

A New Politician Leads The Grand Old Party:
The Causes of Trumpism and its Effects on the Republican Party



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My sixth grade Social Studies class sat alert as we watched our teacher scrawl the names of the presidential candidates on the board. Cruz. Sanders. Clinton. Trump. He then asked us each who we would vote for in the upcoming 2016 presidential election. We each raised our hands for the name we had heard our parents discussing at the dinner table and he tallied up the votes. I do not remember who had won the hearts of Mr. Clubb's Geography class, but I do remember the drama that entailed afterwards. The screaming and yelling about why one candidate would ruin our great country and why the next would bring us glory and triumph, the passion with which we said our words, and the authority with which we held our opinions, though they were not really our own at all. We knew not of the facts or statistics and many of us knew little about the candidates other than what made headlines and what our parents told us, yet we defended gloriously and slandered viciously.

As we crept ever closer to that fateful day in November, the arguments left the classroom and invaded our free time. Between class, we could be found arguing about immigration by the lockers or debating the severity of scandals by the water fountain. We questioned our friends' integrity based on the views they promoted and could even be found in tears after a conversation turned hostile. All of this continued until November 8th, 2016. My mom knocked on the door of my childhood bedroom earlier than usual and gently woke me up. "Honey," she said. "Trump won."

Trump's first term in office was unique on many accounts, but most notable was the evolution of a new political strategy: Trumpism. This phenomenon "revived and reinvented old strands in American political thought, such as populism, conspiracism, isolationism, and White nationalism." This mix of ideology had never been seen before in American politics. Trump promoted White nationalism, seen by the famed slogan "Make America Great Again." He

scapegoated immigrants, Mexicans, Black people, and Muslims in order to invoke fear within the White working class. He developed a strong populist platform that criticized “the elite” while being a businessman and billionaire who came from wealth; he even utilized the spoils system, a populist concept. While he “framed politics as a battle between ordinary Americans and the corrupt elite, his policies actually benefited elites” (Moynihan and Roberts 152, 154).

The most notable aspect of Trumpism is divisiveness and polarization, inciting fear and turbulence in order to be seen as the solution to the problem. He led by dividing the people, creating turbulence between the Democrats and Republicans by using slanderous speech and conspiracy. He even divided the Republican party, turning his followers against any traditional conservatives who did not agree with him. When considering Trump’s term and the ideology that surrounded it, one of the most important questions to consider is what the new course of the Republican party and American politics as a whole will look like because of it.

Many of the most important aspects of Trumpism could be seen throughout the history of American politics, from Jackson’s utilization of populism as a “Western man” turned wealthy lawyer to Nixon’s southern strategy to Reagan’s Hollywood career prefacing his political strivings. These presidents set the foundation for Trump to utilize all of their tools at once. The climate surrounding the 2016 election, however, was what allowed Trump to utilize divisiveness and fear in order to take hold of the White House. Polarization in America began to grow at the beginning of the 21st century, specifically when the first Black president, Barack Obama, was elected. This scared many White nationalists and traditional conservatives, a fear of which Trump took advantage. He built upon the growing divisiveness, even disrupting many of the platforms conservatives have held for years, thus splitting the party. He started to break down American democracy, planting the seeds of distrust in the American people. His election may be

considered a turning point election because of the pattern of divisiveness that has followed it and may lead to a series of polarizing presidencies that will flip sides almost every term, moving further and further away from each other in ideology each flip. This is caused by the furthering distrust and dissatisfaction from the American people for their government. When investigating the many ways the Grand Old Party and American political climate could change, this direction of increased polarization and divisiveness seems the most plausible.

Elements of Trumpism Throughout American History

For many Americans, Donald Trump is a unique figure in the political scene. Whether he is a breath of fresh air or a frightening jolt often depends upon one's party affiliation, but he is undeniably a key player in a pivotal change in United States politics. His first term "will go down as the most astonishing development in the recent history of the United States" (Kus 395). Although he was a combination of ideals never seen before, certain elements (e.g., populism, scapegoating, the spoils system, a crude election, scandal, etc.) of the Trump persona and doctrine have been a part of American politics throughout the country's history, specifically in the conservative party. Three presidents who embody many of these elements were Andrew Jackson, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan.

Andrew Jackson was a wildly popular and unique politician for his time. He began his first presidential term in 1829 during Westward Expansion, the movement of Americans towards the Pacific Coast. He was the first president from the newly-inhabited west and was considered a great frontiersman. For the first time in American politics, a candidate represented not the highly educated and wealthy men on the East coast but the working and poor migrant workers. His election was the first in which all White, male citizens -- property owners and non-owners --

could vote in the majority of states, rather than just those that were wealthy and educated. He was “first to represent the ‘people’ and was first to understand their passions. The eighteenth-century aristocrat and philosopher was passing from the American political scene, and the rough, crude frontiersman represented the new order.” Jackson was uneducated and appealed to those who had not attended the expensive universities, contrasting the majority of politicians to proceed him. In this way, he was considered a new type of politician (Thompson 224).

Jackson was famous for his spoils system, the practice of giving government positions to those who were loyal to the winning party, often regardless of an individual’s merit or credentials. Because of this system, he maintained a close relationship with his followers, a relationship that “was unfavorable to the free exercise of individual judgment, and perhaps was the undeveloped political character of many of Jackson’s partisans” (Morse 157).

While not often regarded for it, Jackson was a prominent player in the sectionalism that began to spread during his time as president. The division between the North and South was rising because of the dispute between the slave states and the free states, which was widely attributed to the Missouri Compromise. In 1820, Missouri was admitted to the union as a slave state and Maine as a free state, outlawing slavery. The Compromise also dictated that all states admitted from the Louisiana Purchase north of the 36° 30' parallel would be free states while those south would be slave states. In 1834, Bleeding Kansas, a series of skirmishes and fights that broke out between slave owners and abolitionists, were an effect of “the growth of sectionalism, *i.e.*, the tendency to divide the Union into two portions, politically separate and independent” that occurred during Jackson’s presidency. Sectionalism and divisiveness have been protrusive elements of American politics since his time (Morse 158).

Jackson's most well-known trait was his wide popularity among the common man, which was the first time populism had been seen in a presidential election. He was unscholarly and digestible to the people; his career as a politician revealed "his lack of scholarship." It was known that Jackson's "spelling was poor, his grammar sketchy, his literary background, for all practical purposes, non-existent" (224). However unlike many of the polished and proper politicians who were university-educated and philosophers, the people understood him. Jackson was one of the first frontiersmen to make inordinate amounts of money, but he did so later in his life without diminishing his frontier roots. In 1789, "he received an appointment as solicitor with a comfortable salary, and, by 1796, he was one of the richest men in the district. Jackson's ability as a backwoods lawyer was unquestioned; his very crudeness endeared him to the people of the frontier" (Thompson 225).

Jackson claimed to be similar to the common man and entertained the public. He had a particularly crude election with slander from both sides. This kept the public's attention, creating a story to follow instead of just policies that seemed removed from a common man's life. "In truth, this election was conducted on both sides with unparalleled bitterness and venom. Both sides made scandalous charges against the personal integrity of the candidates and campaign literature was unbelievably crude and vulgar, even to modern eyes" (226). Moreover, Jackson was unknowingly engulfed in a marriage scandal. He married a young woman before her divorce had finalized, which gave his political opponents fuel for slander later in his career. All of this public drama caught the people's eye, making them, for the first time, interested in what politicians had to say. "Partly because of shrewd campaigning and partly because Jackson's politics were vague, both Southerners and Westerners, farmers and slave-owning plantation owners, believed Jackson to be their man" (Thompson 226).

Jackson was the first man to attempt to represent the common people as a president and was widely popular for his frontiersmen disposition, such as opening up the White House to all people at his inauguration, while his predecessors disregarded the working class when crafting policies. He recruited other men of a similar stature via his spoils system in order to create a cabinet that better represented the people and was just scandalous enough to entertain the people and gain their attention.

Richard Nixon, though having a lengthy political career, “never fit the models we used to order our political universe” (Graham 93). Though offered a scholarship to Harvard University out of high school, Nixon could not afford the travel expenses and instead attended Whittier College, a local Quaker school before serving in the military. When he returned to the United States from his station in the Pacific, he was convinced to run for Congress. Nixon served as a Republican congressman and then as Vice President under Dwight D. Eisenhower. After losing his first presidential election in 1960 to John F. Kennedy, he returned in 1969 to beat George McGovern. Though he had a humble upbringing, he was successful in his political career until resigning after the House Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment against him (“Richard Nixon”).

Nixon’s most egregious pursuit during his presidency was the reversal of civil rights and equality for African Americans. He was a “law and order” candidate who worked against crime, yet he did so by painting African Americans as criminals and stripping them of their rights. He opposed racial busing, open housing, affirmative action, and egalitarian civil rights programs; this was a “Southern Strategy” that appealed to the working class, which was a veiled way of appealing to those who were against civil rights for African Americans (“Richard Nixon”).

William Chaf’s college textbook, *The Unfinished Journey*, assesses Nixon’s strategy:

Shrewdly and effectively, Nixon mobilized his constituency of 'silent' or 'forgotten' Americans around the 'social issues' of patriotism, alarm about crime, and traditional middle-class values. Brilliantly pursuing his 'southern strategy,' Nixon used his opposition to civil rights, his anger at the Supreme Court's liberalism, and his contempt for student demonstrators to forge a new base for the Republican Party in a 'Sun Belt' - the states of the Old Confederacy and the American West. (Graham 94)

Nixon displayed the same populism as Jackson, attempting to appeal to the working class or common man that felt forgotten in politics. He captured the views of the Southern voters, still holding the same racist ideals that they held while Jackson was campaigning. He went so far as to point "out that 'there has never in history been an adequate black nation, and they are the only race of which this is true'" (Graham 98). This view shows inherent racism and displays how Nixon was using African Americans as a scapegoat, blaming them for the problems in the country.

Nixon attempted to divide the American people, particularly the groups within the Democratic party. He worked to turn the White working class against the Black working class and was "determined to screw the liberals." By blaming African Americans for White people's economic and social struggles, Nixon convinced many struggling and working-class White people to support him. His disposition was described throughout White House notes as "insecure, vindictive, obsessed by his enemies, and driven by the imperatives of re-election." He was human in the sense that he displayed the same anger many working-class Americans felt at the time. He also employed "locker room bravado" with his all-male advisory network, simply another way of connecting with the common man. Nixon represented the working class instead of the rich and educated in order to gain popular support (Graham 93, 98).

Ronald Reagan was America's first Hollywood president. He was known more as a personality than a politician. Reagan acted in more than fifty movies before serving as an officer at the outbreak of World War II. He acted more as a figurehead for the war than an active-duty

soldier, never leaving the United States or seeing combat. Nonetheless, he was known for being anti-communist, both while president of the movie actor's union, accusing many people of being Communist during the Red Scare, and of the United States. Although Reagan was initially a Democrat, he switched over to the conservative side of the political spectrum to support Eisenhower and Nixon, officially changing his party affiliation in 1962. He acted as governor of California from 1967 to 1975 and president from 1981 to 1989 ("Ronald Reagan").

Reagan was a great proponent of the Christian Right and promoted traditional ideals. During his two terms, the Christian Right had high status and growth, though it made few advances in public policy. Though he facilitated little permanent change, Reagan was a public advocate for traditional Christian views. He spoke out for the teaching of prayer and creationism in public schools, as well as "spoke at the national convention of the Religious Roundtable, a group led by fifty-six prominent evangelical and Fundamentalist religious leaders." His term was one of the first times Christianity was highly publicized in politics, causing many Conservatives to "hail him as the father of modern Republican politics. The Christian Right celebrates Reagan's hero status more passionately than any other group. He is their champion, the man who brought them out of the political wilderness and into the halls of power" (Marley 851, 853).

Reagan utilized a similar approach to Nixon in creating a following. He created a string of campaigns using certain stereotypes like the "food stamp abuser," creating a scapegoat for the hardworking Americans to blame for hyperinflation. This campaign "strictly adhered to Richard Nixon's 'southern strategy,' which wrote off the black vote in favor of appealing to segregationist Whites" (35). This is another example of populism, trying to gain the favor of the working man, though Reagan himself was wealthy and unaffected by the failing economy. He

used the South's racism to his advantage by blaming a specific people instead of government failures, as "no one had to be told that the 'Welfare Queen' and the food stamp abuser were black and the hard-working people struggling to make ends meet were White people" ("Looking Back" 35).

These presidents reveal many of the same elements used by Trump during the 2016 presidential election and his presidential term. Trump utilized populism, a political strategy aimed toward the common man who is oppressed by the elite. While campaigning in 2016, Trump created a platform based on "distrust towards the Washington establishment, conservative on both economic and social issues, and placing a special emphasis on immigration (with the construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border as the signature policy)" (Kus 395). However, after preaching working-man ideals and benefits for the middle class, in his presidency he promoted policies for the rich. His cabinet was filled with men "from some wing of the Republican establishment" (Olsen, "Barbarians Inside the Gate"). His policies benefited the upper class, choosing programs that "directly redistributed resources to supporters facing economic insecurity" and tried to convince Congress to overturn the Affordable Care Act. "Elsewhere, he pushed new administrative burdens such as work requirements on basic social programs such as Medicaid and food stamps, even as he sought to minimize burdens on corporations by demanding reductions in regulation" (Moynihan and Roberts 154).

Similarly, Trump was able to catch the attention of many citizens who otherwise would not have been interested in politics. By repeatedly attacking members of the Democratic party and his opponent, such as calling Hillary Clinton "'the most corrupt person ever' to run for President," he was able to spark strong emotions within his followers (Barone). His many scandals kept the public watching him and wanting to learn more.

Trump reflects Jackson in his populist approach, but also in his modern-day application of the spoils system. He required “loyalty over competence among public servants,” often firing or soiling the reputation of those in the Republican party who opposed him (Moynihan and Roberts 152). Such was apparent when Trump fired both Secretary of Defense General James Mattis and Chief of Staff General John Kelly at the first sign of opposing him. This idea has been seen throughout American politics but never as boldly as in the time of Jackson. Because many Republicans refused to take a stand against Trump, “Republican lawmakers at least tacitly endorsed aspects of Trumpism that many Americans find deeply offensive: anti-immigrant sentiment, hostility towards institutions, and the racism on display from White supremacists who participated in the attack on the Capitol” (Bush).

Trump followed the models of both Nixon and Reagan by making a certain race or ethnicity into a “scapegoat” in the eyes of the American people. In his campaign, he painted Mexican immigrants as invasive, working against making America great. He often stereotyped the Mexican people and immigrants, spewing blatantly racist ideals. “‘When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best,’ [Trump] said. ‘...They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people’” (Scott).

The scapegoat method has been used throughout history during troubling times. The Russian government and people utilized the scapegoat methodology throughout their history whenever they had political, military, or economic downfalls, such as after the assassination of Czar Alexander II. They blamed the economic downfall on the Jewish people, giving the country a common enemy in order to promote Nationalism (“Pogroms”). Utilizing such a method has been a common way of invoking fear in order to gain political power through history. The

Scapegoat theory is defined as such: when economic or social issues within a nation seem insurmountable, a minority within the state is blamed (Berk). Trump utilized this same theory with Mexican immigrants, blaming them for economic and social problems within the nation. He did the same with Muslim refugees, eventually using an executive order to close the border to seven Muslim countries. “Trump described ‘American carnage,’ building on his campaign rhetoric of a country under siege from refugees and immigrants, particularly Mexicans and Muslims” (Puig). These and several other instances show that Trumpism is not many new political elements but instead a combination of previous practices never before seen altogether in American politics.

Because Trump seemed like such a different candidate compared to those they were accustomed to, many citizens asked themselves: how could he have been elected? Yet when looking back, the aspects that make Trump unique have been utilized throughout history by other presidents. The precedents established by previous leaders, coupled with the political environment surrounding the 2016 election, led to Trump’s attainment of the White House.

The Political History Leading to Trump’s Election

In 2016, many believed that Hillary Clinton would win the presidential election by a landslide. A survey conducted by the Princeton Election Consortium found that Hillary Clinton had a 99 percent chance of winning the election over Donald Trump (“Survey”). The shocking turn of events that Tuesday night led to many asking one question: how did Trump win? Being the first president elected without any political or military experience and having a personality that was different from any politician in recent memory, many Americans wanted an answer.

After George W. Bush's presidency ended in 2008, history was made when Barack Obama was elected as the first Black president in American history. Democrats had a tremendous victory that year, taking over both chambers of the Senate. This started an increase in political polarization that has continued to rise ever since, as Republicans began to feel powerless in their own government and grew in their distrust of Democratic politicians. The polarization stems from "increasing disapproval of the chief executive from the opposition party," where Obama had an approval rate of 84 percent of Democrats and only 14 percent of Republicans (Dimock).

As polarization grew, Trump used it to his advantage in his campaign. Utilizing divisiveness and fear tactics, he brought even moderate Republicans to his side, those who would not have voted for him if they had not been so unhappy with the Democrats. "Trump led by dividing." He used "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite.'" For Trump, the 'corrupt elite' included members of the federal government itself" (Moynihan and Roberts 153). His use of populism made the neglected middle class trust him, though his policies would actually work against them.

Though Obama's presidency signified a progressive change in American politics, his two terms sparked feelings of resentment present in the Republican working class, especially those who were racist and uncomfortable having a Black president. Consequently, moderates who leaned right also voted for Trump. Moderates who leaned left, however, chose not to vote at all because they did not support Clinton, either because of her scandals or the voters' sexist views. Only 78% of people who leaned "mostly liberal" voted for Clinton while 87% of people who leaned "mostly conservative" voted for Trump (López and Flores). This difference shows how

moderate voters were unwilling to vote for Clinton. As well, only 32% of Republican registered voters did not vote compared to 35% of Democratic registered voters. This difference, though only three percent, had a significant impact on the election (Enten). This spark of divisiveness began a pattern of polarization that ran throughout Trump's presidency and has continued since.

Breaking Down Democracy

During Trump's last year of his presidency while running for re-election, polarization between the two major American political parties was at its height. Major news coverage (e.g., Fox News, CNN, MSNBC) was highly distrusted by citizens on both sides, as neither party trusted other biased news sources. Similarly, many Americans began to distrust their own government, the body whose purpose is to protect and serve them, based upon the actions of the Republican party and Trump.

Trump created a public distrust of free elections, thus corrupting democracy at its core. When the polls were not in his favor, Trump refused to commit to a peaceful transition of power, scaring many Democrats and citizens who value the nation's ideals. "We're going to have to see what happens," the president responded to a reporter [when asked about leaving the White House]. "You know, I've been complaining about the ballots and the ballots are a disaster" (Choi). Before and after the 2020 election results were finalized, Trump and his supporters worked to overturn the verdict. Trump and numerous *Fox* news reporters claimed that "the vote was hacked and ballots switched from the president to Joe Biden, thanks to technology developed in Venezuela" ("Giuliani Claims"). He and his team of lawyers filed 62 lawsuits and were defeated 61 times. He was not able to overturn the election but instead provoked his supporters, leading them to believe the votes against him were illegitimate (Cummings).

The January 6th attack on the Capitol was driven by a distrust of the American government led by Trump. This attack was meant to be a historical revolution, which means it was truly an act of treason. Trump claims to have “urged only a peaceful demonstration” and that any violence was not his fault (Frum). Yet, in 2022 just a year after the initial attack, he tweeted many aggravating messages to his supporters. On December 18th, 2020, he tweeted, “Republican Senators have to get tougher, or you won’t have a Republican Party anymore. We won the Presidential Election, by a lot. FIGHT FOR IT. Don’t let them take it away!” He tweeted on January 1st, 2021, that “The BIG Protest Rally in Washington, D.C., will take place at 11.00 A.M. on January 6th. Locational details to follow. StopTheSteal!” He offered to pardon many of the offenders during his last few weeks as president. These messages promoted the idea that Republicans were being attacked, giving them the opportunity and the reasoning to become violent (“A Timeline”).

When asked to comment on the tweets and the insurrection at the capitol, he “praised the insurrectionist throng: ‘great people.’ He denounced their arrest and jailing as unjust” (Frum). Such support of those committing treason shows that Trump continues to go against American values and to dislodge the democratic ideals that have been integral to the nation since its start.

Breaking down democracy injures the very heart of the United States government. Planting distrust in the people for an institution meant to protect them is what led to a treasonous rebellion and may lead to worse actions in the future if continued. Furthermore, such distrust leads to uncertainty within the public, making it even easier for a demagogic leader to seize power.

Divisiveness Within the Republican Party

Trump's utilization of divisiveness did not end when he was elected. He started an "ongoing civil war within the Republican Party" (Olsen, "Barbarians Inside the Gate"). Many voted for him to stay loyal to their party because of the hyper-partisanship that was perpetuated during the crude election through attacks between the individual candidates. "The decisive factor was that almost all Republicans stayed loyal to their party despite all their misgivings about Trump" (Lachman 15).

His divisiveness was not only within his own party lines. He was "widening the demographic and cultural differences between ordinary Republicans and Democrats" by using harsh rhetoric that his supporters followed blindly. Most notably was his use of the expression "fake news" to describe news and media outlets (Jacobson). His use of this term created a distrust of information and facts among his supporters, leading to a cult-like following that looked to him for the truth. "He wanted to be the sole disseminator of information -- and 'facts' -- to his base. That desire was driven by selfish and political concerns: Trump wanted to create an alternate reality in which he was winning at everything from the economy to immigration to even Covid-19." Because of Trump's rhetoric, from 2016 to 2021, the percentage of Republicans having at least some trust in national news organizations fell from 70 percent to 35 percent (Cillizza).

Trump identified as a Democrat from 2001 to 2008 and has switched political party affiliations many times over the years he has been a voting citizen. Such a mixture of ideology in the leader of the Republican party begins to sort those who follow conservative ideals from those who follow the figurehead. "The conflict among Republican elected officials, conservative media outlets, and voters surrounding the nomination and election of President Trump suggests fissures

and divisions in the party about what it means to be a conservative” (Barber and Pope). Because the definition of conservative ideology is now up for debate, the Republican party is less sure of itself than ever, forcing it to hold on to the prior leader of the party in order to stay afloat politically.

Traditional conservative ideals surrounded the idea of having less federal government power and upholding traditional Christian beliefs and morality. It promotes the principle of localism, having local control of policy decisions and creating a local political identity. Economically, conservative ideas are based around a free-market economy, following the *laissez-faire* approach of letting the economy work itself out (Rose).

The modern conservative party in the United States emerged after World War II and became a dominant force in the political scene after the turning point election in 1968 of Richard Nixon, beginning a string of Republican presidents. This party stood for traditional ideas and was characterized by personal liberty, Christian morality, and the rule of law (“The Pillars”).

The Republican Party, its full name being the “Grand Old Party” or “GOP,” spent multiple decades at its most powerful in the second half of the 20th century defining its platform. In the 1960s, “the party presented itself as ‘moderate’ or even ‘progressive’” and stood for “liberal pay” from the government for its workers. In 1972, the party stood for policies regulating the economy, such as wage and price control to curb inflation. A dramatic change in policies regarding social platforms was seen in the 1980s, where the party switched from vehemently supporting public transit to “vigorously [supporting] the right of personal mobility and freedom as exemplified by the automobile.” Abortion, now a hot topic, was disputed between the party until 1980 when they announced their support for “the right to life for unborn children.” The issue of the government workforce, regarding having more or fewer workers,

drastically changed in just over two decades. The GOP switched from supporting the rights of government employees in the sixties to blaming public-sector workers in 1984 for “an epidemic of crime, a massive increase in dependency and the slumming of our cities.” In this same decade, Republicans established their *laissez-faire* economic policies, such as tax cuts and “an increasingly critical attitude toward government,” and declared “war on government overregulation” (“GOP Platform”).

The 1992 Republican platform during the first election of the decade stood for gun rights, private investments, sacrificing the environment for the economy, illegalizing abortion, and opposing homosexual rights. They took “the most conservative turn on nearly every issue.” They asserted “‘traditional family values and in the Judeo-Christian heritage,’ ... [emphasized] social views and [played] down the economy for the first time in many conventions” (“THE 1992 CAMPAIGN”).

President George H. W. Bush’s foreign policy in the early 1990s has been praised for decades as being “prudent” and “remarkable.” Bush steered America through the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, the crumbling of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the ejection of Panama’s cruel leader, and the liberation of Kuwait. Bush implemented reserved actions when regarding foreign affairs, aiming “not to force into existence a better world, but to adapt to and shape circumstances for America’s advantage.” Although he was prudent, he was in favor of militaristic approaches to foreign issues. He attacked Hussein’s army and won the Gulf War. He built the American nuclear arsenal to increase U.S. military power (Fontaine). President Bush’s actions show the conservative policies for foreign affairs. Instead of the isolationist ideology America followed in the early 19th century, the GOP currently believes in militaristic approaches and a strong national defense, as well as stepping into the foreign

affairs of other nations when America feels it necessary in favor of world peace and spreading democracy.

Trump's administration created a new form of ideology that can barely be considered "conservative." One of Trump's major policies when campaigning in 2016 was halting immigration and building a wall in order to keep out illegal immigrants on the Mexican border. "On immigration, the Republican Party had been split roughly fifty-fifty between its restrictionist wing and its accommodationist wing. Donald Trump didn't shade the difference. He put himself squarely on the restrictionist side of that dispute and, in fact, went two steps further than anyone on the restrictionist side had ever gone before" (Olsen, "Barbarians Inside the Gate"). On abortion, a matter Republicans have had a firm stance on since the 1990s, Trump said, "I hate the concept of abortion, but I am strongly pro-choice," a moderate stance on an issue that goes against the Republican traditional ideology that the party relies on ("Donald Trump Presidential Campaign").

Reducing the power of the government and cutting the budget are issues that supposedly lie at the heart of American conservatism with their relations to the pillar of personal liberty and a free market. Yet Trump "refused to say that cutting the budget was an important priority." He campaigned in favor of tariffs, which work against the free market, and never officially supported Christian ideology. Regarding foreign policy, "Trump questioned military alliances that were painstakingly supported and built by Republican presidents going all the way back to Dwight D. Eisenhower. He questioned the American role in the world, suggesting that he might want to pull out of Afghanistan, suggesting that NATO had seen better days, and suggesting that perhaps America would be retreating from its role in the world" (Olsen, "Barbarians Inside the

Gate”). He did not stand for the same militaristic and outgoing policies that had been supported by the GOP.

Trump’s most blatant suppression of Republican ideology was his attempts to increase the power of the executive branch beyond the norm set by precedent. Republicans have stood for personal and state liberties for decades, such as supporting the states’ rights to control their own public education systems. Increasing executive power goes against their most fundamental beliefs. In 2020, within the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Trump declared that “he, and not individual governors and mayors, would make the decision about when and how to reopen the country,” taking all the power from the states and even Congress. “[W]hen somebody’s president of the United States, the authority is total,” President Trump claimed.” Trump’s administration “claimed the authority to fire the FBI director for any reason, argued that the president is immune from criminal investigation let alone prosecution, and bypassed the congressional appropriations process to use military funds to build a wall on the southern border.” He wanted to have complete power over the American government (“Trump’s Unconstitutional View”)

Trump’s personal beliefs and policies have steered the Republican party away from many of the beliefs they have held for decades. This has led to a harsh divide within the party: those who hold traditional conservative beliefs, such as those established in the late 20th century, and those who blindly follow the party’s figurehead. There is “an ongoing civil war within the Republican Party that was launched by Donald Trump when he first declared his candidacy for office a little under three years ago” (Olsen, "Barbarians Inside the Gate"). In 2016, “almost one in ten Republican voters refused to support Trump in both the primary and the general election,” a number that has continued to grow (Barber and Pope).

A party divided is a party that is weak. Without the entire Republican party backing congressional and presidential candidates, the party will be unable to stand against the Democratic party, constantly growing stronger because of the younger generations becoming increasingly liberal. Henry Olsen, a *Washington Post* columnist and a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, states:

Trump people can't win without Trump critics. Trump critics can't win without Trump people. The Republican Party that is divided against itself will surely fall. A party that will surely fall in the face of the united Democratic Party that used to dislike the traditional Republican Party, but absolutely loathes the Trump party. (Olsen, "Barbarians Inside the Gate")

If the Republican party stops voting as a block and continues to increase their divide in ideology, they will not be able to stand against a united Left much longer.

Turning Point Elections

The Republican party choosing Donald Trump as their candidate for the 2016 election strayed far from their recent choices at the time, especially 2012 candidate Mitt Romney, who has generally been considered a moderate Republican. Such a change brings up the question of whether the most recent election can be called a turning point. A turning point election is one where a significant change in the pattern of American politics and elections is sparked. An election that shows signs of being a turning point can help provide evidence for what the future patterns of politics following it will look like. When considering the 2016 election of Donald Trump, determining whether it counts as a turning point and in what way provides support for predictions of the future of the Republican party and American politics.

During multiple time periods of American history, there have been a pattern of one party holding more power over the Executive Branch. One is known as the Era of Good Feelings,

another the first half of the 20th century. The Era of Good Feelings was a national attitude of the United States in the first half of the 19th century after the dissipation of the Federalist party. The Democratic-Republicans became the only widely supported political party at the time and had held the presidency for 28 years. This period's presidents were the last of the Founding Fathers and northeastern elitists ("Era of Good Feelings").

The election of 1828 was "arguably one of the most significant in United States history." Suffrage had been given to all White men above 18, regardless of social status. This gave the common man and lower-class tremendous voting rights, as they outnumbered the educated elite by far. Until 1828, the northeastern, educated Founding Fathers had controlled the presidency, the last of them being Harvard-educated John Quincy Adams, son of the prior president and Founding Father John Adams. Only land-owning White men could vote until this time, so they had been voting for the presidents that would represent them. When Andrew Jackson proved to be a populist candidate, he won both the electoral and popular votes by a landslide against his incumbent opponent John Quincy Adams (Eldridge).

Following Jackson's election, the Democratic-Republicans disappeared from the Executive Branch for good. Jackson's two terms brought back the two-party system with the Democrats (Jackson's party) and the Whigs. For the next 31 years, the presidency was held by one of these parties. The Democrats held the presidency for six terms while the Whigs held it for two (Rogers).

In the first half of the twentieth century, there were two world wars and a rise of communism around the globe. When America entered its fourth war of the century, the Vietnam War, anti-war sentiment was strong. Protests became popular and the time was one of change. The Civil Rights and Feminist movements were both on the rise. With all of this change,

American citizens, especially those in the south, were uncomfortable and wanted to revert back to some “sense of normalcy” (T. Johnson).

President John Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson were the first Democrats to support Civil Rights as Democrats. Because of the deep racism and anti-Black rights in the South, which had been overwhelmingly Democratic, the South shifted its opinion to the Republican party, which campaigned for workers' rights. Richard Nixon, who campaigned as an anti-civil rights and law and order candidate, showed that he could provide the normalcy that so many around the nation craved after the protests resulting from the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. This election was the first where a Republican won while campaigning against civil rights and with the south on his side (“United States Presidential Election of 1968”). After Nixon was elected, Republicans held the Executive branch for 28 of the next 40 years, the Democrats only having two presidents over that time (Rogers).

After Republicans had had a stronghold on the American government for the second half of the 20th century, many believed that the election of America’s first Black president would be the next turning point. Regarding his election, President Barack Obama said in 2008 that “change has come to America” (“Obama Elected”). When Hillary Clinton was chosen as the first woman presidential candidate after Obama’s two successful terms, it seemed like America was going in the way of Democratic progress. When Trump was elected, though, it seemed that America had swung back in the opposite direction of change. Trump was the 44th White male president. The pendulum of American politics swings back and forth and has for all of history, but switching from Obama to Trump looked like the pendulum was swinging faster than ever before. Though Obama’s election could be considered a turning point, there was now an argument for Trump’s to be an even greater one.

Eerily like Andrew Jackson, Trump was elected directly after the term of a Harvard-educated president. The New York businessman was the next populist president, claiming to represent the common man. In many ways, Trump's election was unprecedented. Never before had there been so much polling from the Republicans in the early stages of an election and never before had there been so much media coverage. Each news conference was free advertisement for the candidates, something Trump utilized to the fullest extent ("The Most 'Unprecedented' Election"). Every candidate had an opportunity to reach the public in a new way: through social media. This allowed them to reach the general public more readily, especially the younger generations and those who rarely watched the news. Though sites like Twitter and Facebook were active during the 2012 election, they were not utilized as they were in 2015 and 2016. In 2012, Twitter had only 185 million users. In 2016, Twitter had over 315 million users, almost doubling in amount ("How Many People Use Twitter"). Because candidates could utilize social media, they were able to share more messages than ever before, not needing to hold a press conference or debate to spread their messages to the voters.

Trump had a great affinity for Twitter and used it to amplify his political reach. "His campaign successfully crowdsourced a message of anger and fear" by spewing messages about conspiracies and hate (S. Johnson). He scapegoated Mexicans and Muslims to utilize the public's fear. He used sexist and racist commentary, claiming that "you can do anything" to women when you are famous and bragging about actions that bordered sexual assault (Tolentino). He erroneously claimed at a rally that all Black people were "living in poverty," a broad and stereotypical comment (Henderson). Trump also, using social media, blasted his base with the idea that mainstream media and credited sources were actually "fake news," leading to a wide distrust of media ("Fake News"). This planted a seed in his fan base, eventually leading to them

only trusting him for their information. People were now not only fighting over politics but also now not trusting the facts others would use, leading to a wider divide between the people.

The election of 2016 was also unprecedented because there was direct foreign intervention. Russian military intelligence hacked Hillary Clinton's campaign, leaking thousands of her and her staff's emails to WikiLeaks; the same group hacked into many of Trump's Republican competitors' emails, such as Senator Lindsey Graham and Marco Rubio. Russia had ties to spreading propaganda on social media, staged rallies in swing states, and had multiple meetings with the Trump campaign (Abrams). The goal of these attacks were to promote Trump's campaign and obstruct his competitors.

Though Trump's election shows a clear connection to Jackson's through their anti-elitist and populist sentiment, there was one key difference between the two. While Jackson was a popular president among a large majority of the public (the common man), winning 55.3% of the popular vote and uniting the people, Trump has had historically low approval ratings (34% at its lowest and a record-breaking low 41% average), lost the popular vote by millions, and divided the people (J. Jones). Because of this, it is likely that their two elections would have different effects. While Jackson's election led to a string of Democratic presidents, Trump's will lead to discord. The elected presidents following him will consistently switch parties, each time becoming more and more extreme. This was already seen by Biden's election, whose morals and beliefs show him to be a far change from Trump.

An election is considered a turning point when it leads to a change in American politics. It is now too soon to see if the election of 2016 will provoke a change in the pattern of American politics, but all of these factors show that it is likely that the election has had an effect on

America as a whole. Most notably, it provokes a new question: what will happen to the Republican party in the wake of Trump's term as president?

The Future of the Republican Party

The Republican Party has changed drastically from what it was before the 2016 election. The party has lost its core beliefs and is divided between those who are loyal to the traditions of the party and those who follow Trump and his message. The question is not if the party will continue to change but how.

The first possibility of how the Republican party will continue to change is that it could dissipate entirely. The two factions, those who follow Trump versus those who are conservative but refuse to follow Trump, could split into two different parties. This has been seen before. Following the 1808 election and as the Federalist party dissolved after the War of 1812 due to their unpopular support of the Alien and Sedition acts, the Democratic Republican party split into the Democrats (or Jacksonians) and the Whigs, each supporting different candidates ("Democratic-Republican Party").

The key difference here between this situation in the 19th century and the modern Republican party is that the Democratic party does not seem to be dissolving anytime soon. In the 2020 election, Biden received 81.2 million votes while Trump received 74.2 million votes. Though votes do not always represent party alignment, the Democratic party seems to be on the rise. The American population is becoming more and more composed of minorities and immigrants. In the 2020 election, 39% of the votes for Biden were by people of color versus 15% for Trump (Prokop). The percentage of the population identifying as White has decreased 8.6%

since 2010 (N. Jones). If the same trends continue as they have been in the future, the Democratic Party should continue to gain support.

A strong indicator of the direction of the Republican party was the Insurrection of the Capitol on January 6th, 2020. This act was the first attack on the Capitol in Washington, DC since the British invasion in 1812. On January 6th, 2020 as Congress was in session to affirm the results of the 2020 election, won by Joe Biden, a group of armed Trump supporters gathered and stormed the Capitol with the hopes of overturning the results of the election by force, which they believed had been falsified. Resisting arrest and fighting uniformed police officers, the group believed they had been spurred on by Trump to gather and fight for their beliefs, an act for which Trump is still being tried for in April of 2022. But even if this act was marked by the Trump supporters as an attempt to “take back our country,” it was an act discussed to be treasonous that incited violence against the American government (““Our President Wants Us Here”).

The leaders of the Republican party and their response to this act of treason shows a worrisome direction for the GOP. The Republican National Committee (RNC) voted to impeach Representative Liz Cheney after she investigated the events occurring on January 6th. Liz Cheney, the Chair of the House Republican Conference since 2019 and member of the House of Representatives since 2016, is a classic Republican; she is the daughter of Dick Cheney, who served as Vice President under George W. Bush, and has been well respected by the GOP for years. However, as soon as she questioned the acts of Trump or took a position against the treason of a group of Trump-supporters, she was condemned. The RNC claimed that she was “participating in a Democrat-led persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse” (Boot). Instead of officially denouncing the insurrectionists’ illegal act of violence, the RNC acted as though they had been having a productive conversation. Coupled with Trump’s

actions to widen the scope of the Executive power, the actions of the GOP are turning towards authoritarianism, rejecting political plurality and working to concentrate power.

Authoritarianism favors a singular power instead of distribution of power to the people. As the Republican party continues to support violent insurrectionists and bills that restrict voting rights, it suggests that the party cares more about staying in power by rallying around their popular figurehead and keeping the groups of people who do not support them from voting. But if the party continues on this path, they will become ineffective in government, working to simply stay in power instead of to make productive change. They would continue to increase the divide between the left and the right parties, slandering the Democratic party to deter votes for it. Furthermore, they are showing signs through the action of and response to the insurrection. Such authoritarianism and far right-wing ideology shows that the GOP is venturing farther from the center of the political scale and its opposing party, creating more divisiveness.

Another direction the Republican party could go in is continuing to follow Trump and those who subscribe to his ideas or even a new leader. Trump has been the figurehead of the Republican party since the 2016 election and is still a key player in the political atmosphere. This can be seen by the current situation in Congress, as the Republican party and its leaders continue to support Trump. People like Representatives Marjorie Taylor Green and Matt Gaetz continue to be praised by Trump and thus have the support of his followers despite both of them being engulfed in multiple controversies. Marjorie Taylor Green has been criticized as a White nationalist and anti-semitic and Matt Gaetz was involved in allegations of sex trafficking, yet Trump highlighted both of them in his speech at the 2022 Conservative Political Action Conference in Orlando, Florida (Lavender). As he supports them, the two Representatives, alongside many other Republicans, support Trump, too. Matt Gaetz wants to nominate him as

House Speaker and Marjorie Taylor Green invested in Trump's new Social Media site, Truth Social. As long as Trump has supporters in Congress, he will still hold political power. His supporters make up a large proportion of the Republican party, so any Republican hoping to run for office must have his support as well.

While those who have Trump's support can be favored as the future leaders of the party, there are many people modeling themselves after him that he does not support. They are also strong candidates for next party leaders. One is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. He reflects Trump in many ways, like attacking media companies, pushing forward authoritarian laws that restrict the voting rights of minorities, and is said to "harness all the right-wing populist energy generated by Trump without the latter's childlike inability to focus on what his advisers tell him." Fox News, despite DeSantis often opposing Trump, sees him "as the future of the party." DeSantis is suspected to run for president in 2024 (Chait). Another Trump-like politician is Senator Ted Cruz. He has said, "I am a conservative, an unabashed conservative. I'm also a populist. I am deeply a populist," continuing the ring-wing populist ideals of Trump. Cruz is also rumored to be running in 2024 (Leonardi). If there are going to more Trump imitators running as the Republican figureheads, the same divisiveness seen in his presidency will return to center-stage.

The most convincing argument for the future of the Republican party and the American political climate based on Trump's presidency is that divisiveness and extremism will continue to rise, coupled with an overall distrust of the government by the American people. Trump's lowest approval rating came at the end of his presidency and Biden's has continued to drop as his time in office grows, starting in the high 50th percentile and dropping to the low 40th percentile as of April 2022 ("What Does the Country Think"). The American public is becoming dissatisfied

with the slow workings of the government, which “grows ever more dysfunctional because of deep political divisions” (Drutman). With the country and Congressional house so polarized, gridlock and endless filibusters force the federal government to take longer than ever before in creating legislation and action. When a president sows such distrust in the American people of their own democratic process, seen by Trump after the 2020 election, they promote this dissatisfaction and even promotes the breaking of the system. When the people are dissatisfied with how the country is being run, those who linger as Independents or Moderates switch sides and vote for the opposing party in the next presidential election. This change, seen from Obama to Trump to Biden, is encouraging a drastic change in who is in the White House from term to term and, with the continued dissatisfaction of the public, will continue as a trend.

However, the two parties are venturing further and further away from each other on the political spectrum. Right-wing populism and extremism is the current way of the Republican party. As for the Democrats, those who are most popular in the party proceeding the 2020 election, such as Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, are considered socialist extremists by the GOP. This means that as each presidential term is held by the next party, the White House will be on a completely different side of the spectrum than it was the last term. Any progress made on one side will be reversed by the other because of the extreme divisiveness that continues to spread and increase. This will lead to a government that is ineffective, polarized, and ineffectual to the American people.

Trump’s effect on the Republican party reflects the upsurge of right wing populism that can be seen around the globe. Right wing populism is characterized by “xenophobic, nationalistic traits, a tendency toward authoritarianism, aggressive leadership, and an anti-elitist message,” all of which were seen during Trump’s campaign, presidency, and the aftermath of

such (Merelli). In Europe, anti-immigration and far right parties are gaining power. In a German election in 2021, the conservative anti-establishment Free Voters gained about 3 percent of the vote since five years ago. In a Dutch 2021 election, three right-wing populist parties combined for a record number of won seats, 29 out of the Tweede Kamer 150. Two right-wing Italian populist parties combine for 41 percent of the vote in some 2021 polling averages. These statistics show “the enduring appeal of populist values in a large segment of the population almost everywhere. Native-born voters without a college degree or similar qualifications want nationalist policies that restrict migration and ensure that economic growth is shared across groups and regions” (Olsen, “Europe Is Proof”).

Yet as right wing populism continues to grow in popularity among voters, increasingly liberal ideas are likewise gaining power. If the divide between the two sides of the political spectrum is going to continue to grow farther apart, the polarization and divisiveness seen in the current political climate is just the start of the turmoil in the American political climate. The GOP faces many plausible directions, but only with purposeful action to reduce such hostility and divisiveness can they ensure their political survival and further American politics.

Conclusion

Since Trumpism was introduced to the American political scene, both citizens and candidates are faced with more turbulence and instability than they can manage because of the growing uncertainty of the future. There is polarization and divisiveness that feeds into the everyday lives of citizens. Where friends are lost because of political affiliation and where political discussions between those with different ideologies become merciless fights. Where discussions of abortion and gun control quickly becoming accusations on each other's character

and morality. Americans can not trust the facts fed to them by major news sources or social media platforms and do not know where to look, allowing any candidate to take advantage of such desperation. They can not trust their government, whether for fear of corruption or inability. Who now is looking out for the citizen's and their interests? The most trying element of America's new political scene is this sense of uncertainty. The times they are a-changin', but the real question is how.

As discord continues and dissonance carries on, it is clear that divisiveness will remain a key aspect of the political scene. After Trump's turning point election, the parties have and will continue to grow farther apart; as the White House changes hands from party to party, the impact of the government during each term will be increasingly less because the focus will be on undoing the past presidency. The issues plaguing the country will be put on hold in order to advance political power and agendas.

What is most worrying is the loss of connection the American people feel from their government and even each other during these trying times. As polarization grows greater, the political climate rears sectionalism and the divisions within the public, leading to Americans feeling disconnected from their country as a whole. Without any sense of proper national identity or connection, American culture could be lost.

The sixth-graders fighting in their Social Studies class show the present and future of American politics. If kids, emblematic of innocence and purity, can not look past differences in political opinion in their own friends, it is clear that the environment has grown toxic. As right-wing populism continues to grow and the left swings evermore towards the other side of the political spectrum, even young kids can see how their country is falling apart. When faced with this continued polarization and divisiveness, some solution must be found in order to keep

this 250 year republic together. We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, must rid ourselves of such hostility and partitions and must find some way to become, once again, a united states.

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