



THE MEANING OF TRUMP

What the Billionaire Businessman's Anti-Establishment
Challenge Heralds for America's Future

By Donald T. Critchlow

Donald Trump's nomination to head the Republican Party ticket in 2016 stunned and confounded the Grand Old Party establishment, foreign policy experts, conservative pundits, and most of the news media. Trump is a unique phenomenon in American political history. No other presidential candidate, with the possible exceptions of Andrew Jackson in 1824 and Woodrow Wilson in 1912, has experienced such a meteoric political rise. At least Jackson had served as a congressman and U.S. senator from Tennessee, and Wilson came to the White House after two years as governor of New Jersey.

Trump won the nomination with no experience in elected office, defeating sixteen other Republican contenders. At every step, his GOP primary campaign rivals underestimated him. His understanding of policy was nearly absent, he lacked a ground game for campaigning, and his rhetoric was vitriolic, divisive, and demagogic. True to his swashbuckling style in business, Trump's campaign soared on the strength of idiosyncratic antics such as the constant stream of name-calling tweets that ensured viral exposure in twenty-four-hour news cycles and delighted anti-establishment voters looking for a populist hero. But from start to finish the Trump phenomenon left the Republican Party in total disarray, with even former Republican presidents refusing to endorse the GOP's 2016 standard bearer. With less than a month before general election day, news reports about Trump's serial lewd behavior prompted other Republican leaders to retract endorsements and had some GOP leaders desperately exploring ways to dump Trump from the ticket.

The form and content of Trump's bid for the presidency was set in his June 16, 2015 announcement speech, in which he declared, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing

◁ Donald Trump at
Trump Tower, New
York, Aug. 14, 2015.
*Andrew Hetherington/
Redux*

those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And, some, I assume are good people." His tone was in sharp contrast to that of Jeb Bush, the leading candidate at the outset, who had described illegal immigration as an act of love by people striving to give their families a better life, and to that of Marco Rubio, the Cuban-American senator from Florida, who had supported providing undocumented immigrants with opportunities to remain in the country.

After a series of primaries that saw his rivals drop out one after the other, Trump received the presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in July 2016. Trump had failed to win a majority of primary voters in any state until it had become clear he was headed to ultimate victory. The crowded Republican field had split the vote. Yet Trump tapped into a deep undercurrent of anxiety in America about a tepid economy, the loss of manufacturing jobs, demographic changes, race relations, and the breakdown of families and social order. Playing on popular resentment is not new to American politics, but never was a leading presidential candidate so unvarnished, so unrestrained, and so blunt in his language. His appeal turned off most higher-income and suburban voters, but attracted other vital voting blocs.

Trump energized a constituency that had not gone Republican since Ronald Reagan twenty-five years earlier: blue-collar workers. A key to his success was attracting working-class independents and Democrats who cast ballots in Republican contests in states with open primaries. Trump received a higher percentage of blue-collar voters than any other Republican candidate, ranging from 40 percent to 60 percent of voters making \$50,000 or less, according to the exit polling in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and New Hampshire. The only state where another candidate did better among these lower-income voters was in Wisconsin, where Ted Cruz beat Trump by one percentage point, 42 percent to 41 percent.

Surprisingly, Trump also captured much of the evangelical Christian vote that can be critical to Republican electoral success, even though he displayed little religiosity himself, unlike some of his rivals, Mike Huckabee, Ben Carson, or Cruz, who wore their religion on their sleeves.

From Trump Tower to the White House

Trump has been a well-known celebrity in American popular culture for decades, thanks to his flamboyant activities as a businessman (building iconic skyscrapers and casinos bearing his name), his self-promotion of a billionaire's lifestyle (of his three glamorous wives, two were fashion models and the other an actress), and his fame as a reality TV host (on NBC's *The Apprentice* for eleven seasons). Though it seemed to many observers that Trump came out of nowhere, his political ambitions in fact

date back decades. His 2016 bid for the presidency was initially dismissed by most serious observers as another scheme to enhance the Trump brand for merchandizing eponymous products that include, besides his skyscrapers and casinos, wine, apparel, golf resorts, hotels, and a university. However, Trump had considered running for president in 1988, 2000, and 2012, and governor of New York in 2006 and 2014.

Trump contemplated challenging President Reagan's vice president and heir apparent, George H. W. Bush, for the Republican presidential nomination in 1987. He launched a national advertising campaign chastising Reagan for his negotiations with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and with Japan. Trump ads proclaiming, "There's nothing wrong with American's foreign defense policy that a little backbone can't cure," appeared in newspapers across the country. He created a press frenzy by flying into the early-primary state of New Hampshire and declaring, "Whatever Japan wants, do the opposite." Typically touting his own savvy as a negotiator, he added, "The Japanese, when they negotiate with us, they have long faces. But when the negotiations are over it is my belief—and I have seen this—they laugh like hell." He pushed for a protectionist policy, appearing on the popular Oprah Winfrey television show in April 1988, telling the audience, "I'd make our allies pay their fair share. We're a debtor nation."

In 1999, Trump temporarily left the Republican Party, complaining that conservatives are "just too crazy right." He formed an exploratory committee to run for president under the banner of Ross Perot's Reform Party. He received the endorsement of Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura and appeared on dozens of television talk shows describing himself as "America's white knight." He clamored about the problems with immigration. He proposed universal health care, restrictions on assault weapons, access to abortions, and a targeted tax on the super wealthy. He labeled the leading candidate for the Reform Party nomination, prominent television commentator Pat Buchanan, a former advisor to three Republican presidents, a "Hitler lover," a divisive figure who was anti-Semitic, anti-Hispanic, and anti-black. He called for the end of gridlock in Washington and condemned the influence of special interests in politics. Trump took the lead in several polls of Reform Party voters, which encouraged him to announce that his future cabinet would include Republican Senator John McCain as defense secretary, General Colin Powell as secretary of state, and Democratic Representative Charles Rangel as secretary of housing and urban development. He told interviewers that he wanted Oprah Winfrey as his running mate. In the end, the Reform Party went with Buchanan, dismissing Trump as a celebrity out for publicity.

Trump kept himself in the limelight. In 2004, he announced that he was considering another run for the presidency, but opted to host *The Apprentice* instead. In

2006, word got out that he was considering a race for the governorship of New York. After much media speculation, he quelled the rumors. Many, including former New York City Mayor Ed Koch, thought he was deliberately feeding the media frenzy to further enhance his public persona.

In 2011, Trump was back on the political stage again, appearing at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference, the main venue for vetting conservative candidates running for office. His keynote talk focused on addressing China's currency manipulation and making South Korea pay for U.S. troops stationed in its country. He said the rest of the world viewed America as "ineffective and weak." He accused Republicans in general, and George W. Bush, Mitt Romney, and Ron Paul in particular, of weakness. He saved his biggest jab for President Barack Obama by questioning whether he was born in the United States, a constitutional requirement for becoming president. His so-called birther attacks on President Obama attracted considerable media attention, which gave rise to Trump running for the Republican presidential nomination in 2015. A *Newsweek/Daily Beast* poll taken in February 2011 had him trailing Obama by two percentage points if Trump challenged him for the White House in 2012. But just as quickly as Trump's hot air balloon rose, it fell to earth when Obama publicly released his birth certificate. Trump dropped to eighth in the polls.

Trump's ambitions had not been dampened, however. After GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney's loss to Obama in 2012, Trump kept himself in the headlines by pressing a conspiracy theory that Obama's released birth certificate was a forgery. He was joined in this accusation by such conservative icons as "America's toughest sheriff" Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, Arizona who even launched a criminal investigation into the validity of Obama's birth certificate.

An Anti-Establishment Revolt

With few taking Trump's 2015 candidacy announcement seriously, the candidate immediately struck on the one issue that the Republican Party had hoped to avoid: immigration. The issue is a potential minefield for any Republican seeking higher office; while a tough stand on immigration mobilizes conservatives, it alienates Hispanics and other constituencies important to Republican electoral success. In 2008, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney switched his position on the need for immigration reform to one focused on controlling the southern border. As a first-term senator, Marco Rubio found himself under attack from the Republican right for joining a bipartisan immigration reform effort that included a pathway for citizenship for undocumented immigrants. By focusing on immigration, with what most informed people thought was an outrageous and demagogic vow to deport 11.2

million undocumented people who were living in the United States, Trump appealed to many grassroots Republicans and blue-collar workers. They liked his rhetoric, seeing him as an outsider willing to speak his mind and not fearing politically incorrect language.

Trump's call for restricted immigration and the construction of a wall on the southern U.S. border, which he said would be paid for by Mexico, fed into economic anxieties, cultural concerns, and brooding anger among grassroots Republicans. Trump connected with an angry American electorate that was discontented with politics as usual, sick and tired of what it saw as cronyism, corruption, and mutual back-scratching in Washington.

Trump presented himself as a nationalist who would protect America from what he described as an "open border" allowing a flood of undocumented immigrants into the United States. His angry rhetoric and sloganeering to "make America great again" drew tens of thousands to his rallies. He did not restrain himself even when talking about fellow Republicans. On a campaign stop in Iowa only a month into his campaign, Trump expressed contempt for Senator McCain, the party's presidential nominee against Obama in 2008. "He's not a war hero," he told the Family Leadership Summit. "He was a war hero because he was captured. I like people who were not captured." As some in the media pointed out that this attack came from a man who had received draft deferments throughout the Vietnam War, many thought the attack on McCain was the end for Trump's campaign. It turned out to be just the beginning.

Trump succeeded in sailing to the nomination as an anti-establishment candidate in part because he entered the presidential race just as the Republican Party was experiencing a perfect storm. The Republican base was angry with its leaders for failing to turn back President Obama's agenda, including the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare. Republicans had swept the 2014 midterm elections, taking control of the U.S. Senate with fifty-four seats, extending control of the House with 247 seats, and reaching down to the state level with thirty-one governorships and securing a majority in sixty-eight state legislative chambers. Not since 1928 had Republicans had such complete control of Congress and state governments. Republicans had run and won on a promise of change; when things did not change, grassroots Republicans became angry at the Republican establishment, whose members were derided as RINOs (Republican in Name Only).

The populist anger first erupted shortly after the enactment of Obamacare in 2010. The conservative Tea Party protest movement, inspired by pressure groups such as the libertarian Freedom Works organization, emerged spontaneously when grassroots activists organized rallies against Obamacare and the corporate bailouts after the 2008 financial crisis. Most of the protesters were upper-income, better-educated

whites. In many states, leadership had come out of libertarian Ron Paul's anti-establishment presidential campaign in 2008. In some states there were two and sometimes three groups claiming to represent the Tea Party movement. Republican strategists encouraged the movement as a means of mobilizing voters, but they were playing with fire. These were angry voters who demanded change and an overthrow of politics as usual—including the Republican establishment.

The Tea Party mobilization paid off in the midterm elections in 2010, and again in the 2014 midterms. Republicans had been elected to Congress on promises to repeal Obamacare, enact legislation to secure the nation's borders, contain the national debt, reform the regulatory state, and redirect the administration's foreign policy. For their efforts, Tea Party activists got bipartisan support for raising the national debt, a Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriages, and an attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, a tragedy that left the American ambassador to Libya dead. For the Tea Party, adding insult to injury was the revelation that the Internal Revenue Service had engaged in a policy of targeting Tea Party groups for tax audits—and had been let off the hook for doing so. Things did not appear to be changing in Washington, even with Republicans in control of Congress. Concepts like acceptance of incremental change and legislative compromise—the foundations of a democratic system—were dismissed by Tea Party rebels as opportunism, cronyism, and betrayal of principle.

Nor did these angry voters seem to comprehend that the Republican Party risked becoming a minority party if its base of support narrowed. Republicans had lost the White House the previous two elections, and while they had made extraordinary gains in Congress and on the state level, Democrats had almost a lock on the Electoral College by controlling large populous states on both coasts. Minority voters—Hispanics, blacks, and Asian Americans—were voting Democrat, and as young minorities reached voting age, Democratic voter rolls would only grow. Although white voters still constituted about 70 percent of the population actually casting votes, they were an aging and shrinking demographic set. Presenting itself as a party of true reform and inclusion, and not just an angry opposition, is essential to the future of the Republican Party.

GOP voter anger was evident by September 2015 as the Trump campaign gained momentum and splits within the Republican House caucus deepened. The crisis within the party pushed Representative John Boehner to resign as speaker of the House and refrain from seeking reelection in his Ohio district. His successor as speaker was Representative Paul Ryan, Romney's running mate in 2012, who agreed to give a greater voice to the so-called Freedom Caucus, which consists of about forty-two House members closely aligned with the Tea Party movement.

At first glance, the large Republican presidential field—Trump’s rivals—looked strong. Jeb Bush is Republican Party royalty, the son and brother of two former presidents. There was a giant sucking sound as money from major Republican donors flowed into Bush’s campaign. Many conservative Republicans initially turned to Scott Walker, the governor of Wisconsin, who had become a hero in conservative circles for taking on the labor unions and winning a recall election and reelection to his office.

Cruz, the firebrand senator from Texas, saw a path to the nomination through the evangelical vote. Rubio, once a protégé of Jeb Bush, thought he could win as a highly articulate policy wonk, and a Hispanic. Carson, a brilliant African American surgeon, played on his fame in conservative circles for having openly attacked Obama at a prayer breakfast. Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky—Ron Paul’s son—sought the nomination with strong civil libertarian positions and a neo-isolationist foreign policy. Chris Christie, the governor of the heavily Democratic state of New Jersey, offered himself as a candidate who could attract cross-party voters. John Kasich, governor of Ohio, always a key battleground state in general elections, offered a message of good governance and moderation. The long shots in the race, Carly Fiorina, a former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor who had won the Iowa primary in 2008, and Rick Santorum, a former senator from Pennsylvania who had become a perennial candidate appealing to traditional values, filled out the second and third tiers of candidates.

One by one Trump picked off his rivals in the primaries, making the race for the Republican nomination seem at times like a Whack-A-Mole arcade game. In debates and on the stump, Trump was belligerent, thin-skinned, and rude, but he showed a knack for capturing the weaknesses of his opponents. He taunted Bush as “Low-energy Jeb,” dubbed Rubio “Lightweight Marco” and the “Choker,” and labeled Cruz, “Lyin’ Ted.” Trump made fun of Fiorina’s physical appearance, and described Carson as having a “pathological temper.” Viewers turned on their TV sets in huge numbers during the presidential primary debates just to see what Trump might say next.

Some believed that voters had gotten wise to Trump’s antics-driven campaign after Ted Cruz triumphed in the Iowa Caucus in February 2016. In a well-organized ground campaign, Cruz took 51,000 votes, compared to Trump’s 45,000. Not far behind was Rubio. Trump appeared to have hurt himself by boycotting a GOP debate sponsored by Fox News. In the earlier first debate, Trump shot back angrily at Fox newscaster Megyn Kelly after she asked him about his anti-Hispanic comments, suggesting that her question was generated by uncontrollable female hormones. Cruz, though, did not walk out of Iowa unscathed. Accusations by the Carson campaign that Cruz had told Iowa precinct captains that the retired neurosurgeon had suspended his

campaign reinforced an image of Cruz as an unscrupulous grandstander who would do anything to become the party's nominee. Following their poor showings in Iowa, Huckabee, Paul, and Santorum dropped out.

New Hampshire proved to be the turning point. The pack of candidates desperate to become Trump's main challenger piled on Rubio, who had risen to second place in the polls. Bush launched a massive TV ad campaign against Rubio, bringing up charges that when he had been a state senator in Florida he had misused his government credit card for personal expenses.

In a televised debate, Christie, who was making his do-or-die stand in New Hampshire, blasted Rubio for never having made a monumental decision in his political life. "Marco, the thing is this. When you're president of the United States, when you're governor of a state, the memorized thirty-second speech where you talk about how great America is at the end of it does not solve one problem for one person." He slammed Rubio for spending his time on the campaign trail and not fulfilling his duties as a senator. Sensing blood, Bush joined the attack by saying that Americans should not gamble on a candidate who does not have executive experience—suggesting that Rubio would be another Obama. The Christie charge and Rubio's apparent flummox left viewers with the impression that he was a hollow suit.

Bush also made a run at tarring Trump but it didn't stick. He challenged Trump about his use of eminent domain, a practice by which a government or private entity can appropriate land or property. Trump had used eminent domain as a real estate developer, once forcing an elderly woman from her house next to his casino in Atlantic City. "How tough is it to take property from an elderly lady?" Bush asked. Trump used his stock putdown and was booed by the studio audience. He was booed again when he accused the audience of being made up of party hacks and paid lobbyists.

With 25 percent of the vote Trump was victorious in New Hampshire, and Rubio fell to a distant fifth. Kasich came in second with nearly 16 percent, Cruz third with 11.68 percent, and Bush, the early favorite in the race, fourth with only 11.02 percent. Fiorina and Christie came in sixth and seventh with single-digit percentages and announced they were suspending their campaigns.

The field had been narrowed, and Bush and Carson would drop out two weeks later after further defeats in the South Carolina primary. Trump gained some momentum when he won the endorsements of Carson and Christie, but he and Cruz split the six "Super Tuesday" primaries held on March 1. Trump dispatched Rubio by defeating him in his own state of Florida on March 12, and picked up the critical Michigan primary on March 8. That damaged Kasich's hopes of turning Rust Belt voters his way (although he would go on to win his home state primary in Ohio on March 15). From there, Trump rolled onward to the nomination with massive

victories in the eastern United States—in New York and Connecticut on April 19, and in Pennsylvania and Maryland on April 26. In a last-ditch move before the Indiana primary on May 3, Cruz announced that he had selected Fiorina to be his vice presidential running mate. But Trump walloped Cruz in Indiana, forcing the Texan to withdraw from the race.

Such was the party establishment's antipathy to Trump and fear he would bomb in the general election against Hillary Clinton that even after Trump had won enough delegates for the nomination, there was talk about making a last stand against Trump at the Republican National Convention. The scheme entailed a change of party rules to allow an open vote and release delegates from binding obligations to support the candidates who had won the primaries. The hope was that if Trump failed to secure the nomination on the first ballot, an alternative candidate could be put forward. But the plan quickly fizzled. Trump had triumphed.

The Trump Factor

Twenty-nine million Republicans voted in the 2016 primaries, exceeding the record set in 2008 when 26.8 million voters cast ballots in GOP primaries. More than 14.8 percent of registered Republicans voted in the primaries, compared to 11 percent in 2008, even though turnout fell off after Trump won the Indiana primary on May 1 and came within sight of clinching the nomination. The turnout revealed that the Republican grassroots voters were fired up. Trump won 1,441 delegates of the total 2,472, surpassing the threshold of 1,237 delegates needed to secure the party's nomination.

Trump's full-throated vow to "make America great again" through immigration restriction, trade protectionism, and returning manufacturing jobs to the United States was designed to lure blue-collar voters to the Republican Party.

Trump's success with working class voters improved his prospects for defeating a Democratic opponent in the November general election. In analyzing Romney's loss to President Obama in 2012, a few election analysts such as Sean Trende of *RealClearPolitics* argued that four to six million white males had stayed home from the polls, and if they had voted then Romney would have won the election. These missing voters, Trende claimed, were mostly blue-collar, lower-income voters, many in the Rust Belt spanning the Midwest and Northeast who were disaffected with the political system. Trende's argument assumed that these absent voters could be turned out to vote. More importantly, he postured that political appeals to bring them into the party would not alienate others in the party.

Political parties are composed of uneasy coalitions. The Democratic Party is primarily a coalition of the wealthy and the poor; highly educated whites and less-educated minority groups; young whites and Hispanics, African Americans, and

Asians. White voters in the 2012 presidential election and in the 2014 midterm elections went overwhelmingly Republican. This leaves the Democratic Party with a problem with white voters, while Republicans clearly have a demographic problem with ethnic minority voters. Trende's argument, while not dismissing the need for Republicans to reach out to these minority voters, suggests that attracting blue-collar whites to the party is the key to victory.

Yet, Trump's policy views as well as his abrasive style alienated many voters, including those in his own party. His rhetoric was macho, angry, and offensive. His bluster, self-congratulatory chest pounding, and name calling offended many Republicans, ideological conservatives, suburban women, and minorities. Conservative intellectuals and many Republican Party insiders were mortified that Trump seemed to personify what progressives had been saying all along: the Republican Party is racist, anti-women, and xenophobic. Opinion leaders at the *National Review* and *Weekly Standard* launched a Never Trump campaign. Conservative commentator George F. Will announced he was leaving the Republican Party, and the entire Bush Dynasty—George H.W., George W., and Jeb—skipped the Republican National Convention and pointedly avoided endorsing the party's nominee for president.

Whatever Trump had gained in winning blue-collar white males to his cause, he lost suburban white women, Hispanics, and moderates. Exit polls in state primaries revealed the problems he could expect in the general election. In Florida, he received only 40 percent of the female vote and only 26 percent of the Hispanic vote, which went overwhelmingly to Rubio. Trump received 46 percent of the evangelical Christian vote. A similar pattern was seen in exit polls in the key battleground states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Trump's hyper anti-immigration stance put strong Red states such as Arizona, with a 40 percent Hispanic population, into play. Troubles were also evident in Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada.

Trump did surprisingly well among evangelical voters, given his equivocation on social issues. Over the course of the campaign, Trump took five different positions on abortion, ranging from women should be punished for having an abortion to "my position has not changed—like Ronald Reagan, I am pro-life with exceptions." Yet in Virginia he won 36 percent of the evangelical vote; 55 percent of the evangelicals in Pennsylvania; and received more evangelical votes than Cruz or Rubio in South Carolina, Ohio, and New Hampshire. These self-identified voters were willing to ignore Trump's clear lack of knowledge about the Bible and his apparent absence of religiosity. The evangelicals were angry white voters sick of what they saw as the attack on Christians as bigots, homophobes, and racists. They feel hurt by the attacks, especially considering that their churches are involved in drug rehabilitation, afterschool programs, food distribution for the homeless, single-mother counseling,

and an array of other community programs. They see in Trump a rare politician who unapologetically shares their contempt for the establishment—and for this alone, they overlooked his spiritual faults.

Outlook for the Grand Old Party

After the Republican National Convention, Trump got a bump in the polls. But his momentum slowed after the Democratic National Convention, which laid out Hillary Clinton's campaign strategy: Attack Trump. Heavy-hitting and well-received speeches by Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, and Bill Clinton reinforced the narrative that Trump was unsuited temperamentally to be president. America was already a great country and Trump's message was divisive and dark. One evening at the convention featured remarks by Khizr Khan, a Muslim American whose son died while serving in Iraq. He said that by receiving draft deferments Trump had failed to sacrifice for his country, and that Trump's call to ban Muslim immigrants showed his ignorance of the constitution.

Democrats were baiting Trump, and he took the bait. Instead of recognizing the greatest sacrifice a parent can give to their country—the life of a child serving in the military—Trump went on the attack. He argued that he too had sacrificed by creating thousands of new jobs, and then taunted Khan—noting that Khan's wife had stood silently by his side during his convention remarks, Trump suggested that Muslim women were not allowed to speak in public.

Some Republican leaders, including House Speaker Paul Ryan, Senator McCain, and Senator Kelly Ayotte, who faced tough reelection challenges in 2016, quickly distanced themselves from Trump. Even Trump supporter and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich said that Trump did not seem prepared to be president. Trump responded a few days later by getting into a feud with his fellow Republicans—stating that he was unwilling to endorse Ryan, McCain, or Ayotte in their reelection campaigns.

When Hillary Clinton's poll numbers jumped after the Democratic National Convention, taking a lead nationwide as well as in key battleground states, many concluded that Trump would have been better off taking a vacation without access to his Twitter account after the Republican convention. Trump did an about-face and endorsed Ryan, McCain, and Ayotte. He pivoted to the economy, giving a speech in Detroit in early August saying that as president he would reduce the corporate tax rate, cut taxes for the middle-class and lower-income groups, and make better international trade deals. He proposed creating a private-public infrastructure bank to fund public construction products. But before long, there was another controversy raging around Trump, this time when the media published recordings of disturbing misogynistic conversations that Trump confirmed as genuine.

And so it went as Americans elected a successor to President Barack Obama. The Republican Party boasts a long and proud legacy in the American political tradition, beginning with its founding in 1854 by anti-slavery activists and others. It quickly swept to victory in 1860, putting Abraham Lincoln in the White House and winning control of Congress. Throughout a century and a half the GOP has weathered ebbs and flows. Seldom has it faced such disarray as in 2016.

History suggests that whatever Trump's own political fortunes, the Republican Party will survive. After the 1964 presidential election in which Barry Goldwater went down in a landslide defeat and Republicans lost thirty-seven seats in Congress, the party rebuilt itself and regained the presidency in 1968. Following Richard M. Nixon's resignation from the presidency amid the Watergate scandal in 1974, less than 15 percent of the electorate identified themselves with the Republican Party. Six years later, in 1980, Reagan won the White House in a landslide. Republican comebacks can be partly attributed to Democratic overreach.

But this time the comeback could have its limits. In 1968 and 1980, Republicans were able to tap into new voters. The damage done by Trump with Hispanic and female white suburban voters might have lasting effects on the Republican Party, ensuring that it will remain a minority party. Both the Republican and Democratic parties face an upsurge in populist challenges, but for Republicans with Trump's nomination, the ramifications are multiple and severe. Trump as the party's leader is entitled to appoint the next chairman of the Republican National Committee. After the 1964 loss, the establishment ousted Goldwater's appointee. Goldwater, a lifelong Republican, agreed to the change. Trump the outsider with the outsized ego might be less amenable to giving up the reins. The Republican Party has extraordinary strength at the state level. Win or lose, Trump supporters may see opportunities to go after the Republican establishment throughout the country.

Perhaps the chickens have come home to roost for a party that helped stoke the flames of voter discontent with its support of the Tea Party, with its attacks on the mainstream media, academia, crony capitalism, and the very concept of compromise—even if principled and necessary for the sake of governance. The GOP's greatest challenge, however, is overcoming its sole reliance on the mobilization of white voters. In the end, Americans tend toward moderation and won't support a party that projects itself as zany, xenophobic, and intolerant. Trump's startling political rise points to a major realignment of both parties in which Republicans are no longer a coalition of globalization-loving business interests and globalization-hating white workers, but a party of the dispossessed, those hurt by globalization. Democrats, a coalition of coastal upper-income voters and poor minority voters, might be transformed into the party of college-educated voters who win in a globalized economy.

In 2016, both major American political parties nominated candidates disliked and distrusted by a majority of Americans. The next American president faces serious challenges in formulating and implementing domestic and foreign policies. This sets the stage for the out-party to make huge gains in the 2018 midterm election. American politics is thus certain to experience more volatility in the years to come. Donald Trump personifies the disruption of the American political tradition.