



# The Daily Free Press

The Independent Student Newspaper at Boston University

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## 'Politically homeless' young conservatives seek to build Republican Party of the future

October 15, 2020 11:26 pm

by Angela Yang

**C**onservative college students disillusioned with today's partisan polarization are banding together to push for reform in the Republican Party.

Founded in Massachusetts, "gen z gop" advocates for discourse over division and seeks to vote President Donald Trump out of office. More than 2 months since its launch, the organization has around 35 members and more than 200 applications.

Students at Boston University say it is difficult to find political refuge when neither of the major parties speaks for them.

College of Arts and Sciences senior Jesse Lamba, who identifies as an independent, said Trump's xenophobic rhetoric around immigration and Islam kickstarted his dismay with the Republican Party.

"It was definitely leading up to the 2016 election where I started to feel like this is not the party that I recognize," Lamba said.



*Young conservatives disillusioned with the current state of the Republican Party founded gen z gop as a refuge for Republican college students who want to vote President Donald Trump out of office. COURTESY OF GEN Z GOP*

Lamba said he recalls a contrasting example in 2008, when former President Barack Obama's presidential opponent, late Sen. John McCain, defended Obama after a woman questioned his heritage. Videos of the incident showed McCain taking the microphone from her.

"No ma'am," McCain had replied. "He's a decent family man, a citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues, and that's what this campaign is all about."

This kind of civility, Lamba said, is a trait he hopes Republicans can once again adopt.

He said while he did not support Trump's brand of "authoritarian populism" in 2016 — the year he believes the GOP "took a turn for the worse" — he also could not agree with some of former First Lady Hillary Clinton's policies.

"I was in a place where I didn't want to even be a part of politics because due to the rhetoric and where we were going, but I think that right now, there's a time for reckoning," Lamba said. "I personally see an opportunity here to really shift the discourse."

While Lamba and similar centrists do not find a place in the Democratic Party, either, he said the GOP's relationship with the left should be rooted in respect and understanding. Politicians should recognize their opponents as "human beings" with policy differences, he said.

"These are fellow Americans," Lamba said. "It's up to us, the younger generation, to change the narrative around that and say, 'You know what, it's our job to now move away from, just as an example, demonizing immigrants,' and [look] at things from a multi-dimensional perspective."

First-year BU School of Law student Jake Binnall, a registered Republican, said he felt "super defeated" seeing Trump's 2016 nomination by the Republican National Convention. He was frustrated, he said, especially because the large pool of candidates contained some "promising" alternatives.

"People bought into his attacking of certain groups to attach their anger to something," Binnall said. "I didn't support him then and I don't support him now, because I just don't think he's a Republican, and he's been pretty open about that, too."

Instead of casting a ballot for his own party in 2016, Binnall said he voted for Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson, a former Republican.

In 2020, Binnall's primary issue with the Republican Party is its apparent lack of an authentic party platform. Instead, he said it appears the GOP is standing solely behind Trump's whims.

"We've literally abandoned the concept of having beliefs and it's just whatever this guy wants is what we believe in," Binnall said. "That's really dangerous, and it doesn't think beyond him possibly having two terms. It doesn't think beyond a single individual."

Binnall's reason for having previously identified with the Republican Party comes from the core values he said the party has since abandoned: small government, promotion of a free market and fiscal responsibility in adhering to a budget.

He said it seems the party's politicians are shifting their stances based on convenience rather than true belief, becoming "very populist and flow-of-the-wind." Conservative advocacy groups that traditionally oppose government overreach, he said, haven't spoken up against Trump's issuance of executive orders — which has outpaced Obama's.

"So it's like when Obama did it, it was bad, but when [Trump] does it, it's okay because Democrats are crazy," Binnall said. "I think the values are supposedly still there. It's just, I think they're being ignored."

But rather than return to a previous version of the Republican Party, Gen Z GOP aims to present a path forward and forge a party that can be conservative while recognizing the issues today's young adults and their children will have to face in their lifetimes.

To Lamba, ignoring the impact of climate change and denying the contributions immigrants make for the United States are major faults in the current GOP. Instead of doing this, he said, the party must create long-term policies that can offer a "palatable alternative" to ideas from the left.

Binnall said despite "conserve" being a root word of "conservative," the party has shifted away from environmental conservation in favor of big business. What also disappoints him, he said, is the GOP's lack of willingness to confront social issues such as police brutality and LGBTQ rights, seemingly because of its desire to oppose Democrats.

"We really need to get to this idea of: these are issues that we all know are bad, these are hurting people," Binnall said. "Just because we care about the same thing doesn't mean that the parties are the same."

This "volatile toxicity" dissuades Republicans from discussing such issues at all, he said, for fear of being labeled a RINO: "Republican in Name Only." The future Binnall envisions for the GOP includes not being afraid to take on that dialogue.

"I would love to see a political environment where it's normal to have regular conversations with the other party or even having cross-party endorsements," Binnall said. "It's just super dangerous for everyone involved to start automatically hating people, or not taking seriously what other people have to say based on a letter after their name. That sounds silly because it is silly."

BU political science professor Virginia Sapiro wrote in an email that the polarization between today's major political parties has risen gradually over recent decades.

Democratic and Republican leaders used to cooperate more behind the scenes even when they quarreled in public, Sapiro wrote. This collaboration typically occurs when both parties can see an advantage in doing so.

"But they have to believe there are some points of agreement," Sapiro wrote. "Are there any today on important matters given the shape of the parties?"

Neither Binnall nor Lamba will vote Republican on Nov. 3, they said. While Lamba said he still feels “politically homeless,” he plans to support former Vice President Joe Biden. Binnall said he hasn’t yet decided his vote — but he knows it won’t be for Trump.

“I think that my beliefs are very Republican,” Binall said, “but I think the Republican Party has not become very Republican.”



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