Spring 5-15-2016

A Retrospective on the Trump Candidacy

Hunter Collins
University of Wyoming, hcollin3@uwyo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://repositoryuwyoedu/honors_theses_15-16

Recommended Citation
http://repositoryuwyoedu/honors_theses_15-16/69

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Honors Theses at Wyoming Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses AY 15/16 by an authorized administrator of Wyoming Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact scholcom@uwyo.edu.
Hunter Collins  
Dr. Andrew Garner  
Political Science Department & Honors Program  
Senior Honors Project  
Spring Semester, 2016  

Trumped: A Retrospective
Introduction:

This has been one of the most exciting, confusing, and hard to explain election cycles in a decade. Although virtually every election cycle is described at the time as the most important election in a generation, given the combination of candidates and issues currently faced by the US political system, the oft-repeated phrase may prove particularly relevant this year. The constant media coverage, unique mix of candidates, and overall political atmosphere have all contributed to a wild, and at least on the surface, unpredictable primary season.

Very few, even election professionals, predicted Mr. Trump’s victory in the primary campaign, and he has managed to split the Republican Party along fundamental fault lines.1 As respected South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham put it, “This is not about who we nominate anymore as Republicans as much as it’s who we are. This is a fight for the heart and soul of the Republican Party, What is conservatism?”2 This represents an internal divisiveness that rarely rears its head in American political parties. Given the larger than life personalities involved this trend will likely continue well into the General Election campaign, which is only in its beginning stages. Donald Trump has only recently effectively wrapped up the Republican nomination, although some questions do remain. Continuing his success in the General campaign may prove difficult, but in order to understand the obstacles he faces beyond

---

the simple math of the Electoral College, it is important to understand the roots of his campaign and his support.³

At the beginning of the primary season few would have anticipated the current situation. Data journalism and other tools were touted as reducing the art of elections to a precise and quantifiable science. One of the biggest limiting factors when using data to study presidential elections is the extremely limited sample size. Obviously, there are only a maximum of forty-four successful campaigns to study and including all of these takes a researcher back to the time of George Washington. Obviously data of this vintage is almost entirely useless in studying modern presidential elections and nominations. The processes have changed almost entirely, and data from the era to begin with is extremely lacking. This limits researchers to a handful of modern nomination contests. As the authors of The Party Decides write in their introduction, “Our main analyses involve sixty-one candidates, but these candidates ran in only ten nomination contests — and ten is not a large number for making inferences about a process as complicated as presidential nominations.”⁴ This does not make their data or conclusions in any way irrelevant, it merely frames the limited scientific base from which they can draw any inference.

As usual, reality is messier than theory, but to ignore the data-driven and scientific approaches to the election cycle is to throw the baby out with the bath water.

There are definitive lessons in the success of the Trump candidacy and there are also

identifiable failings in the media and general political sphere. The Trump campaign is largely seen as unique and the media frequently treats it as a distinct entity separate from the world of politics as normal. This treatment somewhat makes sense given Mr. Trump’s unique background and braggadocios nature; however, even his larger than life personality is not larger than the United States’ political system.

Although there is plenty to be broken down within the larger campaign, the candidacy of Donald Trump has captured the attention of the nation, polarizing large swathes of the American public and threatening the unity of the Republican Party. Given the Party’s success in the 2014 midterms and the re-energized base provided by the Tea Party, the idea of a fractured Republican Party is initially surprising. But, this can be explained by looking at the roots of the conservative resurgence.

**The 2016 Pre-game:**

The 2012 election was won by President Obama in a much more decisive fashion than many expected. This led to a remarkably candid post mortem examination by the Republican Party. In it they highlighted numerous issues they felt the Party could push that had a consensus of public opinion. They also highlighted areas where they felt the party was increasingly out of touch with the average American voter. One of these key areas was immigration policy, where they recommended a considerably softened stance. Donald Trump however, has proceeded to reverse course on virtually

---


every recommendation made in this examination. At the start of the 2016 election season, it certainly did not look like this would be the case, and the focus of the media and Republican Party was on candidates very different from Mr. Trump.

At the beginning of the primary cycle during the spring and early summer of 2015 little attention was paid to the possibility of a Trump candidacy. The main focus in the Republican Primary regarded the likely showdown between anti-Washington figure Senator Ted Cruz, and former Governor of Florida Jeb Bush. Contrary to Senator Cruz, Governor Bush was virtually the most establishment candidate imaginable, with a long electoral record and instantly recognizable family name. Both candidates enjoyed large amounts of financial support from some of the most reliable names in conservative politics. Jeb Bush in particular was able to raise an almost $100 million war chest, an impressive amount, even in the money-rich post Citizens United political environment. This campaign presented a classic choice for the Republican Party, and one that had been addressed many times in the past; the choice between an electable moderate establishment figure and a “true conservative” who could fight for the party’s ideals. Of course by the end of the summer seventeen candidates had piled in filling various spots on this spectrum, with the exception of Mr. Trump, a man so foreign and antithesis to traditional politics that his space on any linear spectrum is virtually impossible to define as a single point. As Matt O’Brien put it in the Washington Post,

---


9 Rutenberg, Jim. 2016.

“Trump, you see, doesn't so much seem to have firm positions as he has words that have come out of his mouth more recently than other words. Sometimes the new words mean the same thing as the old ones. Other times they don't. So which ones does Trump "really" believe? Who knows? ... The answer might be whatever he thinks will help him the most.”

This has extensive implications for the Trump campaign, and for understanding the current state of the Republican Party. Although they deserve further examination, it is first important to look at past events that led to this point in electoral history.

**The Tea Party:**

The roots of Mr. Trump’s electoral success thus far and the general dichotomy of, and systemic issues, in the modern Republican Party were sown far before Trump’s descending of the escalator in the lobby of Trump Tower in June of 2015. They came even before the peak of the infamous “birther” movement, backed by Mr. Trump. Although points in electoral history stretching back for decades can explain parts of the Trump candidacy to various degrees, the sudden formation of the Tea Party during 2008 and 2009 is the most logical point to begin in a chain of events cumulating in Mr. Trump’s current Whitehouse run.

Upon the election of Barrack Obama in 2008 the birth and formation of a millions-strong conservative movement was far from being on anyone’s mind. President Obama

---

was elected on one of the most progressive platforms in recent history, and with Congressional majorities he seemed likely to be able to enact substantial legislative change. This electoral success cumulated in the passage of the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare and one of the President’s key legislative accomplishments. From this success however, one of the major forces in modern electoral politics grew. That force became known as the Tea Party.

The Tea Party’s formation saga has left an indelible mark on American politics and its shadow will likely last for decades.\textsuperscript{12} It has already shaped races, legislation, and \textit{juris prudence} with substantial effect. However, the Tea Party, while a new iteration, is representative of an older frustration in American politics. This frustration has bubbled up before in incidents often decades apart. As Williamson et al. found in their examination of the movement,

\begin{quote}
“The Tea Party is a new incarnation of longstanding strands in US conservatism… Opposition is concentrated on resentment of perceived federal government “handouts” to “undeserving” groups, the definition of which seems heavily influenced by racial and ethnic stereotypes. More broadly, Tea Party concerns exist within the context of anxieties about racial, ethnic, and generational changes in American society.”\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

This flies in the face of the Tea Party’s traditional self-styled constitutionalism and virtually every other base the movement espouses to support. Many members of

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Congress, holders of state legislative seats, and even presidential candidates such as Ted Cruz identified themselves as Tea Party supporters and virtually none of them described this as their base set of beliefs. The Tea Party and its leadership are often described and publically quoted as seeing themselves as ideological purists. But many theoretical examinations have come to a different conclusion.\(^{14}\)

Although ironically many Tea Party conservatives do not support Mr. Trump, the Tea Party base has been enthusiastically supportive of his candidacy.\(^{15}\) One explanation for this is that the Tea Party is less of a constitutional originalist movement in the mold of the late Justice Scalia and more of a populist movement, a descriptor many have applied to the cult-like following gained by Mr. Trump.\(^{16}\) Lind writes, “the Tea Party is less a libertarian movement than a right-wing version of populism.”\(^{17}\) Thus, while many of the early leaders of the Tea party were able to espouse radical libertarian and constitutionalist ideals in their electoral rhetoric this may have simply been a means to the end of furthering opposition to the progressive policies of President Barack Obama.

Oppositional politics presents inherent barriers to governance, but makes excellent fodder for campaign activity. As a politician campaigning for, but not yet holding office, decrying the assorted policies of those currently in power costs virtually


\(^{17}\) Lind, Michael. 2015.
nothing in terms of actual commitment. Additionally, doing so generates free media, and often creates a widespread following on the part of the candidate. However, once elected, this oppositional model proves difficult to maintain, particularly in the long term as many of the relatively new Congressmen elected since 2010 on Tea Party platforms have found. These political outsiders have been quitting in large numbers, announcing they will not seek reelection. From the outside looking in oppositional politics works very well, once in office however the realities of governance make its continuance a likely futile endeavor.

The Tea Party has seen little success in enacting its legislative agenda. Despite voting repeatedly in Congress to defund or repeal Obamacare, the legislation still stands and repeated court challenges have failed to undo its central tenants.

While the formation and history of the Tea Party may seem far away from the massive and politically diverse crowds drawn by Donald Trump across the country its relevance is paramount to the appeal that is drawing in a large section of Mr. Trump’s base. An attitude tired of Washington politics as usual and a frustration with Republican leadership provided the perfect setup for Mr. Trump’s success.

**Elite Messaging, Filtering & Queuing:**

---


In his seminal 1992 work, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, John Zaller lays forth one of the most important and empirically relevant models for understanding voter behavior that has been presented thus far. In it he argues for a complex process of elite queuing. This model explains how voters filter out information from elites whose views they disagree with.

As anyone who has turned on a television in the past several decades knows, the airwaves are awash in content. This is to make no mention of the explosive growth of content on the Internet. There is now access to more information from more sources that ever before. While this might initially sound like a good thing, in a more competitive market after the entire product experience is usually improved for all customers, in this case the exact opposite may have occurred. Because voters have access to an unprecedented number of sources, they can self-select what sources they want to get their news from. As a result, demand has increased for niche news services, and allowed for considerable media bias of virtually every possible slant to develop.\(^{22}\)

Voters are also much more willing to accept information provided from elites who are politically aligned with their own beliefs, although in the case of many low information voters this alignment is tangential at best and based primarily on party affiliation.\(^{23}\) Thus, not only do voters now have access to more partisan information, they already had an implicit bias to be more willing to accept it. This creates a positive feedback loop in voter media consumption, and one that allows for increased polarization as voters become more like their now diversified media sources. For a


typical Republican voter, watching for the most part mainstream media sources, the process would look like the diagram below.

**Partisan Filtering in Voters: Diagram 1**

As it can be seen this system of selective listening leaves very little room for individual thought or for openness to new ideas. Thus the veracity of any one particular given “fact” is not based in reality, but rather based on an internal sourcing argument implicit to the voter’s sorting of information. While this reality is rather depressing, this can be expounded upon through another theoretical lens to provide a theoretical platform explaining the success of the Trump campaign.

This second model explains how elite messaging is translated into votes during the primary season. Coupled with the aforementioned filtering model this explains the amazing electoral support seen by the Trump campaign despite the apparent lack of

---

elite support. This process was able to occur because the elites of the Republican Party essentially shot themselves in the foot, albeit in a rhetorical fashion.

**The Party Decides:**

In 2008 a group of respected political scientists put together the book *The Party Decides*. It has quickly become one of the most influential pieces of literature in American political science and is also one of its most often cited or maligned depending on the setting. Fundamentally the book attempts to describe the process by which political primaries function and their conclusion is essentially the title of their collective work, the party decides. However, like any theory in practice a more nuanced approach is required.

This model argues that primaries are fundamentally a contest between the established base of the party, and the leadership. Historically, of course this was not the case. Parties used to decide their candidates in the infamous smoke-filled back rooms of days long past. Today this process feels to have occurred in another world, yet the transformation was actually relatively recent. However, most examinations of party nominations politics have shifted to focusing on messaging, mobilization, and other voter-centric methods. As the authors of *The Party Decides* write, “the demise of the party has been exaggerated.” It also argues these groups have fundamentally different motives behind their actions during the primary contest and driving who they support in the end. This is important to note, as it both acknowledges that the group of party

---


“elites” is far wider than what they might traditionally define as and that the motives of different groups are at odds with each other, even within a seemingly united political party. This sets up the traditional conflict that occurs, particularly during the Republican nomination process, between an electable “moderate” often favored by the party elites, and a “true conservative” who is often favored by the base of voters. When read at its most basic and face value this model has numerous implications for the 2016 Republican primary process. One of the clearest of which, is that Donald Trump should never have been selected as the Republican nominee.

On Super Tuesday Donald Trump had scored only 39 points in *FiveThirtyEight’s* endorsement primary tool. This was behind Senator Rubio, Governor Kasich, and Senator Cruz. Senator Rubio had over five times as many endorsements as Mr. Trump. Even now, as the only remaining candidate Mr. Trump’s endorsements lag behind three contestants who have suspended their campaigns. A simplistic interpretation of *The Party Decides* theory of primary would therefore indicate that Mr. Trump was very unlikely to win these or any further contests. However, this conclusion ignores the implications of the past half-decade of elite messaging within the Republican Party.

**Shooting Yourself in the Foot:**

In a 2013 op-ed piece Republican Senator Rand Paul wrote, “Our Founders never intended for Americans to trust their government. Our entire Constitution was

---

29 Silver, Nate. (2016).
predicated on the notion that government was a necessary evil, to be restrained and minimized as much as possible." Senator Ted Cruz, on the floor of the US Senate said, "Let me be clear: I don't trust the Republicans. And I don't trust the Democrats," he continued, "and I think a whole lot of Americans likewise don't trust the Republicans and the Democrats." The banner ad welcoming visitors to the Tea Party’s website in April 2016 read, “Stop the Establishment”, below it were targeted pictures of Speaker of the House Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. In more fringe circles the aforementioned sentiments can reach even more direct and often violent levels. These mentalities have been echoed countless times across the conservative media spectrum. Their effect on the party and its base has been profound.

Following the model of elite queuing these statements, collectively with thousands of others, have served to sever large parts of the establishment from the base of the Republican Party. These “lost voters” have flocked to Trump’s populist messaging and general political incorrectness, the exact traits that the Republican elites who now make up the establishment have been arguing in favor of for years. Of

---


course, overwhelmingly, these elites are not in favor of Donald Trump, but their messaging has made this opposition largely irrelevant.\textsuperscript{37} \textsuperscript{38}

Republican voters have been told for the better part of a decade now that their government and own party has betrayed them, and that Washington outsiders are their only salvation. This has led to the rise of the Tea Party movement; many of whom supporters now favor Donald Trump.\textsuperscript{39} It can hardly be considered surprising that this level of rhetorical bombast resulted in an unpredictable outsider candidate. Mr. Trump has managed to further capitalize on this outsider status, taunting many of the establishment figures that have been labeled as betraying the conservative cause by right-wing media.

Some commentators, mainly on the left of the political spectrum, have taken glee in this, loudly crying that Mr. Trump’s campaign has exposed the hypocrisy of the Tea Part movement.\textsuperscript{40} Such a war cry, while catchy, ignores a larger point. Hindsight is always, relatively, twenty twenty. However, few in the Republican or even Tea Party establishment could have predicted the wild success of the Trump campaign. It is easy to blame the elite messaging, and while certainly a culprit, there are numerous other factors that have played into Mr. Trump’s success. These factors also deserve attention, as many of them are larger than the unique perfect storm of circumstances that the


\textsuperscript{39} Lind, Michael. 2015.

Republican Party has managed to bring about on itself for the 2016 primary. One of the most important issues concerns the long and complicated relationship between Donald Trump and the media.

**Free Media:**

On top of all of the previously mentioned contributing factors, Mr. Trump has managed to generate an incredible amount of free media for his campaign. This is not particularly surprising considering he spent the past three decades carefully crafting a remarkably successful personal brand.\(^1\) His television shows, book deals, and other marketing schemes are indicative of an ability to sell himself that almost matches his braggadocios claims of monetary self worth.

Most presidential candidates maintain a basis of policy expertise, which is then used as part of a platform to brand themselves. Publicity is ideally second to policy substance, regardless of how realistic the candidates’ policy aspirations are. Donald Trump has taken this a step further, flipping the model on its head. For him, the nomination has been more about the media than about the substance of what is said in the media. The attention created is surface, and exists for its own sake. This strategy has paid huge dividends for Mr. Trump as can be seen with an examination of the amount of spending by campaigns on media vs. their “free media”. Free media, also often known in advertising circles as “earned media” is coverage of your product, (in this case Mr. Trump’s campaign) that occurs as the name implies free of significant financial burden to the campaign. Mr. Trump is a master at this, and it shows. The following chart

depicts earned vs. free media of the candidates of both parties up until March 15th of this year.

**Chart 1:**

**Bought Versus Free Media**

In millions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Bought</th>
<th>Free</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>$82</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubio</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanders</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasich</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trump</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,898</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jindal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florina</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckabee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Malley</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santorum</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While other candidates have press teams that carefully manage their interactions with the mainstream national media, Mr. Trump is a media tour-de-force. While Governor Bush bought $82 million in airtime, Mr. Trump received almost twenty-four

---


times that in free coverage. For every hour of television Jeb Bush bought, Donald Trump got to go on for free all day. No other candidate even approaches these numbers. The impact of this amount of free media cannot be overstated. Recalling the filtering model that was introduced earlier, imagine if there were twenty four times as many bits of information from one candidate as the next, with even more outrageous ratios between that candidate and the other trailing members of the field. Governor Kasich was dealing with a thirty six to one deficiency at the point of this analysis.  

For low-information voters, who might not regularly be watching Sunday talk shows and other political news this effect would be particularly acute. Since they are not seeking out much, or any, of this information independently what they receive will mainly be passive. This almost accidental method of media exposure benefits whoever has the most airtime, as that is whom the voter is most likely to accidentally view the content of. As demonstrated by the above chart, overwhelming this is most likely to be Mr. Trump. The effect is further compounded for Republican primary voters who are obviously most likely not considering voting for Hillary Clinton and merely trying to make a selection between the Republican candidates. Without Clinton in the media mix Mr. Trump’s ratios become even more unevenly skewed.

Thus Mr. Trump seems to have truly built his campaign on the old adage, “all press is good press.” While it might be tempting to dismiss this viewpoint given many of the radical comments Mr. Trump has made, his electoral success thus far is
undeniable.\textsuperscript{47} Given the messy realities of studying political science as opposed to, for example hard chemical science, it is difficult to determine the degree of impact this media attention has had. There is no way to run an experiment again. However, the discussion on the issue is to the degree of impact, not if there has been an impact.\textsuperscript{48} Mr. Trump’s campaign has most assuredly been heavily helped out by the media, despite his oft-proclaimed disdain for members of the media.\textsuperscript{49} In the end, for the Trump campaign a bizarre and unique brand of media savvy may have trumped policy substance and acumen demonstrated by the campaigns of Governor Bush, and Senators Cruz & Rubio.\textsuperscript{50}

**Post-Policy Candidacy:**

The catchphrase “post-policy party” has been trotted out in liberal media for several years as an attack on the obstructionism of the Republican Party, and in particular the Tea Party with regards to the policies of President Obama.\textsuperscript{51} Although it is a stretch to label the entire Republican Party in such a fashion, a case can be made that Mr. Trump is the first post-policy president.\textsuperscript{52}\textsuperscript{53}\textsuperscript{54} His policies, when outlined, are often contradictory of both each other and the Republican Party platform. They also flip a shocking amount depending on the audience and other factors seemingly only known to

\begin{itemize}
  \item Sides, J. (2015, July 20).
  \item Ingram, Michael. (2016). “Love and Hate: The Media’s Co-Dependent Relationship With Donald Trump.” *Fortune Magazine.*
  \item O’Brien, Matt. 2016.
  \item Samuelsohn, Darren. (2016).
\end{itemize}
Mr. Trump. As the *Washington Post* found when trying to sort out Mr. Trump’s policies on minimum wage,

“First, Trump said he didn't want to raise the minimum wage at all, since it was already "too high" and "we're not going to be able to compete against the rest of the world" if it got any higher. Then he proclaimed that he was "actually very different from other Republicans" and would be "open to doing something" about the minimum wage. Finally, though, he explained that while he hoped states would raise their own minimum wages, he didn't think the federal government should have one at all.”

Changing one’s position, colloquially known as flip-flopping is traditionally frowned upon and heavily punished in political circles. An infamous ad showing John Kerry windsurfing back and forth while his policy shifts were highlighted has often been credited as playing a large role in George W. Bush’s victory in the 2004 presidential election. Yet for Donald Trump, a lack of policy direction represents less of a political liability and more of an understanding of his large and diverse populist crowds. Clearly, given the immense crowds drawn by Mr. Trump and Senator Bernie Sanders, there is an appetite in the American public for populist messages. The question then

---

59 Lind, Michael. 2015. 
becomes one of implementation; Senator Sanders has attempted to weave a populist message with relatively detailed, if far left, policy objectives. Contrarily Trump’s strategy seems to be an interpretive reading of the American public, or at least his audience at any given point.\textsuperscript{61} This strategy seems to have served him well, although it is questionable whether a “normal” politician would be able to replicate it given the aforementioned stereotypes. Dozens of traditional politicians have been brought down by accusations of flip-flopping, but such a fall does not seem to be in the cards for Mr. Trump.

In the context presented by MSNBC, the label of post-policy has a distinctly negative connotation, however populism can also be seen as a natural extension of democratic government. It is a certain brand of majoritarian politics to be sure, but simply reading and reacting to public opinion, as Mr. Trump has discovered can be a lucrative campaign strategy. Mr. Trump is not even the first presidential candidate to try this, a convincing argument can be made that President Bill Clinton did the same thing, albeit to a much lesser extent during his widely popular two terms in office.\textsuperscript{62} The balance between populism and policy has always been a delicate one in politics and Donald Trump may have discovered a way to avoid it completely.

\textbf{Remaining Republican Nomination Challenges:}

Interestingly for Mr. Trump, while the following scenario is unlikely the primary may not be entirely over. Although the mainstream media, Trump supporters, and recently a great many politicians and power brokers have concluded Mr. Trump is the

\textsuperscript{61} O’Brien, Matt. 2016.

presumptive Republican nominee, formal processes have in no way confirmed this.63

Until the vote of the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, the nominee process remains incredibly open. In the past parties were virtually the entire force behind nominations, in the 1970’s as mentioned previously, this began to shift into a system where the individual voters were given more power.64

Ironically, this shift has been more prevalent on the Republican side; the Democratic super delegate system considerably narrows the road for any perspective outsider candidate.65 These super delegates are primarily party insiders, holding various offices in federal and state government; obviously not two demographics Mr. Trump has previously fared well with. In the case of an individual with such high net unfavorable as Mr. Trump, it might close the window all together.66 The party elites counted in the aforementioned FiveThirtyEight endorsement primary tracker are the same ones that under a super delegate system are given voting power at the party convention.

As infamous Nixon aide and now Trump supporter Roger Stone put it, “The Republican convention can do whatever it wants,” he continued, “[y]ou can’t bring a lawsuit. There’s no jurisdiction.”67 And for the Trump supporters in the Republican Party that is really the central problem. The Republican Party is under virtually no legal mandate to reflect the will of its primary voters. In the past, back-room dealing was the

64 Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2008.
norm for party nominations and the primary process in this modern form is only a recent invention. *The Party Decides* model additionally argues that this process has only changed on the surface and fundamentally through the process of elite queuing, much of the nuts and bolts remain in the top-down fashion as decades past. 68 This election cycle is arguably one of the first instances of the party base rebelling against the party elites and winning, at least on the Republican side of the ticket.

Therefore, while unlikely, it is still possible that the GOP including the convention Rules Committee will take actions to prevent the nomination, such as unbinding the vast majority of delegates who are currently committed to voting for Mr. Trump on the first ballot. 69 This would in turn open up many strategically placed delegates who are supporters of Ted Cruz, but currently bound to vote for Donald Trump to vote for their first candidate. Anticipating a contested convention the Cruz campaign had packed as many of these delegates as possible into the slots through often-archaic state rules committee meetings. 70

This process will continue to remain fluid and any move to undermine Mr. Trump’s support at this point by the establishment is likely to be kept under an extreme veil of secrecy given the implications of such an action. While such a chain of events is unlikely, it is important to understand the implications on a broader context.

Many voters do not understand that political parties are social clubs not the federal government, and many of the protections we are entitled to do not apply when

69 Mattingly, Phil. 2016.
dealing with a party as opposed to the government itself.\footnote{Fields, Lisa. (2016). “Independent Voters Are Pissed They Can't Vote for Trump or Sanders in New York.” Vice. https://news.vice.com/article/independent-voters-are-pissed-they-cant-vote-for-trump-or-sanders-in-new-york} If a particular state party, such as the Republican Party of Wyoming, decides to award its delegates to Senator Cruz instead of Mr. Trump, it has no more “betrayed democracy,” as some commentators would have you believe, than if the local diner decides to serve Pepsi instead of Coke despite your insistence to the contrary.\footnote{Stone, Roger. (2016). “How The GOP Elite Plan To Rob Donald Trump.” Infowars. http://www.infowars.com/how-the-gop-elite-plan-to-rob-donald-trump/} In the case of the diner the individual in question can always chose to take their business to a competing venue, in the case of the political party the individual has every right to leave it, establish a competing party, or write in a candidate at the general election stage. The party primary system was not designed to be, and has not for the majority of its life been fair.\footnote{Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. 2008.} For Trump supporters, the above may sound quite worrying especially given the fact that an exclusion from either major party ticket would likely force Mr. Trump into an attempt to break Duverger’s Law. This law attempts to explain the prevalence of two party duopolies in nations that use first past the post voting systems. It argues it is very difficult for multiple parties, or multiple candidates, to succeed in a voting system such as that of the United States.\footnote{Duverger, Maurice. 1972. “Factors in a Two-Party and Multiparty System,” in Party Politics and Pressure Groups (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell)} For Trump voters this means an uphill battle is likely if they want to repeat the success of their candidate with a party elite so openly hostile to him.\footnote{Rucker, Phil. (2016). “GOP elites are now resigned to Donald Trump as their nominee.” Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/gop-elites-are-now-resigned-to-donald-trump-as-their-nominee/2016/04/28/7ee8cf72-0cbc-11e6-a6b6-2e6de3695b0e_story.html}
However, for elites this is the exact opposite; welcome news. It means that the Trump campaign, along with everything they abhor about it need not be repeated. With a few changes to the party rules they could prevent the reoccurrence of such an event for the indefinite future. The question then becomes one of political calculus. Obviously, an ability to prevent another Trump candidacy does not translate into that being necessarily the correct move. A move away from Mr. Trump could alienate large parts of the Republican base, and even in more extreme scenarios lead to the demise of the party. Even more extreme solutions than the aforementioned scenario have been proposed. Either way, such a decision by those that control the party is not one to be made lightly. It has been almost two centuries since a major party shift in American politics, and triggering one inadvertently or not would likely change the system for generations.

The Future of the Trump Campaign:

An unlikely yet still possible showdown at the Republican Convention is not the only obstacle that remains in Mr. Trump’s path to the presidency. From a macroeconomic perspective the picture does not look good for the Trump campaign. Influential research in recent years has drawn into question the importance of individual

---

78 Tomkowiak, Mateusz. 2016. “How the GOP Can Stop Donald Trump With This One Weird Trick.” Politico Magazine.
79 Tomkowiak, Mateusz. 2016.
candidates like Mr. Trump, instead focusing on overall macro conditions.\textsuperscript{80} Despite facing substantial congressional opposition, the President has managed to accomplish a decent number of his policies goals.\textsuperscript{81} Notwithstanding on-goings, or lack thereof, in Washington the economy has done relatively well over the President’s second term. Jobs figures and profits are up since the Great Recession, with 9.265 million new jobs and a 166\% increase in corporate profits.\textsuperscript{82} Although these benchmarks still do not reach the artificially high levels created by the questionable Federal Reserve policies of Alan Greenspan.\textsuperscript{83} Despite the generally positive economic picture, President Obama’s job approval rating hovers around a 50/50 split in most recent polling.\textsuperscript{84} This is certainly not enough of a disapproval rating to push Obama’s personal image into being a campaign issue for the general public.\textsuperscript{85} Given current electoral circumstances, the economic and presidential climate is a soft but net positive for the Democrats. This is of course on top of the fact that Democratic presidential candidates already enjoy an advantage in the Electoral College.\textsuperscript{86}

Again, after all of these factors are considered, Mr. Trump’s deep net unfavorable numbers should be studied.\textsuperscript{87} Holbrook’s writings and data indicate that the unfavorability gap should narrow towards its theoretical equilibrium as the general election nears.\textsuperscript{88} Where exactly this equilibrium is and if the average voter dislikes Mr. Trump enough to affect that remains to be seen. It is also worth noting that his likely primary opponent, Hillary Clinton, also suffers from deep negative ratings and together the pair makes the most disliked general election duo in polling history.\textsuperscript{89} This will likely prove the ultimate test for this model of general election forecasting. If candidates truly don’t matter, or at least have a minimal impact personally on campaigns, then having candidates disliked by such a wide spectrum of Americans should be the perfect case to prove it. A victory for whichever candidate is disliked more, with the equilibrium tilted in their favor would substantially bolster Holbrook’s analysis.

Ultimately the 2016 election cycle remains fluid, current polling margins have and will continue to narrow, as November approaches.\textsuperscript{90} The importance of any one, or even a series of polls or campaign events is minimal, but the overarching trends that define them matter. This shows the arching trajectory of the overall campaign. The problem is discerning these trends from the signal noise. Modern political science is a data gold mine, with barriers to collection at all time lows. However, with this glut of information

\textsuperscript{87} Enten, Harry. 2016. “Americans’ Distaste For Both Trump And Clinton Is Record-Breaking.” \textit{Five Thirty Eight}. \url{http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/americans-distaste-for-both-trump-and-clinton-is-record-breaking/}

\textsuperscript{88} Holbrook, Thomas. 1996.

\textsuperscript{89} Enten, Harry. 2016.

\textsuperscript{90} Holbrook, Thomas. 1996.
comes a great deal of limited relevance. In the end, despite all the noise to the contrary, in the most basic sense the American electoral system fundamentally focuses on the course of the country, the economy, and the will of the people.

**Conclusions:**

Donald Trump’s possible future electoral success is still unclear. Many possible scenarios for the election in November do not favor him, and the Republican nomination has yet to be formally awarded. What is clear is that he has managed to access a large group of dissatisfied Republican primary voters. Numerous factors have converged to make this possible, some of which as mentioned are unlikely to do so again, particularly if the establishment of the Republican Party choses to change some of its operating conventions. For those voters who are participating in their first or second presidential election, this is the most exciting election of a lifetime. A unique convergence of factors has resulted in a candidate that few thought had any serious prospects of winning the Republican Primary managing to dominate it. Whatever the result, Donald Trump’s candidacy will be remembered as a unique point in American politics. This point may be an aberration studied for its unusual qualities or mark a paradigm shift in the saga of American electoral politics. Whichever road the country

---

91 Grim, Ryan. (2015). “Why You Shouldn’t Read Too Much Into Primary Polls.” *Huffington Post.* [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/primary-polls-problems_us_55cb5b80e4b0f73b20bb3f02](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/primary-polls-problems_us_55cb5b80e4b0f73b20bb3f02)


94 Cillizza, Chris. 2015. “In 2016 race, an electoral college edge for Democrats.”


96 Rutenberg, Jim. 2016.
takes, understanding the Trump campaign will be of paramount importance. There are valuable lessons to be learned from virtually any perspective. Establishment Republicans can find a road map to preventing a reoccurrence of what in their view has been a nightmare.\textsuperscript{97} For the Trump campaign and its larger network of supporters, such an examination provides a roadmap to future electoral success, showing them what went right and what fueled Mr. Trump’s campaign. Even Democrats can learn from the Trump candidacy, obviously despite the frustrations of many of Senator Sander’s supporters, the Democratic super delegate system may have its advantages.\textsuperscript{98} They could also learn from the immense success of Trump’s populist messaging and the earned media his campaign received. Hillary Clinton was second behind Mr. Trump in free media according to the analysis so this lesson may be particularly well received.\textsuperscript{99}

It will take some time for the dust to settle and for a proper theoretical evaluation of the Trump campaign to be conducted, but his candidacy has already left a mark on history. Already, fundamental shifts in the American electorate have been exposed. Whether or not Donald Trump ascends to the presidency is yet to be determined but the lessons from his unexpected and peculiar campaign will be useful for years to come. This campaign season has been one of superlatives and it has resulted in one of the most superlative candidates in American electoral history.

Word Count: 7505


\textsuperscript{98} Silver, Nate. (2016). “Donald Trump Would be Easy to Stop Under Democrat Rules.”

References:


