



Economics

# Richard Florida: It's Not (Just) the Working Class. It's the Service Class.

The real contested terrain of American politics is the Service Class and its locations.



By *Richard Florida*

The Service Class, not the Working Class, is the key to the Democrats' future. Members of the blue-collar Working Class are largely white men, working in declining industries like manufacturing, as well as construction, transportation, and other manual trades. Members of the Service Class work in rapidly growing industries like food service, clerical and office work, retail stores, hospitality, personal assistance, and the caring industries. The Service

members of ethnic and racial minorities.

A growing chorus of commentators contend that to be competitive the Democrats must win back the strongholds of the White Working Class. As Thomas B. Edsall [wrote recently](#) in *The New York Times*, 6.7 to 9.2 million Obama voters, mostly concentrated in the Midwest and the Rustbelt, switched their votes to Trump in 2016, more than enough to give him his Electoral College victory. Trying to recapture those white Working Class voters—many of whom are both more intolerant and less economically progressive than the party's base—would not only be difficult, but counterproductive. A more effective and more realistic strategy, my own research suggests, is to attract the larger and growing ranks of the Service Class—especially by targeting the areas where they live.

The Republican and Democratic parties each have distinct class advantages that have not only persisted but grown stronger over time. Across America's 350-plus metros, places where the Working Class is dominant went overwhelmingly for Trump. The correlation for the Working Class share of the workforce and Trump votes was substantial (0.53), while the correlation between the Working Class share and Clinton votes was negative (-0.51). Going back four years, the correlations were similar for Romney (0.46) and Obama (-0.45).

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On the flip side, the Democrats have a distinct and persistent advantage in the larger, denser, more knowledge-based metros, where the engineers, scientists, academics, designers, researchers, lawyers, senior managers, and arts professionals that make up the Creative Class are concentrated. Clinton votes were significantly correlated with the Creative Class share of the workforce (0.49), while Trump votes were even more negatively associated with Creative Class metros (-0.54). Again, these correlations were similar, if slightly weaker, in 2012, 0.40 for Obama and -0.41 for Romney.

US workforce, and members of the Creative Class make up another third, the Service Class is by far the largest and fastest-growing class in America, accounting for more than 45 percent of the workforce (65 million strong and growing).

Here the data speaks for itself. In 2012, the statistical associations between partisan vote shares and Service Class shares were weak but slightly favoring the Democrats, 0.1 for Obama and -0.1 for Romney. But in 2016, Service Class locations were essentially up for grabs: there were no statistical associations between the Service Class shares of metros and Trump or Clinton votes. In Florida, for example, Clinton took larger, more densely-populated Service Class metros like Miami and Orlando, while Trump took smaller ones, like Pensacola, Myrtle Beach and Gulfport. The Democrats did not lose the election simply because the Republicans swung the Working Class, whose members and locations have long been trending in their direction, but because they were not able to inspire or mobilize the Service Class, too many of whose members simply stayed home.

Places with large Service Class populations hold the key to the Democrats' future. With their disproportionate shares of working women, members of minority groups, and millennials, they are a natural Democratic coalition. Service Class workers make roughly \$25,000 dollars per year—a fraction of what Creative Class and blue-collar workers earn. To galvanize them, the Democrats must craft a bold and aggressive agenda for inclusive prosperity, including a higher minimum wage indexed to geographic differences in living costs, stronger labor laws, as well as far-reaching programs to upgrade their jobs and turn them into actual careers, provide affordable housing, childcare, and healthcare, and establish a universal basic income, among many other things.

Although Trump's policies will not help the Working Class, the Democratic Party cannot depend upon winning them back. To improve its standing in smaller, red-leaning metros, the Democratic Party must aggressively court the Service Class strongholds within them, adding them to the Creative Class metros that are already solidly blue.

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