



## How Trump Is Making the Stolen Election Narrative Work in His Favor

While Donald Trump's opponents in both major parties continue to count his eventual loss — whether in the upcoming GOP primary or in the 2024 general election — as a foregone conclusion, the reality is that the perseverant real estate mogul-turned president is still displaying the unique level of acumen that allowed him to pull off the ultimate underdog win in 2016.

One of the top gripes that Trump detractors have against him is his refusal to back down from the stolen election narrative.

Anti-Trump voices within the Republican Party have reasons for wishing Trump would stop talking about election fraud.

Of course, the prevailing belief among the GOP establishment is that there was no election fraud in 2020 and that Joe Biden, while problematic, is a perfectly legitimate president. Among this wing of the party, the Trumpian argument that 2020 was stolen remains taboo.

There is also fear among establishment Republicans that continued talk of election fraud will dissuade Republican voters from voting in upcoming elections. The reasoning goes: If people think the election is going to be stolen anyway, why would they bother voting?

Now, for Trump's camp, unveiling the truth about the 2020 election's integrity is a worthy purpose in and of itself. If the election was stolen (and there is certainly [ample evidence](#) suggesting that the race was far from pristine), then shouldn't we, as citizens in a republic whose existence depends upon the integrity of our elections, be concerned that an election was won through illicit means?

But there is another consequence of the Trumpian adherence to the stolen-election talking point that benefits Trump in a major way:

By framing Trump's 2020 election loss as not a real loss, but a case of a Deep State coup against him, Trump and his supporters are able to mitigate the sting of "defeat" that would hinder the electoral prospects of another candidate in his situation.

Put another way: In politics, one of the factors voters look at in their candidates is the notion of electability. People want the candidate who best represents their values, yes; but they also want someone they believe has a real shot at winning. This is why, fortunately or unfortunately, voters often go with the candidate who is better funded, even if said candidate doesn't fully represent them on the issues as much as another.

This is also why voters look unfavorably on perennial candidates. If a candidate has lost before, and especially if he has lost multiple times in the past, then the assumption is that he will lose again. Why, the logic goes, should one support a candidate who is destined to lose? Clearly, he doesn't know how to



Luis Miguel



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on May 7, 2023

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win elections.

For Trump, that tendency would be a stumbling block for his reelection chances. He lost once. Who's to say he won't lose again? This is why presidents who lose their reelection bids generally decide to call it quits and fade into history rather than giving it another shot four years later. Their loss marks them with the branding of defeat; voters, as a result, would rather take their chances with fresh blood.

But the refusal by Trump and his supporters to accept 2020 as a legitimate defeat allows the 45th president to avoid this branding among much of the Republican electorate.

*National Review's* Rich Lowry ruefully comes to that conclusion in a recent piece for [Politico](#).

Trump has ruled out of bounds one of the most telling critiques of him for Republican primary voters. Throwing at him that he lost a winnable election in 2020 should be the easiest criticism to make. It doesn't require departing with him on substance or attacking his character. It needn't involve condemning him for January 6. It should have, in theory, equal appeal to Trump fans and Trump skeptics, all of whom have a shared interest in defeating Biden. The argument can be swaddled in warm sentiments: "You did so much good and were such a brave fighter as president, Donald, so it's a real shame you lost. But you did. And we can't afford to lose again. Sorry."

Trump's contention that he actually won, and his intense bond with his supporters, creates the real possibility that making this case against him will boomerang, though.

And, as Lowry notes, all of this removes from the hands of Trump's Republican rivals one of the chief successful attacks they could use against him: The fact that he "lost."

Winning in a Republican primary means playing to the base. It means being the most conservative voice in the room. So no serious GOP contenders would try to go to the left of Trump on policy — but they could still attack him personally as a "loser" who lost a winnable election in 2020.

But Trump has successfully taken that attack point away from them. Now, any Republican candidates who try to criticize Trump for having "lost" are admitting they don't believe in the election-fraud narrative that has become such an integral rallying point among the base.



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