

How did this political climate come to be?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Per usual, Ross Douthat is [in this post](#) occasionally wise:

[Tuesday's] recall vote is not necessarily a bellwether for the general election, not necessarily a sign that Mitt Romney can win a slew of purple states, not necessarily proof that the country is ready to throw in with Walker's fellow Wisconsinite Paul Ryan on issues of spending and taxation.

But neither is it anything like good news for liberalism. We are entering a political era that will feature many contests like the war over collective bargaining in Wisconsin: grinding struggles in which sweeping legislation is passed by party-line votes and then the politicians responsible hunker down and try to survive the backlash. There will be no total victory in this era, but there will be gains and losses — and the outcome in the Walker recall is a warning to Democrats that their position may be weaker than many optimistic liberals thought.

but often infuriating:

It's useful to think of Obama's stimulus bill and Walker's budget repair bill as mirror image exercises in legislative shock and awe, and the Tea Party and the Wisconsin labor protests as mirror images of backlash.

No, that really isn't useful at all, because stimulating the economy and going to war against unions aren't simply two sides of one partisan coin. A Republican in Obama's shoes would likely have pushed a stimulus bill—no doubt different in many details, but still a combination of spending and tax cuts intended to juice the economy—because unless you happen to be a Republican Congress trying to paint a Democratic president as Chairman Mao, it's widely understood that *this is how you get out of a recession*. That's only shock and awe in a context already rife with obstructionism and disinformation. But few governors from the *same* party as Walker have been brazen enough to overreach to the degree that he did, pivoting in a flash from running a tough bargain with the public-sector unions to blowing up the

bargaining table and changing the locks on the doors.

I could rant about Douthat's other points as well, but I'd rather just point you to [Ben Dueholm's post](#):

The discouraging thing about [Douthat's] very bad column is that its worst parts all reflect conventional wisdom. We're just doomed to be much poorer now. We can't afford to provide health insurance to anyone anymore. The only serious plan to deal with our increasing share of misery is Paul Ryan's. None of these things is true.

[Read it all](#), along with [Jamelle Bouie's take](#).