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[Gauging the Fear Inside the Palace Walls](#)

A pretty reliable gauge of Establishment fear is how far away from factual reality its chief spokesmen stray at election time. With [economic populism now driving both the Democratic and Republican presidential contests](#), professional political pontificators in Washington are attacking candidates for being crazed and angry - when in fact their own rhetoric shows it is the pundits who are the angriest of all. An uprising is on - one against the hostile takeover of our government by Big Money interests. And inside the walls of the Washington palace, the elite are freaking out.

Here's [Time Magazine's Joe Klein](#), claiming that presidential candidates who attack NAFTA are "wildly irresponsible on trade":

"NAFTA has been a wash, creating as many jobs as have been lost."

According to [government data](#), NAFTA has cost America at least 1 million jobs. This is not new information - nor is it even much debated among economists on either side of the trade debate. But because it offends the Washington Consensus in support of lobbyist-written trade policies and because the realities of trade are finally taking center stage in the presidential primaries, Klein - a loyal Establishment soldier - has taken to the ramparts to lie.

Klein's silliness is eclipsed only by Stu Rothenberg - who reliably hands us the old adage that any candidates challenging the status quo will destroy America. Here's [his take today](#):

"[John Edwards] is also portraying himself as fighting for the middle class and able to appeal to swing voters and even Republicans in a general election...His approach to problems is likely to frighten many voters, including most middle class Americans and virtually all Republicans...Given the North Carolina Democrat's rhetoric and agenda, an Edwards Presidency would likely rip the nation apart - even further apart than Bush has torn it."

Rothenberg's entire career is predicated on his supposed ability to analyze polling data - which is stunning in juxtaposition to his statements today. After all, [polls](#) show Edwards performing the best of any Democrat against any Republican presidential candidate. More importantly, polls also show the vast majority of the country - including Republicans - behind his populist economic positions.

For instance, Edwards has staked his candidacy on guaranteeing health care to every American and on raising the minimum wage - two positions the majority of Americans - and a huge chunk of Republicans - strong support. As I noted in a [2005 Washington Post article](#), a 2005 public opinion survey by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center showed that about half the GOP's core voters support the "government guaranteeing health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes" and an astounding three-quarters support an increase in the minimum wage. Pew recently updated these numbers to show that [4 in 10 Republican voters](#) nationally "favor universal health coverage, even if it means higher taxes."

Trade? Same thing. Edwards has been demanding an end to Washington's lobbyist-written, job-killing trade agenda - a demand that the majority of Americans (and Republicans) support. The [Wall Street Journal](#) was only the most recent publication to note this fact. "By a nearly two-to-one margin, Republican voters believe free trade is bad for the U.S. economy," the Journal noted, adding that voters in both parties want our trade policies reformed.

Knowing these numbers, it is difficult to understand how a professional poll-watcher like Rothenberg could say that an economic populist platform "is likely to frighten many voters, including most middle class Americans and virtually all Republicans." It is even more difficult to understand when you consider that the leading Republican candidate right now is Mike Huckabee - a guy being grossly outspent but who is nonetheless surging among Republican voters on the strength of his economic populist themes. In short, all of the actual facts point to exactly the opposite of Rothenberg's conclusions: That power-challenging economic populism is exciting most voters, including most middle class Americans and many Republicans.

But, then, the rhetoric from the Kleins and Rothenbergs is less surprising when you consider how the rise of economic populism fundamentally indicts both the system they have long defended and, more personally, their individual relevance as supposed political oracles.

Most Washington pundits have reached their positions by defending the system they cover as fundamentally good. Doing that, in their minds, validates their own value and worth - because if they acknowledge that the system is corrupt, it means they are admitting that their work bolstering that system is corrupt, too (which, of course, it is).

And so elite reaction to the populist uprising is swift. As [respected pollsters tell us](#) that "if Americans have ever been angrier with the state of the country, we have not witnessed it," Washington pundits tell us candidates representing that anger are doomed. These pundits desperately claim that candidates' support for majority positions will somehow "rip the nation apart," and that such candidates who take up the populist mantle are "wildly irresponsible" for doing so.

Sadly, the caucuses and primaries look like only the opening act of a more full-scale Establishment backlash against America's populist tide. A group of has-been politicians are pushing [Wall Street billionaire Mike Bloomberg](#) to run as an independent if these has-been politicians do not approve of the nominees of both parties. We are told that Bloomberg is the one who can restore "unity" and "bipartisanship" in the face of the uprising. That the populism represented in both parties' primaries right now is supported by both Republican and Democratic voters has somehow escaped these supposed crusaders for "bipartisanship."

The fledgling Bloomberg candidacy says all you need to know about the difference between actual bipartisanship in America, and Washington bipartisanship. A [cursory glance](#) at the New York mayor's positions show an egomaniac wholly out of touch with the country on issues from the Iraq War, to civil liberties to economic policies. But because he is a Wall Street billionaire with the corresponding respect and love of Big Money, he is promoted as a deity by Washington.

"[A Bloomberg candidacy would] be intended as punishment meted out by the Establishment," writes [Salon's Glenn Greenwald](#). "That, more than anything, seems to be the oh-so-noble and trans-partisan purpose...To find a way to stifle the populist anger at our political establishment after 8 years of unrestrained Bush-Cheney devastation."

Still, on this New Years Eve, I remain an eternal optimist. A few weeks ago I finished up my new book, entitled "[The Uprising: An Unauthorized Tour of the Populist Revolt Scaring Wall Street and Washington](#)" (due out in the Spring of 2008). I spent a year reporting firsthand from the trenches of the populist movement that I have been a part of for the last decade - an uprising against the hostile takeover of our government that [I documented in my first book](#).

In my reporting over the last year I learned that things are - finally - starting to change. The Joe Kleins, Stu Rothenbergs and Mike Bloomborgs still have influence, because they have lots of money behind them. But an uprising is on - one that has already impacted the 2008 presidential race, and one that will continue to seethe well past the upcoming caucuses and primaries. It is that simple fact that truly frightens the defenders of the status quo who have gotten used to the good life inside the palace walls.

Posted by David Sirota

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