

## History shows that Trumpism may not die

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November 15, 2020

Political movements and their parties rarely die; they merely go into hibernation for a while.

In 1895, Keir Hardie of the U.K.'s Independent Labour Party was humiliated as he and every one of the 28 ILP candidates went down to crushing defeat. The consensus was that socialism was dead. A generation later, the reformed Labour Party replaced the Liberals as the Opposition, and in 1945 Labour was elected with a massive majority. In 1963, Senator Barry Goldwater began his campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. His conservative movement briefly captured the GOP. The next year he went on to a humiliating electoral defeat, and conservatism was pronounced dead. Sixteen years later, conservatism triumphed under Ronald Reagan, the "Great Communicator." From 2006 to 2015, Canadian Liberals slid badly, ending at third party status. Then Justin Trudeau won a large majority government.

What is shared among them as the source of their renaissance? Each had built a coherent and appealing political agenda, strong institutional foundations, and was led by a compelling leader. Most importantly, the ultimate triumph of the defeated party was always under a new leader.

This rebound is eminently possible for Trumpism, if the GOP codifies its policies and prejudices into a socially acceptable discourse. Americans in every generation have struggled with immigration. Anger at free trade and globalization has a broad and deep resonance in the American electorate. Contempt for all governments has often been widespread in American history. America First isolationism also has deep roots, with the GOP almost successfully blocking American participation in both world wars, the Marshall Plan, the United Nations and the Bretton Woods agreements that created the global economic infrastructure of the post-war years. Trump is merely a cruder version of a long line of conservative champions of these views.

However, if Trump refuses to pass the baton then Trumpism will fade. Some of his few intellectual champions have been working to create a Trumpism think tank to begin to move from angry tweet to researched policy, while whispering that this is the bridge to a new populist GOP for the post-Trump era. Trump did hit the 21st-century conservative gold seam. But Republicans are unlikely to let their party continue to be a subsidiary of the Trump Organization and a plaything for his children.

Unless Trump can be persuaded that he needs to focus on his financial and legal challenges immediately — and that he must not attempt to use his political platform to help him fight those personal nightmares — Trumpism will sink rapidly.

A Trumpist GOP, without Trump, has another enormous advantage. They have access to hundreds of millions of dollars of support from rich right-wing American PACs, foundations and billionaires. The Koch brothers created and funded the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute, think tanks that provided the policy underpinnings to the Reagan revolution. A new

generation of politically engaged billionaires from both Wall Street and Silicon Valley will back a new America First GOP agenda with generous support.

The consensus view today appears to be that Trump will not give up the political reins of his movement. I am not so sure. Trump watchers must never lose sight of his decision-making polestar, "Does this choice promise the best reward for me?" The humiliation of his loss may not be something he risks repeating. It would only be a very dim or deceitful lawyer, friend or family member who did not caution him: creditors and the courts will not be amused if they see him ignoring, or worse, attacking them.

American Republicans will soon face an existential choice. If Trump refuses to step back and they cannot tame or civilize Trumpism, they face defeat. If they force his departure in light of his likely criminal convictions, they risk provoking a massive internal civil war. Trump led them to near-victory a second time, but he has never achieved a majority of votes, sliding further behind this time. A third run by Trump or his children seems doomed.

If four years of Biden/Harris sees the defeat of COVID, a restored economy and a return to greater civil harmony, a grateful American public seems unlikely to vote for the bitter leader of the angry and aggrieved one more time. Will the GOP elders realize they must cut bait in time?

For Republican party leaders, the months following January 20, 2021 will be very testing indeed.