



## What Will Happen to Freedom in November?

**It's Important to Remember What American Liberty Has Survived**

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The coming presidential election could cause a liberty lover to commit ritual seppuku. A left-wing corporatist, or possibly a self-described socialist, will face off against an unprincipled populist who supports big government and carries protectionist and anti-immigration banners.

The usual gaggle of third parties are running with no hope of victory. Anti-Trump Republicans are concocting a plot to run an unknown apparatchik as an independent in hopes of either winning or at least preventing anyone else from winning the 270 necessary electoral votes, tossing the election into the House of Representatives. Who would control the latter body after such a race, and whom such a body would choose as chief executive, remain matters of conjecture.

Whew!

Thousands of years ago, the Bible warned people against putting their hopes in princes. That remains good advice today.

Indeed, almost as soon as the Constitution was ratified, politicians ignored their oaths and broke the nation's fundamental law when it was convenient to do so. The Alien and Sedition Acts, passed during John Adams's presidency, would have done Hugo Chavez or Vladimir Putin proud.

In succeeding years, men of principle vied with shameless opportunists to set US policy. The twin tragedies of slavery, which conflicted so greatly with America's founding principles, and civil war, in which the central government killed promiscuously to hold people in political bondage (rather than to achieve the far more appealing objective of freeing the bondsmen), effectively destroyed the original Constitution.

By the end of the 19th century, neither major political party could be trusted to protect liberty. Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, was one of the last liberals to be president. There was little, if any, difference between such "progressives" as Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, both friends of Leviathan. If Calvin Coolidge offered a step back toward more limited government, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt soon launched a series of grand national crusades.

Since then, there has been sporadic but largely ineffective resistance to the ever-aggrandizing state, by Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan, for instance. However, Lyndon Johnson and Barack Obama both pushed dramatic increases in the welfare state. Republicans often have been as willing as Democrats to spend and regulate. Richard Nixon and George W. Bush were particularly enthusiastic advocates of expanded government.

Maybe 2016 will offer a worse choice than usual, but maybe not. What to say of Michael Dukakis and Bill Clinton vs. George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole vs. Bill Clinton, Al Gore and John Kerry vs. George W. Bush, and John McCain and Mitt Romney vs. Barack Obama? Which of these candidates was dedicated to protecting individual liberty and limiting state power? None of them.

Moreover, America has survived worse from politicians across the spectrum. Abraham Lincoln sacrificed the Constitution (and hundreds of thousands of lives) to prevent people from choosing a new political union. Teddy Roosevelt and his great rival Woodrow Wilson disdained even the idea of constitutional limits. Franklin Delano Roosevelt expanded on the defeated Herbert Hoover's interventionist economic program, threatening the market economy he claimed to save.

Relying on the inflated Democratic congressional majority, Lyndon Johnson carried on a policy of guns and butter while launching the misnamed "Great Society." Richard Nixon converted to Keynesianism and expanded the regulatory state. Since then, government has continued to grow inexorably under Republicans and Democrats alike.

Of course, some presidents and Congresses have proved to be better or worse than others. Sometimes it might make sense to support the lesser of evils. Nevertheless, past experience suggests that America wouldn't look that much different with Chris Christie or Marco Rubio as president than Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. Without question, government would be bigger, spending would be higher, regulations would be more extensive, additional wars would be fought, and people's liberties would be further restricted. The details would differ, but government would shed more limits and individual freedom would suffer more abridgements. The country would be headed down the same path. Only the speed of descent would differ.

Which means the various schemes being promoted by anti-Trump activists, even if successful, would not make that much long-term difference for liberty. What independent politician could win states from both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump? Probably someone better at promising more benefits than one interested in protecting individual liberty.

Who would Congress, having approved big budgets and passed big programs, choose as the next president if the issue ended up in the House? Partisan loyalty, not commitment to liberty, would determine the outcome. Who would get the nod is not clear. But we can be sure that Rand Paul, Justin Amash, or another similarly minded freedom advocate would not end up in the White House.

Lest reality seem unduly bleak, it's important to remember what American liberty has survived: brutal political division and legal repression during the republic's early years, invasion of the United States by Great Britain, decades of slavery undermining free institutions, a horrid civil war and consequent centralization of power in Washington, progressive takeover of liberal

politics, aggressive redistributionist campaigns in the name of the New Deal and Great Society, and multiple wars feeding an ever-more powerful Leviathan. Compared to these, the prospect of a Clinton, Sanders, or Trump presidency doesn't look quite so hopeless.

It has often been said that eternal vigilance is necessary to safeguard our liberties. That remains the case today. Irrespective of who wins in November, those who love liberty must continue to act as sentinels for freedom. Upon them the future of the republic will depend.

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