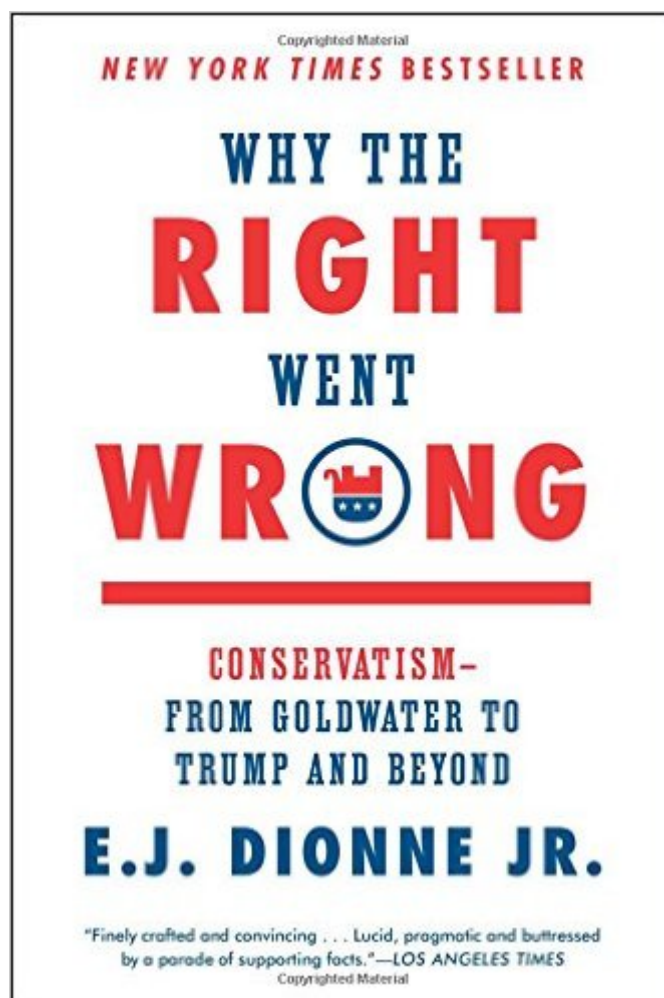


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# Why The Right Went Wrong: Conservatism--From Goldwater To Trump And Beyond



## Synopsis

From the author of *Why Americans Hate Politics*, the New York Times bestselling and "notably fair-minded" (The New York Times Book Review), story of the GOP's fracturing "from the 1964 Goldwater takeover to the Trump spectacle. *Why the Right Went Wrong* offers an "cup to the moment" (The Christian Science Monitor) historical view of the right since the 1960s. Its core contention is that American conservatism and the Republican Party took a wrong turn when they adopted Barry Goldwater's worldview during and after the 1964 campaign. The radicalism of today's conservatism is not the product of the Tea Party, Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne writes. The Tea Partiers are the true heirs to Goldwater ideology. The purity movement did more than drive moderates out of the Republican Party "it beat back alternative definitions of conservatism. Since 1968, no conservative administration "not Nixon not Reagan not two Bushes "could live up to the rhetoric rooted in the Goldwater movement that began to reshape American politics fifty years ago. The collapse of the Nixon presidency led to the rise of Ronald Reagan, the defeat of George H.W. Bush, to Newt Gingrich's revolution. Bush initially undertook a partial modernization, preaching "compassionate conservatism" and a "Fourth Way" to Clinton's "Third Way." Conservatives quickly defined him as an advocate of "big government" and not conservative enough on spending, immigration, education, and Medicare. A return to the true faith was the only prescription on order. The result was the Tea Party, which Dionne says, was as much a reaction to Bush as to Obama. The state of the Republican party, controlled by the strictest base, is diminished, Dionne writes. It has become white and older in a country that is no longer that. It needs to come back to life for its own health and that of the country's, and in *Why the Right Went Wrong*, Dionne "expertly delineates where we are and how we got there" (Chicago Tribune) "and how to return.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The history of contemporary American conservatism is a story of disappointment and betrayal. For half a century conservative politicians have offered oratory incommensurate with what was possible, describing a small government utopia that was impractical and dominated by ideology. (Also a world humbly dominated by aggressive U.S. foreign policy and more military spending.) After carefully examining the reasons behind Bush II's loss of the popular vote in 2000, Karl Rove concluded that moderation was a less effective political tactic than rallying the conservative faithful. Previously he had planned to bring more and more middle-of-the-road voters into the Republican tent through compassionate conservatism applied to social problems. Two disastrous wars followed, as well as a budget-busting tax cut and the Great Recession. Conservatives defined Bush as an advocate of 'big government' whose failures resulted from refusal to be conservative enough on spending, immigration, education, and Medicare. The result, per Dionne, was the Tea Party. The rise of cultural and religious conservatism has led to middle-of-the-road and progressive Republicans fleeing the party - including me. As a precinct chairman years ago, I sat about three feet in front of Goldwater during one of his presentations - I left scared to death that he and his ilk would start a nuclear war, possibly two. Republicans' vacuous opposition to China and Iran, actions to reduce global warming, gun limits (even blocking federal research on the topic), legalizing drugs, reducing the damage done by Free Trade, opposition to Common Care, regulating healthcare like every other developed nation (our costs are about 2X those of our closest competitors), government involvement in the economy (eg.

Disregarding the book's title, which of course is meant to be provocative and to give the book a big splash, the premise of the book is straightforward. The right is being driven further right, but is repeatedly being failed by its politicians as they drive harder rhetoric while being unable to follow through. Disregarding rhetoric, and just looking at the book as a self-help diagnostic rather than an excoriation of the right, it provides some useful insight. Dionne's book is a history of the right from Goldwater to the present that also parlays into the Clinton and Obama presidencies. The

book's premise is that the conservative movement has stagnated, through a cycle of broken promises since Goldwater. First, the politicians whip up fervor by promising to abolish big government or restore traditional values, but only to fail in those promises over and over again. The end result is a greater self-identification of the conservative electorate, as those identifying as "every conservative" has nearly doubled from 1995 to 2015. The book addresses that this shift further right approaches an untenable problem, in that it is a coalition of three groups who serve different ideals: libertarians who want to shrink government, moralists who want "traditional" values and nationalists who want American global power. The punch line: you cannot have small government, big military, and you cannot reverse time on an evolving culture. The book is full of, if not too full of, historical examples of this pattern throughout recent history. If anything, the book is a bit too long and the over-use of examples are a bit tedious and lend to occasional skimming.

The last time Republicans won a presidential election it was 2004. George W. Bush prevailed by trumpeting his ability to keep us safe, despite the 9/11 attacks and the failing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while his domestic agenda revolved around supporting "traditional marriage" and immigration reform. Deep in his campaign literature, you'd find he was also proposing privatizing Social Security, but it didn't figure heavily in the campaign. Today, twelve years later, thrice-married Donald Trump is the Republican frontrunner. His opposition to immigration reform, in general, and Mexico, Mexicans, and China, in specific, defines his campaign. He touts his opposition to the war in Iraq (after it started) and promises to preserve Social Security and Medicare (though his \$11 trillion in proposed tax breaks would likely make that impossible). How did conservatives end up with a candidate who is almost an exact negative image of its last winning standard-bearer? Sure, the utter collapse of George W. Bush in his second term provides much of the answer. But E.J. Dionne's new book *Why the Right Went Wrong: Conservatism -- From Goldwater to the Tea Party and Beyond* makes the case that some sort of crackup on the right was inevitable -- the culmination of decades of the rise of a movement that transformed American politics while failing to live up to its most fundamental promise to shrink government. In many ways, Dionne argues, 2004 was the peak and the breaking point of the Goldwaterism Republicans first embraced in 1964. The polarities of the party had completely switched, with Republicans sweeping the South and Democrats dominating the old GOP stronghold of New England.

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