



Trumping History: Can The Donald Win the GOP Nomination?

Conventional wisdom says that Donald Trump (shown) is a flash in the political pan. Conventional wisdom says he can't actually win the GOP nomination. But sometimes conventional wisdom is wrong.



When Trump announced his presidential bid June 16, consensus among the commentariat was that it was more publicity stunt than plausible run. But then, tapping into anger over out-of-control immigration and, to a lesser extent, unfair trade practices, the real-estate magnate vaulted himself into first place in Republican polling. And now, with his support continuing to grow, some pundits are wondering: Could Trump trump convention and actually win the GOP nomination?

Writing at *Politico*, commentator Jeff Greenfield [suggested](#) Tuesday that the answer may in fact be yes. A day later, Reuters James Oliphant and Emily Flitter [wrote](#) that "some Republicans, especially those outside of Washington, are urging the party to take Trump's bid seriously, arguing that it's not out of the question that he could shock the world and win the primary." After all, "Trump is another product of the media environment," they write; they then quote former Iowa Republican Party chairman Craig Robinson, who noted, "Obama was a brand. Donald Trump is a brand. At the end of the day it was really cool to be an Obama supporter and really uncool to be a McCain or Romney supporter."

The reality of this star appeal was evidenced by last night's Fox News GOP debate: A whopping 24 million viewers watched the event, making it, [reports](#) *TV Newser*, "the highest non-sports cable program of all time, the highest-rated cable news program of all time, and Fox News's most-watched program ever." This "all-time, all-time, ever" status is attributable to only one thing: Donald Trump's presence on the stage.

Thus, what was supposed to be one of Trump's great weaknesses — his "unserious" celebrity status — is also one of his great strengths. More than ever we now live in a celebrity culture; [more Americans read](#) *People* magazine than any news magazine (where the professional pundits roam), and as *Forbes* [pointed out](#), "Nothing, it seems, attracts more eyeballs than celebrity gossip websites." This asset has translated into electoral victory before, mind you, when Arnold (the Terminator) Schwarzenegger and Jesse "the Body" Ventura won the governorships of, respectively, California and Minnesota.

So while Iowa radio host Steve Deace [says](#) that to win the GOP nomination Trump will have to "bring scores of new voters into the primary voting process," we might wonder: How many low-information voters will cast ballots for Trump simply because he's the guy on *The Apprentice*? This isn't to say that informed voters wouldn't support Trump, only that there's a huge swath of the electorate that votes on



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on August 7, 2015

superficial bases.

But it isn't just glitter and sizzle. Trump is proving something Ronald Reagan once noted when saying (I'm paraphrasing), "I long ago learned the difference between critics and box office." The critics — the professional punditry, political class, and professoriate — generally care about things the average Joe doesn't: politically correct posturing, Washington pedigree, and well-oiled campaign-trail salesmanship. But the GOP base has seen the bitter fruits of electing professional politicians. They gave the Republicans victories in 2010 and 2014 so resounding that the party now has numbers in the House unseen since Herbert Hoover days. The result? Instead of delivering an aggressive program opposing Barack Obama's agenda — largely what the Republicans were elected to do — they've made capitulation an art form. Just consider that in the six and a half years Obama has been in office, he's vetoed legislation only *four times*; this means the GOP Congress is largely disgorging the legislation he wants. Consequently and as Greenfield pointed out, voters' mood may be epitomized by that [famous line](#) from the film *Network*: "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

The voter alienation is likely even more serious than that, however. Evident here is a phenomenon spoken of in the interesting [documentary](#) *The Fourth Turning*. The documentarians posit that we've entered a phase of civilization in which cynicism about our fundamental institutions now prevails; during such a phase, people just don't think the country "works" anymore. This being the case, Americans are more inclined than ever to look for salvation beyond our institutions — and our institution candidates.

This phenomenon also helps explain the rise of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who has been gaining in the polls and challenging a listing Hillary Clinton for the Democrat nomination. Yes, he has held political office for 34 years and is the longest-serving Independent in congressional history. And in an age when old white guys are supposed to be on the outs (especially with the liberal base), he's old enough and white enough for two people. Yet he's quintessentially anti-establishment. A longtime avowed socialist, he is an Independent who, like Trump, speaks his mind; whether or not he's honest with himself, he enjoys the reputation of being honest with voters.

And this factor is significant. So much so that it inspired billionaire Mark Cuban — a hard-core leftist — to praise Trump, saying, "I don't care what his actual positions are.... I don't care if he says the wrong thing. He says what's on his mind. He gives honest answers rather than prepared answers. This is more important than anything any candidate has done in years."

Of course, the road to the nomination is a long and treacherous one, and Trump does have his deficits. The field he's leading in the polls comprises 17 contenders who are dividing up the vote. And many question whether Trump will be able to widen his support enough so that if the field is whittled down to just a few candidates — with the vanquished having endorsed an establishment choice upon their departure — he'll be able to retain his lead. As to this, Reuters cites a CBS News poll that "showed Trump to have the highest negative ratings of any Republican in the field."

And lowering these negatives may prove difficult. While former NYC mayor [Rudy Giuliani and others](#) have likened Trump to Reagan, he's definitely unlike the 40th president in one politically important way: the charm department. This came into focus again during last night's debate, when moderator Chris Wallace asked Trump about his four bankruptcies. While the candidate's answer was fine substantively — he pointed out that all successful businessmen use such laws to their advantage at times — it was delivered with a fire-breathing intensity that won't convert many fence sitters.



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Like it or not, “likeability” is a huge factor in electoral success. I’m reminded here of the fellow I spoke to a few years back who despised Obama and ObamaCare but adored Bill Clinton. When I pointed out that Clinton had tried to foist a healthcare plan much like ObamaCare on America, his response simply was, “Yeah, but I like him.”

Thus, it would serve Trump well to incorporate more humor into his presentations and to deflect criticism with cleverness and a smile. Sure, people are sick and tired of political correctness and want to hear the truth, but as George Barnard Shaw once warned, “If you are going to tell people the truth, you’d better make them laugh; otherwise they’ll kill you.”

In the meantime, however, Trump is killing the competition — and confounding it. This was perhaps reflected when Jeb Bush allegedly [told](#) a donor recently that Trump was “a buffoon,” a “clown,” and an “a**h*le” (an accusation Bush denied during the debate). Maybe Bush is frustrated by his lack of traction, but he has no one to blame but himself. For supporting amnesty and the Common Core education scheme won’t endear a candidate to the GOP electorate. In a nutshell, he has problems because nothing screams “establishment” quite like the name “Jeb Bush.”

Whatever one thinks of Trump, his candidacy certainly represents the true American spirit in one important way: It was never meant to be the case that you had to be part of a political ruling class to hold office in these United States. And who knows? With Americans tired of the Machiavellian maneuvering of our entrenched mandarins, a magnate might seem like a breath of fresh air.

Photo of Donald Trump: [Michael Vadon](#)



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