Twitter Thread by Dan Nexon



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If you read a textbook-style account of conflicts centering around the Protestant Reformation(s), it'll probably focus on theological disputes: justification by faith, the lay chalice, baptism, the meaning of "hoc est corpus meum," predestination... kind of thing.

But a lot of the most persuasive work – at least IMHO – on religious conflicts in the 16th and 17th cautions against focusing too much on "ideational content." https://t.co/j1nkhjvqTE

There are a variety of pitfalls here. One of them is that most of the people fighting over religion probably didn't to that point by carefully weighing the finer points of theological disputes. Dynamics of community, identity, and ritual probably played a more important role.

I've been thinking about this as we approach election day. American politics scholars understand very well that, for most Americans, partisanship drives ideology. Scholars of ethnic politics see familiar patterns in U.S. political polarization (cc @sstroschein2).

Political movements embrace conversion (!!) narratives as validations of their beliefs, and the converted stress ideas and epiphanies. But it doesn't take much poking around to see the crucial role if identity, belonging, and social affirmation.

This is a common refrain in studies about "redpilling" into IDW and alt-ideologies.

But it's also true of more 'mainstream' conversions.

On Twitter, you can watch this unfold in real time – and with prominent figures – as departure from orthodoxies meets with escalating attacks from the in-group and kudos from the out-group.

Indeed, the way that groups police their boundaries can be a double-edged sword. Especially if stigmas begin to erode.

Why do you think conservatives have sunk *so* much effort into hashtags, messaging, and spotlighting designed to imply an exodus of specific subgroups from the Democratic coalition?

A lot of liberal commentary (sometimes it me) dismisses this activity as targeted almost exclusively at wavering whites. But after years of these kinds of appeals, it does seem like the social stigma that's kept some conservative minorities in the Democratic fold is wavering.

Sorry, that was a bit of tangent.

The tl;dr community, identity, social affirmation, & ritual matter for all of our politics. It's important to keep this in mind as we come to climax one of the few remaining civic rituals that, in theory, binds all Americans together.

Welp. The number of typos in that thread strongly suggests I need another dose of my ADHD medicine. ■■■■