

Why Republicans Won't Dump Trump Anytime Soon

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As Donald Trump's approval ratings fall and calls for his impeachment increase, Democrats seem not yet to have realized how the old saw, "beware of what you wish for, because you just might get it," applies to them.



What they wish for is to see the back of Donald Trump.

But, having made themselves irrelevant, Democrats can do nothing to bring this about. Now, only Republicans can dump Trump. Democrats can only wish.

They are not alone. More than half of all Americans would have been happy to dump Trump from Day One. Half a year later, the number is closer to two-thirds. That would include quite a few people who generally vote for Republicans, and a few Republican officials as well.

With Trump, there are no neutrals. Many of his supporters will never defect. As his ineptitude becomes increasingly hard not to see, and as his mental state deteriorates in full public view, the reasons why are becoming increasingly difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, their faith in the Donald is real.

The authors of our Constitution saw to it that it would be extremely difficult to depose a sitting President. The only admissible grounds are treason, bribery and "high crimes and misdemeanors," and both the House and the Senate would have to be in accord. Trump has made himself vulnerable to impeachment in countless ways, but with his own party in charge of both chambers, his position ought nevertheless to be secure.

Even so, the United States is at least nominally a democracy, and two-thirds of the voting public do want him gone. Many of them want him gone very much. This counts for something. Therefore, even if what Democrats and others want currently seems out of reach, theirs is hardly an idle wish.

Should what they wish for somehow come to pass, Mike Pence would become President. Only a revolution could change that; a real one, not the "Our Revolution" kind. There is as much chance of that as of a July snowstorm in sweltering Washington DC.

Trump is a hundred shades of awful, but he is not a dedicated theocrat or free market theologian or

Second Amendment fanatic. And although his misogyny is blatant and pronounced, at least he doesn't think that he is on a mission from God to deny women reproductive rights.

Neither is he a neocon, intent on bringing Russia to its heels. He may not even be a bona fide climate change denier.

He is a conman, and these are roles he plays at campaign rallies and on TV- because he is working a con on benighted folk who really do hold some or all of these views, as well as on (slightly) more enlightened citizens who are too pissed off by the status quo to care.

To that end, he has made cabinet secretaries and agency heads out of Republican donors and dimwits who want to undo many of the progressive achievements of the past hundred years.

Trump could care less about their concerns, but he needs them to keep the troglodytes in his base on board, while he does what he can to keep the government from becoming so dysfunctional that even they would balk.

There is little he or the airheads in his family circle can do about that; they have no aptitude for governance and none of the necessary skills.

Lucky for Trump, therefore, that with the help of establishment Republicans, he was able to recruit a handful of slightly less incompetent, though hardly more creditable, generals, corporate honchos, and Wall Street malefactors to run the parts of the government that Trump and his alt-right advisors don't want to "deconstruct."

The various agendas of the reactionaries Trump has empowered are as dissonant as the Republican Party itself. Therefore, they don't always cohere. Although Republicans have been talking about it for years, they couldn't even get their acts together enough to "repeal and replace" Obamacare. Now Trump owns their failure.

To use a favorite word of his, this is a tad "unfair" because, like all of his other "issues," taking away peoples' health insurance was never really his cause. It was a Republican cause that he latched onto.

Trump is not like most of the people he has empowered. His instincts are as vile as any Republican's, but, unlike many of them, he is not an ideologue. He is an opportunist, unencumbered by principles or convictions.

What he wants is to enrich and glorify himself - and perhaps also his children, insofar as he sees them as extensions of himself.

However, for the time being, it hardly matters how he comes by the views he espouses. This is why the GOP leadership has embraced him; they think they can use him, just as he is using them.

They can hardly fail to realize, though, that this may not always be so. Trump will go whichever way the wind blows; and, with him in the White House, the political scene is changing chaotically and at breakneck speed. The wind could therefore shift at any moment, and blow any which way at all.

Pence, on the other hand, comes by the retrograde views he espouses honestly; he is what Trump pretends to be.

The loathsome therefore love him, to the extent that a man without qualities can be loved. He may

not get their juices flowing, the way Trump does, but they can trust him not to betray their values.

And because he is less unhinged than Trump, he is less scary. He is also less of a laughing-stock and a global embarrassment. Pence may put voters to sleep, but were he to take Trump's place, the GOP would stand a better chance of winning back "moderate" Republicans and independents.

Moreover, with all the tumult Trump's campaign and presidency has unleashed, and the tumult that would inevitably follow serious efforts to impeach him, a Pence presidency would be greeted with relief across the political spectrum. This would make it easier to pass legislation.

In these circumstances, Pence might actually become popular for a while. This is what happened with Gerald Ford, once Nixon was gone. Ford was a more formidable figure than Pence, and his politics was better. But this hardly matters; he was popular for a while because he wasn't Nixon. Pence would be popular because he isn't Trump.

Democrats should keep this in mind. Trump is their best recruiting tool. For that, Pence would be a dud.

Trump is a godsend for Democrats, but his presence does not guarantee their success. Even running against a Republican Party Trump heads, Democrats could get slaughtered again - if they fail to break free from their party's Clintonite present and past.

Repudiating Clintonism involves more than just bidding Hillary and Bill adieu. It means rejecting neoliberalism and liberal imperialism, and the Clintons' toothless goody-goodyism or, as they say in Trumpese, their dedication to "political correctness."

Lately, it has also come to mean rejecting their Cold War anti-Communism.

How is anti-Communism even possible when there are no Communists in sight? Like so much else in the Age of Trump, this makes no sense. But leave it to the Clintons. With them showing the way, nobody seems to mind or even to notice.

In any case, concerns about electoral losses to Democrats have nothing to do with why Republicans these days are still hanging onto Trump. On this, as on almost everything else, Democrats these days are irrelevant.

All over the world, people in so-called democracies find that when democratic majorities vote X, they sometimes end up with something else; sometimes even X's opposite.

It has become axiomatic in some circles to maintain that, when this happens, the culprit is always capitalism in its present, globalized and financialized phase.

It is, in a sense. This is particularly obvious in the European Union, especially in the Eurozone.

For the people to rule, they must exercise authority over the institutions that govern their lives. With national sovereignty diminished by bankers and bureaucrats operating at the European level, this condition has become more than usually difficult to satisfy in EU member states.

Essentially the same problem exists in countries in Asia and elsewhere where national sovereignty is

less compromised, and in the United States, where many of the world's major financial institutions are headquartered.

The exigencies of capitalist development explain many things at an abstract level, but they don't explain Donald Trump, or why Republicans haven't yet booted him out.

In the same spirit, but on a slightly less abstract plane, the GOP's dependence on corporate and Wall Street paymasters does not explain this either. They would make out like the bandits they are just as well under Pence.

They might even have done better had Clinton not blown a near certain victory over Trump in the 2016 election.

Truly to understand the Trump phenomenon, we have to become more concrete.

In that vein, it is tempting too to say, "It's the institutions, stupid." There is a sense in which this too is plainly true.

The vast majority of Americans, roughly two-thirds, want Trump out; and, unlike the Senate, the House of Representatives, from which articles of impeachment must come, is supposed to be comprised of representatives who represent the people directly.

This would imply that elections to the House should honor the principle "one person, one vote," or some close approximation, in more than just a formal way. .

But if this were the case, Trump would have been impeached long ago. That this hasn't happened, and isn't even presently in sight, suggests a design flaw. It suggests that our electoral institutions don't do what they were intended to do, that they don't generate outcomes that accurately reflect the peoples' will.

They don't because in democracies as in real estate, location matters. Within Congressional districts, everybody's vote may count equally, but the districts themselves are not equal; the ways they are drawn up make some votes count more than others.

This cannot be the whole story, however, because the system we have used to work well enough.

From a (small-d) democratic point of view, winner-take-all, first-past-the-post elections, and ballot access laws that reinforce the hold the Democratic and Republican Parties exercise over the political scene, are far from ideal.

But insofar as Congressional districts contain a healthy mix of Democrats, Republicans and others, the offense to the "one person, one vote" principle is not too egregious. This is why it was possible to say, without too much disingenuousness, that, apart from restrictions on the franchise, ours has always been a system of majority rule.

Before those restrictions were removed, those words could stick in the craw. But it was nevertheless the case that, for those who did have the right to vote, the majority got its way in presidential contests — with only one exception before Bush v. Gore — and that the composition of the House of Representatives fairly reflected the distribution of votes between Democrats and Republicans.

This is no longer the case in presidential contests - since the turn of the century, the minority has

twice prevailed – and, in elections to the House, the connection between the popular vote in many states and the composition of their Congressional delegations is even more skewed than in the Senate.

Evidently, circumstances have changed in ways that, while not literally institutionalizing minority rule, make it the case that the minority party – which also happens to be the more odious of our two semi-established neoliberal parties – is accorded huge advantages.

Thus it is that, as Trump’s approval ratings keep falling, he has not become any easier to impeach.

It might be different if his remaining supporters were less resolute. Incredibly, though, a personality cult seems to have formed around the billionaire. The more outrageous his behavior and his tweets, the more fervent the true believers within the Trump base become.

Trump’s is not a standard issue personality cult, the kind that attached, for example, to Joseph Stalin and other mid-century Communist leaders. For millions of people around the world, Stalin was Uncle Joe. There is nothing avuncular about Trump. Neither is there anything sublimely cruel or wise or in any other way remarkable. He is what he is; a sleazy, coarse, and ridiculous man, with far too much money, who is about as charismatic as yesterday’s lunch.

But he does project an air of defiant contempt, directed against “elites,” that appeals to the kinds of people on whom he is working his con.

Being radically insecure and a bully by nature, he comes by this attitude more or less naturally. It is complicated, though, because his “populism” is transparently phony. Trump is anything but a class traitor; quite to the contrary, as many of his erstwhile fans are finally beginning to realize.

So far, his remaining supporters don’t seem to care. This too may change, however, once it becomes obvious, even to them, that not only is Trump as good a friend to Wall Street as the Clintons and Obama were, but also that, campaign blather aside, he is no friend at all of people like them.

For now, though, they are still standing by their man. This drives Democrats and other anti-Trump “resisters” to despair, because there is no way to reason with cultists. Trump was not exaggerating all that much when, as a candidate, he quipped that he could shoot somebody on Fifth Avenue in broad daylight, and it would only make him more popular.

When Democrats are moved to act out their frustrations with diehard Trump supporters, all they can think to do these days is escalate the level of anti-Putin warmongering. That was what Team Hillary did once she became the Democratic nominee, and it is what sore loser Democrats have been doing ever since she lost the election. It has become their passion. Watch them on cable talk shows, if you can bear it, and despair for the human race.

They are finding, though, that they have already reached everybody who is reachable; and that most people nowadays don’t much care. This enrages them even more – making them more reckless, strident and absurd.

In the Joe McCarthy – Roy Cohn era, red baiting counted for something; apparently, it no longer does. Why would it, when there hasn’t been a red in the Kremlin in more than a generation? Somehow, though, Democrats and the pundits who serve them haven’t figured this out. The troglodytes in the Trump demographic are way ahead of them on that score. So is Trump.

There is a certain irony in this: Roy Cohn, one of the most demonic figures ever to disgrace the national political landscape and one of America's premier red baiters, was a Trump mentor back in the day.

It is telling that Trump does not, and never has, courted the GOP's most Russophobic faction, the neoconservatives. Why would he? However influential they were when Dick Cheney was calling the shots, neocons have never had any authentic connection to the Republican base; they were mostly turncoat Democrats, after all. Moreover, by the time Trump's con job went into full throttle, the neocons were already ensconced in the Hillary camp.

Affinities between Clintonites and neocons run deep. Hillary herself is a case in point. In her declining years, her inveterate Cold War mentality seems to have welled back up to the surface. Always a liberal imperialist, she is now a neocon too. So are the talking heads - on MSNBC and elsewhere - who seem unable to stop fighting the war she and they lost.

Democrats have nothing to offer Trump's diehard supporters. Most of those poor fools probably thought, at one point, that Trump did; maybe some of them still do.

It is evident, though, that what he mainly has to offer is a vibe that resonates psychologically. Will that be enough to cancel out the bad feelings that are sure to come when it finally dawns on them that they have been conned? The jury is out on that.

It is that vibe, as much or more than the peculiarities of our electoral institutions, that explains why so many Trump voters are not yet ready to cast Trump aside.

Other unusual circumstances must be factored in as well.

Unlike in medieval European cities, in America birds of a feather have always tended to live together. Therefore, on this side of the Atlantic, population sorting, with respect to color and national origin, and often too with respect to religion, has always been with us. Though less widely acknowledged, class membership has played an even more important role.

Along with party polarization, population sorting is becoming more pronounced. It is also becoming more politically significant. Once important only at the neighborhood level, it now affects larger regions - enough to turn entire states solidly Republican or Democratic.

The result is that electoral districts of almost every kind are becoming less representative than they used to be of the political community as a whole.

Then, of course, there is gerrymandering.

Democratic Presidents who raise expectations that they then go on to disappoint help Republicans in the midterm elections that follow two years later. This happened in 1994, with Bill Clinton, and it happened again in 2010, with Barack Obama.

2010 was also a census year; therefore the "shellacking" (Obama's word) that the Democrats took then affected Congressional redistricting significantly.

The shellacking extended to gubernatorial elections and to elections of representatives to state

legislatures. For years, Democratic Party leaders have been focusing on the White House to the exclusion of almost everything else, often treating state electoral contests with malign neglect.

Their GOP counterparts have been playing the electoral game more wisely. There are therefore now twenty-four states in which Republicans hold both the governor's office and both chambers of the state legislature. For Democrats, the number is six.

There are therefore fewer inter-party competitive Congressional elections than there used to be.

With few exceptions, what legislators at all levels want most is their own reelection - until they decide that the time has come to cash in on their connections and clean up as consultants or lobbyists or lawyers. This is the American way: there is ordinary corruption too, of course, but the serious money comes when a politician's "public service" days are over.

Thanks to population sorting and gerrymandering, most Republicans in Congress can be confident that they can withstand challenges from Democrats. The four special elections held earlier this year, called to fill seats vacated by Trump appointees to the cabinet and federal agencies, all of which Republicans won, reinforce this conviction.

Primary challenges are another matter. It is hard to believe that anyone could be to the right of the average House Republican, but, in fact, there are many ambitious miscreants who are. Indeed, these days, challenges to GOP incumbents almost always come from the right. Those challenges are usually well funded - by plutocrats who are typically more greedy or retrograde or both than the average "malefactor of great wealth."

It is well known too that, as a rule, extremists almost always turn out to vote in larger numbers than other voters in off-year elections. Therefore, if challenged in the primaries, incumbents could lose. This is why the last thing House Republicans would want to do is rattle the cages of voters who might be tempted to support primary challengers.

But that is precisely what they would do if they turned against Trump. Impeaching any Republican President would be perilous, but with the personality cult that has grown up around that ridiculous buffoon, the danger is extreme.

Therefore, barring revelations that strike a nerve, even when shooting someone on Fifth Avenue in broad daylight would not, there is almost no chance that Republicans will move against Trump for at least another year.

It may be different when it is too late for serious midterm primary challenges to develop, but, for now, the chances are nil.

Anti-Trump resisters looking for straws to grasp might come to the conclusion that, while there probably is no single thing that Trump could do that would cause Republicans to mutiny, the endless stream of revelations - actually, piddling news items that the cable channels breathlessly depict as "breaking news" - about Trump's "bromance" with Vladimir Putin and his and his family's dealings with Russian oligarchs are a different matter. They shouldn't get their hopes up. Too few Republicans care, and they are the only ones that count.

It is more likely that Trump will come to think that staying on isn't worth the grief - or the damage to his bottom line and reputation. Unfortunately, this hope too is far-fetched. In a better possible world, the Trump brand would already be anathema; in the actual world, the name is still bringing

money in. Even were its pecuniary value to slacken, Trump would probably be too self-deluded to notice.

To be sure, bad things don't just happen to good people; sometimes they happen to bad people too. When the bad person is a portly, sedentary septuagenarian who enjoys fast food and whose idea of exercise is sitting in a golf cart, the chances are pretty good.

Don't count on it, though. Where there are strokes, there is hope, but the gods are seldom on the side of the angels; and, where Trump is concerned, it seems that they almost never are.

Don't expect relief to come from the CIA or others in our vaunted "intelligence community" either. They despise Trump as much as anyone, and dark ops is their thing. When it comes to heart attacks and strokes, they are as good as the Russians and better than the gods. But coming to terms with their own ineptitude, they seem lately to have become cautious in the dirty tricks department, developing a healthy fear of being found out.

Theirs therefore is a strategy of death by a thousand cuts - revelatory leaks, "fake news" in the Trump lexicon - being their weapon of choice. Trump, his own worst enemy, is easy prey.

I hope they and other "deep state" actors take their time. With Pence waiting in the wings, hamstringing Trump and his minions may actually do more good than dispatching him and them altogether.

There is always the danger, of course, that Trump will act out, and that Doomsday will follow.

And even setting that worry aside, with Trump in the White House and Democrats for an opposition party, the future looks bleak.

But the line of succession being what it is, a world in which Trump remains President for a while longer may actually be the best (least bad) of all constitutionally possible worlds.

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