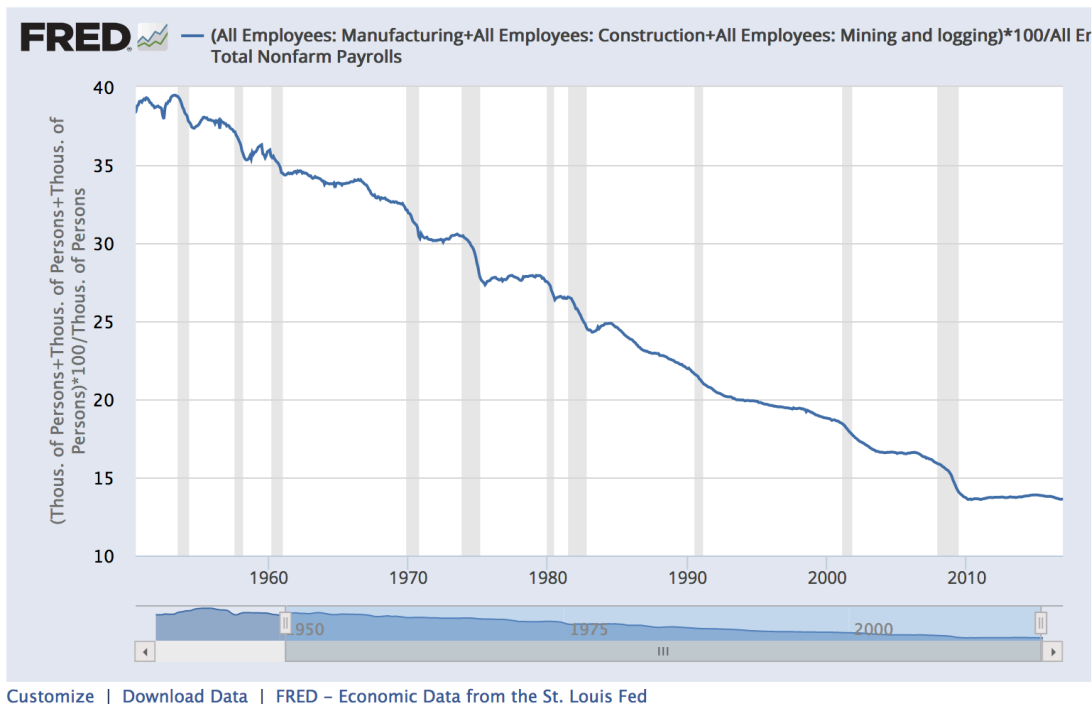
3. The Geography of Work in the New Economy

I have pointed to some very rough and ready data on the correlation between the divergence in economic geography and the split between Trump and Clinton voters. In order to tell a more fully fleshed out story about the interaction between economic circumstance and culture, and how that produces class identities, I am arguing that we need to dive deeper into the everyday lives of voters, as it is the lived experiences expressed in practices that matter in constructing class. One place to start is with the changing landscape of work in the 21st century and how that might be playing out in shaping voter's identities.

Economic circumstances are foundational in framing the everyday environment we live in, but they need to be interpreted and lived to produce our identities, and thus formulations of our political interests and basis for collective action. Our employment experiences are a central part of that economic environment. Thinking about class this way allows us to begin to hypothesize about a series of foundational questions. What makes us afraid of the future, and likely to cling to the past? In contrast, what makes us feel confident in the future and feel we can master the change occurring around us? Do our everyday economic environments and social interactions provide a dynamic sense of economic vitality and opportunity, or a lack of hope in future economic circumstances? What allows us to work and live alongside new immigrants and people from different ethnicities and races without viewing them with resentment as unfair competitors? Getting a handle on these questions could help us start to understand the interplay between economic circumstances and identity and how it matters for the rise of populist parties.

The daily practice of work, and thus cultural construction of class, has been transformed over the past few decades by the same causal forces that have produced growing economic inequality. We all know the basic outlines of the US shift from an industrial economy to a post-industrial one, as a dramatic shift away from manual labor jobs (even while industrial sectors continue to produce strong outputs due to automation). But it is worth reminding ourselves of the dramatic shifts in the nature of work in 21st century America, as portrayed below.

[9] A useful series of graphics on the growing rural/urban US political polarization is found at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/2016-election/urban-rural-vote-swing/.

Employment Growth in Non-manufacturing Jobs
Source: http://www.npr.org/2017/01/07/508600239/what-kind-of-jobs-
president-has-obama-been-in-8-charts

After the Great Recession, the above trends have only accelerated.   A simple table
for job growth in January 2017 indicates the challenges that Trump faces in
delivering traditional, blue collar working class jobs.
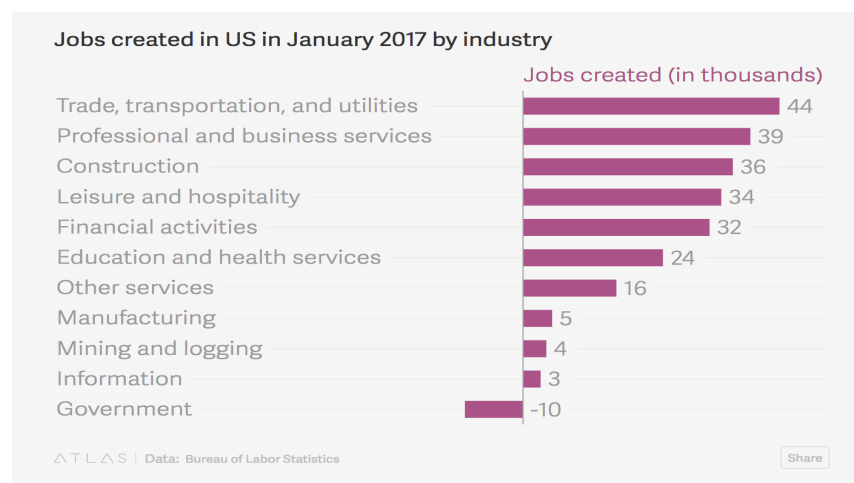
Source: Kopf 2017.

Data collected on the areas of job growth in the economy in this decade
shows that "three low-wage industries (food services, retail, and employment

services) added 1.7 million jobs over the past two years, fully 43 percent of net employment growth. At the same time, better-paying industries (like construction; manufacturing; finance, insurance and real estate; and information) did not grow, or did not grow enough to make up for recession losses. Other better-paying industries (like professional and technical services) saw solid growth, but not in their mid-wage occupations." (NELP 2012).

But even as we know the basic trends and have explored the institutional shifts that come with them (Thelen 2014), we have not fully conceptualized their implications for the everyday lives of workers in this new economy, and their role in creating a new form of class politics. On one hand, the winners, with flexible skills situated in the critical thinking and analytic areas, enjoy their advantages and watch their incomes rise. On the other, those low skilled and semi-skilled workers have seen their incomes drop both absolutely and relative to other groups. Moreoever, the new post-industrial economy actually reinforces and accelerates the geographic agglomeration effects that concentrate economic activity and produce geographic inequality. Despite the digital age, as Venables argues:

> Indeed, the argument can be made that the economic importance of distance has increased. This is because expenditure has shifted to sectors where trade across wide distances is difficult, such as personal services, creative industries, design, and media, all activities in which proximity and face-to-face contact are important. (Venables 2008, 742).

Cities have the upper hand in today's economy, even more than in the past, and there is "considerable evidence that productivity increases with city size, a doubling of size typically rising productivity by between 3 and 8 percent, although the exact mechanism through which this operates remains contentious." (Venables 2008, 749.)

Even in these cities, however, the nature of work does not simply replicate the post war "trentes glorieuses," or Golden Era, of jobs for life, a robust social welfare safety net, pensions, and healthcare. Instead, the rise of "precarious" work has swamped traditional employment, as labor contracts have become more uncertain, insecure and risky in the past 25 years (Kalleberg 2012). This rise in precarious work effects how work is experienced (as well as how people try to manage that precariousness and how employers conduct business). The trend, to simplify, is caused by underlying shifts in power towards business and away from labor, even if flexible work is embraced by some workers (such as highly paid consultants who can use their contract status to ski in Aspen for the month of February). The growth of precarious work is producing an increase in job instability and decrease in length of time at one job; an increase in hiring from outside rather than promoting form within; a shift in risk from employer to employee in things like pension plans and a rise in a sense of job insecurity (Kalleberg 2012). While some European countries have approached these changes

with the goal of a new system of "flexicurity," US political parties on both the left and right have yet to fully grapple with the new work experience.

Cities have been the site of the growth of this post-industrial "gig economy," marked by contingent, contract, and part time work without the traditional structures of post war employment (Hathaway and Muro 2016). Technology has created platforms for employment that bear little resemblance to the Mad Men era of corner offices, strict office hierarchies, and paid vacations. In terms of lived experience of everyday life, for the skilled knowledge worker today it might mean sitting at a coffee taking Skype meetings on your Mac. For the less skilled or those seeking work without structure, this might mean driving for Lyft or Uber. But both of these types of gig economy positions are more likely to be found in the density of urban settings, the areas that saw most of the economic growth of the past decades. For rural workers, there is little prospect of getting any of the gig economy jobs (Muro 2016). The gig economy is also making it possible for everyday work to mean being subject to on-demand, last minute scheduling of your cashier shift, without a commitment to predictable weekly hours while needing to be available 24/7. The just-in-time scheduling of workers is growing, in 2015 it was estimated at about 17 percent of the workforce (Goldin 2015). While some retailers such as Walmart have started to move away from these difficult terms, finding that the customer service was unsurprisingly suffering, it remains part of the new world of work in the digital economy.

A final important change in the lived experience of work in the new economy is the startling drop in geographic mobility that the US has seen over the past few decades. While the processes of economic agglomeration keep strengthening the position of urban areas vis a vis the rural communities, the tradition of Americans willingness to move in search of jobs in the growth areas has fallen off (Kaplan and Schulhofer-Wohl 2015). Rural homeowners in particular are less mobile than urban home owners, in all likelihood because of the dwindling value of their homes in a weakening market that makes buying into a rising urban market impossible (Monchuk, Kilkenny, and Phimister 2013). This means that all of these trends continue to accelerate the divide between those participating in the benefits of the new economy, and those who do not.

4. Class Bubbles & Polarization

My conjecture in this project is that the geography of inequality and the new experience of work in the 21st century are leading to the cultural construction of class bubbles that produce political polarization in the United States. That polarization can be thought of as deep cleavages between the supporters of establishment politicians on one side, and those voters who resent that status quo

as failing them on the other.[10] In this view, class is not just income or social segmentation, but the ways in which the particular lived experiences in different class bubbles create collective identities.

Consider this. A college graduate in Portland, Oregon, rides his fixie to his job as a dog walker—underemployed, but finding meaning in his daily routine, drinking Kombucha while picking up used books at Powells. He lives in an environment full of opportunity, even if he may not take advantage of the various opportunities around him to get wealthy. He may make the same hourly wage as the greeter at Walmart in Hazel Green, Alabama, a middle age man who used to have a well paying welding job until a robot costing $8/hour to his $25 replaced him on the factory floor. Or think of the medical student working in a hospital for less than minimum wage, for whom the future is bright, despite making less per hour than someone plowing driveways and trimming trees.

The everyday life for that dog walker in Portland and the greeter in Hazel Green is profoundly different in terms of the culture experienced, and reproduced, through the everyday interactions with others, on the one hand, in the PDX setting of ramen noodle shops and web design firms, or in the setting of economic decline and renting of the social fabric that comes with the downward spiral of counties left out of the 21st century economy. The differences may lie in part in the sense of hope, opportunity, and potential for dignity and meaning in the world, differences reinforced by the environment you are in and the everyday interactions you have.

Those differences are part of the social stratification and segmentation that creates what I am calling class bubbles, where the everyday practices and lived reality differ dramatically depending on your geographic placement. In addition, the degree of diversity in ethnic, racial, religious and other identities around you will vary dramatically, along with your access to a rich environment of public goods, the arts, education, and of course, economies with jobs and rising home prices. Bourdieu reminds us that "social identity is defined and asserted through difference" (Bourdieu 1984, 172). Our bubbles are delineated not only by what is inside, but by what is outside, and how they differ from the other bubbles.

In this final section, therefore, I would like to explore how we might we go about studying the causal effects of everyday practice on class bubbles. What do social interactions and lived experiences do? How do practice matter? The basic story I am putting forward goes along these lines:

Economic inequality$\rightarrow$ geographic expression of different lived experiences$\rightarrow$cultural class bubbles $\rightarrow$ political polarization

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[10] For comprehensive data on American political polarization, see Pew Research Center (2014).

We have robust data on the rise of spatial inequality, and on political polarization, but is now needed is a better specification of the channels by which class bubbles are socially constructed. This would include an account of the cultural manifestations of the everyday realities that are faced by Americans in the largely rural, relatively racially and ethnically homogenous areas being left behind in the new economy, on the one hand, and for urban dwellers in more cosmopolitan settings on the other. The channels encompass the material realities of everyday life, and the role of social interactions, both face to face and in virtual communities, in constructing individual and collective political preferences.

There are a range of qualitative, ethnographic studies that could get at these dynamics, quantitative assessments that might find correlations between observable implications of my argument, and GIS studies that can map the presence and absence of variables across space to plot out these relationships. Possible research designs also include natural experiments that might demonstrate what actually constructs, and transforms, class bubbles. How might I be able to empirically observe change over time? Might I be able to isolate a formerly rural area counties experience of rapid urbanization and entry into the digital economy? More likely is to find counties that have fit the trend of decline, asking how that tracks their political polarization vis a vis the divides I have paid out. How might I be able to empirically observe change that occurs with change over space or place —for example, looking at rural white working class people moving to a cosmopolitan urban setting and a new work environment, and tracing out how it reshapes their sense of identity and interests. Is there a way to construct data on variation on key aspects of identity with different levels of social segmentation or spatial proximity, focusing on the geographic cleavages displayed in the data in earlier sections of this paper?

An alternative way to capture the dynamics at work might be to focus on interaction and networks as generating cultural bubbles (St Clair 2015). How might we map networks, and see who people interact with in these different cultural bubbles? Can the density and type of interaction (weak versus strong ties, diverse versus homogenous) be shown to produce different outcomes in terms of political preferences? Does the large literature in sociology on networks have clues to how to best study the cultural construction of class bubbles across the US?

 A way into the dynamics at work is to look more closely at how the new geography of class in the 21st century economy creates boundaries that manifest in people living in silos in their everyday lives. There is a large literature on the construction of boundaries that zeros in on the mechanisms at work in reproducing distinctions (Lamont and Fournier 1994; Lamont 2002). As my interest is in practice, I could start with more objective institutionalized, legal and economic circumstances and demonstrate how they help generate the social institutions of subjective status. The boundaries, for example, of people who work by doing, with their hands, rather than by manipulating abstractions, or the boundaries between service economy versus manufacturing could be a useful focus on study in this

project. Education is another obvious boundary that needs exploration in my approach. A very simple tallying of college educated versus non-college majority counties by Nate Silver demonstrates that level of education predicts the 2016 electoral outcome better than any other variable. Silver took the 981 largest counties in population terms, and found that Clinton's wins were very closely linked to college education levels, and in fact she significantly improved on Obama's performance in those counties (Silver 2016). This fits with the notion that there is an increasing geographic inequality of new economy areas versus declining areas that is creating cleavages in our polity. But the key would be to figure out what work, exactly, college education is doing in constructing these divergent world views that produce political polarization.

Recently, a series of remarkable ethnographic works have painted a picture of the everyday lives of working class white Americans in the rural areas that our discussion of economic geography has shown to be falling dramatically behind urban areas (Just 2016; Hochschild 2016a; Cramer 2016). These accounts provide some clues about how lived experiences and the social practices in these places may be playing out in terms of the emotions that voters have towards politics and, particularly, political elites. Katherine Cramer's impressive work on rural resentment in Wisconsin and Justin Gust's laudable study of white working class voters in Youngstown and East London offer piercing wake up calls for those of us who live in settings where such feelings of hopelessness and being abandoned are far from the norm (Cramer 2016; Gust 2016). For example, Hochschild writes about what she calls a "deep story" that seemed to tie together the various conversations she had in five years of visiting white, tea party families. Her subjects live in Louisiana, the third poorest state in the US and one acutely plagued by the geographic expression of inequality described in the sections above. Even among the middle class, daily interactions with trailer park dwellers with missing teeth and broken homes leads many to fear they are but one step away from economic insolvency and the shame of welfare. She writes:

> Being middle class didn't mean you felt secure, because that class was thinning out as a tiny elite shot up to great wealth and more people fell into a life of broken teeth, unpaid rent, and shame. (Hochschild 2016b).

That "deep story" dovetailed with a sense of being separated from other Americans who live in the growth economies of the cities and the coasts, and of being viewed with derision by those people whose way of life seems far away, foreign, and undesirable--yet rewarded by both the market and government policies.

> Pervasive among the people I talked to was a sense of detachment from a distant elite with whom they had ever less contact and less in common....You're not in the 'in' crowd if you're not a liberal. You're an old-fashioned old fogey, small thinking, small town, gun loving, religious," said a minister's wife. "The media tries to make the tea party look like bigots,

homophobic; it's not." They resented all labels "the liberals" had for them, especially "backward" or "ignorant Southerners" or, worse, "rednecks."

... For some, age had also become a source of humiliation. One white evangelical tea party supporter in his early 60s had lost a good job as a sales manager with a telecommunications company when it merged with another. He took the shock bravely. But when he tried to get rehired, it was terrible. "I called, emailed, called, emailed. I didn't hear a thing. That was totally an age discrimination thing." At last he found a job at $10 an hour, the same wage he had earned at a summer factory union job as a college student 40 years ago. Age brought no dignity. Nor had the privilege linked to being white and male trickled down to him. Like Sharon's clients in the petrochemical plants, he felt like a stranger in his own land. (Hochschild 2016b)

How might such ethnographic work might be harnessed to specify more precisely the ways in which practice helps construct class bubbles, with the underlying geography of inequality as the foundational driver of the different patterns of practice? Are there paired comparisons between geographic locales that share income levels but offer very different opportunity structures because of where they are located, rural/exurbia or urban, and thus very different cultures of everyday life?

5. CONCLUSION

The story I have laid out is preliminary and needs to be refined before it can be empirically tested. But it suggests an important link between growing geographic inequality, culture as practice, and political polarization that deserves much more study. I hope that our conversation will allow me to make my arguments more precise, isolate the dynamics at play, and figure out how to test them out empirically. This approach moves beyond the very thin notion of rationality provided by traditional political science, and therefore may be better able to explain the complex politics of our time. Human beings are made up of a variety of intersecting motivations and driven by emotion and desire, as well as their instrumental search for material wealth. To understand the world around us, we need to move towards a version of interest construction that captures the true kaleidoscope of influences at work. In this paper, I have argued that a return to class would be useful to understanding how politics unfolds, but that our understanding of class needs to grapple with culture and identity, not just economic circumstances if we are to explain the momentous and complex politics we are living through. Whether or not we in the upper echelons of American class society like it, at least some of the people who voted for Trump (and Brexit) had true grievances, even if Trump may be the least likely person to be able to address them.

I am also suggesting that those concerned about the path of American politics and the threats to democracy represented by the Trump presidency need to put

aside their bickering about whether it is purely identity politics or purely economic anxiety at work producing our current political moment. There have been a number of calls to push back on efforts to understand or engage with Trump supporters and their "so-called white working class angst" because of the view that this legitimates the racist, anti-Semitic or xenophobic positions held by some supporters and expressed by members of the Trump Administration. For example, a group of feminist scholars signed a powerful statement of resistance that included the sentence "We must also reject calls to compromise, to understand, or to collaborate." [11]

This project attempts to show why understanding the sources of Trump's appeal is both a necessary scholarly task, and crucial to efforts to blunt that appeal. It is not appeasement to understand. I am arguing that despite some scholars and commentators dismissing economic anxiety as a reason behind Trump's electoral success, the stark and growing geographic inequality in the US is demonstrably linked to the populist backlash. Inequality has yet to be effectively addressed, pragmatically or even symbolically, by the mainstream GOP or Democratic candidates or their parties. After global financial crisis, President Obama was unable to stem the tide of an increasingly economically divided country, and Hillary Clinton was never accepted as the candidate with the *bona fides* to tackle what is viewed by many as a "rigged" system. It was left to the highly unlikely success of the self-proclaimed socialist Bernie Saunders, and the eventual winner, Donald Trump, to articulate the views of a minority of the population--but a majority of the electoral college voters--that American was not working for them. I could do worse than to close with Michael Walzer's recent admonition:

> But the current theoretical debate about the relative importance of identity politics and class struggle isn't terribly helpful. There is nothing like the classic "working class," neglected by Democratic politicians, waiting to be mobilized. The people we need to reach are a radically mixed group. They are economically mixed: they include unemployed men and women, old people without adequate pensions, part-time workers, rust belt workers with new jobs that pay much less than they once earned, workers without union protection and with few benefits, and the rural poor—all of them frighteningly vulnerable, watching anxiously for the next downturn. And they are mixed in their identities: black and white, Hispanic and Asian, men and women, gay and straight... But first they must come to see that their difficulties are not theirs alone. Think of them as a class in formation—or, in the old language, a class in itself but not yet for itself. How can we advance the formation? That is the question we should be debating. (Walzer 2017)

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[11] The statement can be found here: http://bit.ly/2lAg6Qm

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