

Commentary

America's Terrible Choice

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Those still possessed of faith in the wisdom of the American electorate may soon have that conviction tested like never before. At some point in the last twenty years, both of America's two political parties became radicalized. The results of that polarization appear set to result in an alarming scenario. What if both parties nominate an unelectable candidate? What if the judgment of America's primary voters is indefensibly improper, and those Americans of character and conviction resolved never to legitimize or ratify it? What if the binary choice before American voters was abhorrent and the consequences of either choice so unthinkably terrible that neither is even remotely acceptable?

Those who are attracted to holding high political office are invariably men and women of great personal ambition. Those who would endure the grueling slog associated with a presidential bid are not only uniquely ambitious but are also possessed of an unusually high self-regard. These unlovely traits are, however, often tempered in the best candidates by a sense of duty as well as an appreciation for the weight of history and the American constitutional framework that has served for 240 years as a bulwark against tyranny. What if that admirable feature of the American system, that kind of civic and moral code, disappeared?

Democrats might be tempted to read more into Bernie Sanders' shocking victory in Michigan than is warranted. Yes, Sanders' romantic bid for his recently adopted party's presidential nomination will struggle along with a new burst of vigor, but his mission remains ill fated. While the Democratic Party's growing cohort of overt socialists will fight on to deny Hillary Clinton the nomination, and Sanders may yet win some shocking victories, it remains difficult to conceive of a scenario in which the former secretary of state is denied her party's nomination.

But Hillary Clinton is "unelectable." According to the latest *Washington Post/ABC News survey*, a majority of the country has an unfavorable opinion of the former first lady. Only 37 percent of respondents believe Clinton is honest and trustworthy. A narrow majority do not think that she "understands the problems of people like you." She will emerge her party's nominee only after she has been forced by the far-left elements of her party to embrace positions that are well out of step with the broader American electorate.

Worse, Hillary Clinton is a terrible model for the nation. She is obsessively conspiratorial and is prone to ascribing to Republicans powers of omnipotence rivaled only by their equally terrible malevolence. She fancies herself above the law, and she would not be bound by quaint notions of fealty to the Founders' ideals or constitutionalism. "When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal," said Clinton's mirror image over 40 years ago. Who knew that this dubious justification for immorality and impropriety also covered the secretary of state? Hillary Clinton's determination to mishandle classified American secrets of state invariably put lives at risk and diminished the nation's strategic position abroad. This is behavior that Americans cannot afford to see emulated in their children. Her actions have disqualified her from serving as commander-in-chief. If Hillary Clinton is nominated by her party to the presidency, it will represent a moral and intellectual failure on the part of Democratic voters that lacks much in the way of precedent. She must be opposed. The general electorate must not ratify the will of Democratic voters.

But Donald Trump is also "unelectable." That same *Washington Post*/ABC News poll found that Clinton is vastly preferable to Trump. Fewer than 30 percent of voters said they thought the real estate heir is trustworthy, understands their problems, or has the experience or temperament to serve as president. That poll found Trump losing to Clinton in a head-to-head matchup by 9 points, with the former first lady winning an outright majority of the vote. That trend away from Trump and toward Clinton has been accelerating, as it appears increasingly likely that the former reality television star will emerge the Republican Party's nominee.

Worse, as president, Donald Trump would weaken the very foundations of the country. Trump has insisted that he would order the U.S. soldiers under his command to commit crimes of war for which they are personally liable and dared his military commanders to stop him. Only when he was informed of the disaster he was inviting with such behavior did Trump release a statement reassuring Americans that he would be "bound by laws." That shouldn't be comforting because it is now clear that his instincts are despotic and violent. He routinely flirts with and condones the prospect of physical violence against his critics. His campaign has promised that there will be a mutiny at the convention if their candidate is not granted the nomination even if he lacks the delegate majority, and Trump campaign operatives have allegedly attacked reporters when discomfited by their line of questioning. Donald Trump is compulsively mendacious, is not possessed of one ounce of self-control, is narcissistic in the extreme, and has no regard for any precedent or law that might constrain his actions in the Oval Office. If Trump is nominated to serve as President of the United States, it will represent a moral and intellectual failure by Republicans of proportions that cannot be overstated. He must be opposed. The will of GOP primary voters must not be ratified by the general electorate.

So what can be done? The Cato Institute's Michael Tanner has identified a number of competing party vehicles that could nominate a Clinton/Trump alternative. Those minor parties might be able to get a candidate on the ballot in a handful of states. Their objective would not, however, be to elect a president but merely to stop Donald Trump from getting to the White House, which would only be the least horrible of two horrible outcomes. And who would finance such a

quixotic effort? Where would the millions come from for ballot access, let alone the tens or hundreds of millions necessary to mount a genuine national campaign? Not to be forgotten, where would this white knight come from? Who has the moral, political, and financial gravitas to serve as an alternative to the two major parties? Who would be willing to sacrifice him or herself, be battered in the press, humiliated by the two major parties, and lose ignominiously in November, and suffer the permanent consequences?

It is not yet assured that either Trump or Clinton will yet become their party's respective presidential nominees, but that outcome is looking more likely by the day. If that were to occur, the American people would face the mother of all lose-lose scenarios in the fall. The most cynical of tuned-out political satirists have always contended that presidential elections amount to a choice between the lesser of two evils. They haven't seen nothing yet.