



NYT: Mainstream Populist Media Broke GOP Establishment

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Mainstream populist media has taken over much of the Republican Party's former role, says Thomas Edsall, a reform-minded, old-school liberal columnist at the *New York Times*.

"The Republican establishment, embodied in the Bush family, proud but powerless, is a relic of a past, brought to its knees by insurgent forces, not least of which is the ascendance of social media," Edsall wrote April 26. He continued:

Fox, Breitbart, Townhall, The Daily Caller and other right-wing media outlets now perform multiple functions traditionally associated with political parties: candidate screening, the maintenance of ideological conformity, reviewing policy positions and vetting congressional voting.

Edsall quotes a variety of establishment experts, on both left and right, to justify his strong claim about a GOP revolution:

Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, wrote me by email. "The establishment, such as it is, still exists, but its influence has been permanently weakened by changes in the media," not just by conservative media, but by social media that "enables candidates to reach their respective bases in an inexpensive way. Endorsements and money mean less and less."

Ideological media outlets on both the left and right, Tanner argues "carry more weight than ever before," displacing establishment influence over candidate selection, because both sides are now more dependent on mobilizing base voters than in persuading the ever-smaller faction of uncommitted voters ...

...

Not only have party establishments lost their ability to coordinate and bargain, but Trump has successfully pushed the Republican Party elite into a corner. As [[Seth Masket](#), a political scientist at the University of Denver] wrote in an email,

“Trump has access to a group of voters that they’ve been courting for decades — working class whites. They’re eager to claim the support of this demographic and, more importantly, terrified to offend it by turning on Trump.”

Edsall overestimates the populists’ win over the establishment, which has used its backroom power in Washington push its own tax-cutting agenda while sidelining the populists’ focus on immigration, wages, and solidarity.

Edsall also underplays the tacit alliance between Democratic and GOP elites to defend their very unpopular preferences for a high-immigration/low-wage economy and a high-diversity/low-solidarity civic culture.

But his basic point about the 2016 election is valid:

The Trump insurgency, in this context, amounted to an internal realignment or revolution within the Republican Party. What is now the party’s largest bloc of voters — whites without college degrees — wrested power from the establishment.