



Why Populism Is Replacing Conservatism, And Why It's Winning

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Depending where you are on the political spectrum, you'll likely have different reasons for loving or hating Donald Trump.

To the establishment of both parties he represents an end to the status quo, the gravy train, and the old methods of not just getting things done in Washington, but winning votes to stay there. To activist liberals, Trump, despite his "live and let live" attitude on many social issues, is anathema to their Utopian, politically-correct world and indeed everything they stand for. They hate him, and he hates them back.

Conservatives, however, are undeniably as divided as they've ever been, or at least since the Goldwater days. To those who remain anti-Trump, the #NeverTrump crowd, the Republican nominee represents nothing less than a complete abandonment of their principles and the values they consider integral to the fabric of America. To them, a vote for Trump is a vote against civility, decency, and everything they hold dear.

The conservatives who are with Trump, however, see something entirely different. They see an unprecedented way to accomplish conservative goals, meaning to actually "conserve" what made America great in the first place, even without an ideologically pure standard bearer.

The key to this pragmatic position, and the reason it's so effective, is the uncomfortable yet true realization that in order to actually get one's agenda accomplished legislatively in America, one must actually win elections on a national scale.

In order to do that, conservatives must abandon the “conservatism” that in effect “majors on the minors” by focusing on peripheral issues that, while they may be important morally, don’t personally affect the average American voter, and instead embrace issues that do.

For their own survival, it’s time for conservatives to become populists.

By making immigration his central campaign issue early on, Donald Trump did just that, speaking to something that hits home for many if not most Americans. We wonder why our betters insist on bringing in two immigrants for every job created when American wages have been stagnant for decades. We ask why it’s so imperative that masses of unassimilable and unscreened Muslims be brought to our shores from regions which we’ve helped destabilize in the first place. Why must our border with Mexico be a sieve that allows anyone and everyone to enter, while Americans who marry foreigners and try to get them a legal permanent resident card face so much red tape?

The burden illegal immigration from the Third World imposes on American society is a steep one, yet one that only ordinary Americans unable to afford high fences and Gulfstream jets have to pay. We know that 25 percent of Federal prisons are filled with illegal aliens, and we know about high-profile cases like the tragic murder of Kate Steinle (often thanks to Donald Trump), but actual figures for illegal alien crime are hard to find because, as a 2015 FoxNews.com story laments, “the government agencies that crunch crime numbers are utterly unable — or unwilling — to pinpoint for the public how many illegal immigrants are arrested within U.S. borders each year.”

According to the FoxNews.com story, which examined data from several unaffiliated sources to come up with the numbers the government doesn’t want to give, the nation’s approximately 11.7 million illegal immigrants are responsible for 12 percent of all murder sentences, 20 percent of all kidnapping sentences, 16 percent of all drug trafficking sentences, and 13.6 percent of ALL sentenced offenders in the U.S.

Additionally, according to the Heritage Foundation, American taxpayers are on the hook to the tune of almost \$20,000 for every low-skilled immigrant household, which pays roughly \$10,000 in taxes while using \$30,000 in government services. In fact, 57 percent of all immigrant household with children use at least one welfare program.

22 million Americans are currently looking for full-time work while at least 8 million full-time jobs are held by illegal immigrants. But but but... our elites tell us we must bring in more, and in ever increasing numbers, yet ordinary Americans wonder why ... and side with Donald Trump. Indeed, if immigration alone were Trump’s main issue it would be a winning one, but it doesn’t stop there.

Trump’s second major policy position, and again one that clearly pivots away from the establishment line of both parties, is trade, and again he nails it. Lecturing Carrier employees who’ve just lost their jobs to Mexico about the finer points of David Ricardo’s theory of comparative advantage is almost akin to telling a grieving mother who just lost her child that

“God works in mysterious ways.” But that’s essentially what is happening. Come hell or high water, free traders are going to stick to their dogma until it sinks us all.

And what is this dogma we are asked by our leaders to believe? That, according to the CATO Institute, “free trade is its own reward,” and any efforts aimed at trying to level trade imbalances should be maligned as “mercantilist.” It all sounds good in theory, of course, if it weren’t for those stubborn facts. Sure, if the playing field between nations WERE level, countries specializing in what they do best and trading with other countries for the things they want but can’t produce as efficiently certainly benefits everyone more than they would otherwise benefit.

Trade certainly CAN be a good thing.

Problem is, the playing field is far from level. Aside from the United States, many other countries, particularly China, actually attempt to protect their workers at America’s expense, keeping their protective tariffs while America lowers theirs. Additionally, some countries, like ours, overload their industries with expensive and burdensome regulations while others, like China, barely regulate anything at all. It is an open secret among outsourcing companies that, while cheap labor is often cited as the reason for a move overseas or below the border, the primary reason some industries move, particularly the ones more prone to pollution, is actually to escape our costly environmental regulations.

Free trade does help some, especially the top 1 percent to whom many of the Republican beltway elite are beholden. Of these, Pat Buchanan writes “[these] masters of the universe fly Gulfstream Vs to Davos and Dubai to dine with titled Europeans, Saudi princes and Chinese billionaires. These are America’s winners from free trade. The losers? Middle Americans. The average U.S. family has not seen a rise in real wages in 40 years. This is directly traceable to the loss of more than one-third of all U.S. manufacturing jobs. And that loss, that deindustrialization of America, is directly tied to the \$10 trillion in trade deficits since Bush I.”

And so, middle America continues to wake up. In fact, based on the percentage of voters who supported both Trump and Bernie Sanders, an increasingly significant percentage of American voters aren’t buying what their leaders are selling them when it comes to trade. For example, while Paul Ryan and indeed most Republican lawmakers, pundits, and Party donors champion the free trade mantra, primary exit polling showed a whopping 54 percent of Wisconsin voters believe trade deals take away U.S. jobs.

Instead, Donald Trump asks the same questions middle-class America asks, and on this issue especially, the guy who’s supposed to have changed his mind at least forty times on every issue has been remarkably consistent on this one – Why should we sacrifice our high paying jobs on the altar of globalism? Why can’t we have FAIR trade that benefits everyone instead of job killing, wage destroying “free” trade? And especially, why has America’s most prosperous eras been when she has been the most protective on trade?

On foreign policy, Trump again finds himself with ordinary Americans. What does protecting a Europe which refuses to pay for it, or policing the borders of Iraq, or toppling dictators only to replace them with ISIS have to do with making Americans secure? Why do we need to thumb

our nose at Russia when they are fighting ISIS harder than anyone else? Our elites would have us entangled everywhere in the world, and yet Trump asks the same question we do – Why not consider putting America and Americans first?

That's populism in a nutshell, taking the people's side against the power elites who clearly do not have our best interests at heart.

Donald Trump wants to put America first. The establishment and the elites hate him for it, but Americans love him and are willing to overlook a whole host of other gaffes and even personality defects not because they don't think those things aren't important in and of themselves, but because they understand, unlike the conservative nit-pickers who still refuse to back him, that he is right and consistent on the issues that affect them personally.

The conservative movement in America has, for all intents and purposes, been a complete failure. Not only has it failed to produce electoral victories on a national scale, it has failed to "conserve" bathrooms that are safe for little girls, much less anything else of note. Could this be because conservatives have abandoned the issues that Americans, particularly middle-class Americans, care about and are truly affected by?

Conservatives have bowed at the altar of "free trade" while watching our manufacturing base disappear. They've surrendered to the oligarchs who want cheap labor and the 'churchians' who see it as their God-given duty to 'rescue' the world by letting the world come here by throwing our borders open to anyone who wants a free ride. They've let the warmongering neocons get us involved in more and more foreign places where we're neither needed nor wanted. Where in all this is the concern for middle-class America?

Populism, on the other hand, is making a resurgence in America and indeed in increasingly significant pockets across Europe because it puts our people first, FIRST. That is why it is winning. That is why the elites hate it so much, and it's ultimately the root of why they hate Donald Trump.

#NeverTrumpers want the perfect candidate, or at least one more perfect than Donald Trump. After the 1964 Goldwater debacle, William F. Buckley wrote, "Idealism is fine, but as it approaches reality, the costs become prohibitive."

As conservatives, our reality is this – In the words of retiring Tennessee Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey, the architect of the Volunteer State's massive shift from dominant Democratic to overwhelmingly conservative Republican government – "It matters who governs."

Unless they can start winning national elections, our people, or the people who by and large think like us, won't govern, and NOTHING we want to get done will get done. But in order to have a snowball's chance of doing that, our leaders MUST start addressing the issues that hit home for the people they supposedly represent.

Of Buckley's paradigm shift, Joe Scarborough wrote in Politio, "Goldwater's disastrous defeat in 1964 taught WFB that lesson all too well, and Reagan's pragmatic conservatism over the next two decades would also show Buckley just how effective a conservative politician could be if he was more interested in persuading voters than posing as an ideological puritan."

There's no denying that it may be too late. As Mitt Romney infamously pointed out during his failed 2012 campaign, the percentage of voters relying on government assistance may have already reached a tipping point that will eventually sink this Titanic. But the death of conservatism, well, not so much its death but its shift to caring about things that actually matter to ordinary working Americans – its shift to populism – could very well be what saves it, and indeed what saves America.