Donald John Trump was born in 1946 as the son of Frederick Christ Trump, a wealthy real-estate developer based in New York city, America. During the 1970s he joined his father's business and eventually became a prominent real-estate developer himself. This made him a wealthy man, as a consequence of which he regularly featured in the Forbes list of wealthy Americans from the 1980s onward.[1]

Trump used this status to become a media personality. In 1987 he published a book, "The Art of the Deal", which ended up being on the New York Times Best Seller list for 48 weeks. During the 1990s he then became a regular guest on a television talk show, the Howard Stern Show. Eventually, in 2003, Trump even launched his own television show, The Apprentice.[2]

He had flirted with the idea of becoming a politician since 2000. That year he said he was considering participating in the presidential elections. He said the same during the run-up to the elections in 2004, 2008 and 2012. In none of these cases did Trump take part in the election debates, when during 2015 rumours developed that he might join the elections of 2016, almost no one took these seriously.[3]

However, on the 15th of June 2015, in the lobby of his Trump Tower in New York, Donald Trump formally announced that he would join the race to become the 45th president of the United States. It is said that an event in 2011 inspired him to do so. During April 2011, at the annual White House Correspondents' Association Dinner, Donald Trump was lampooned by President Obama, which motivated him to join the presidential race. He first began to support various politicians, with significant amounts of money. And he reached out, informally, to the leaders of the Republican Party. Not only its leading politicians, but also the donors and media magnates that supported it. Because Trump was a celebrity, the Republican Party enjoyed its affiliation with Trump. It helped them to attract attention, and thus to gain favour with political donors and American voters. The resulting interactions convinced Trump to speak to professional election campaign managers, in a bid to learn more about his chances of winning an election and about the preparations he would need to make to run a competitive campaign.[4]
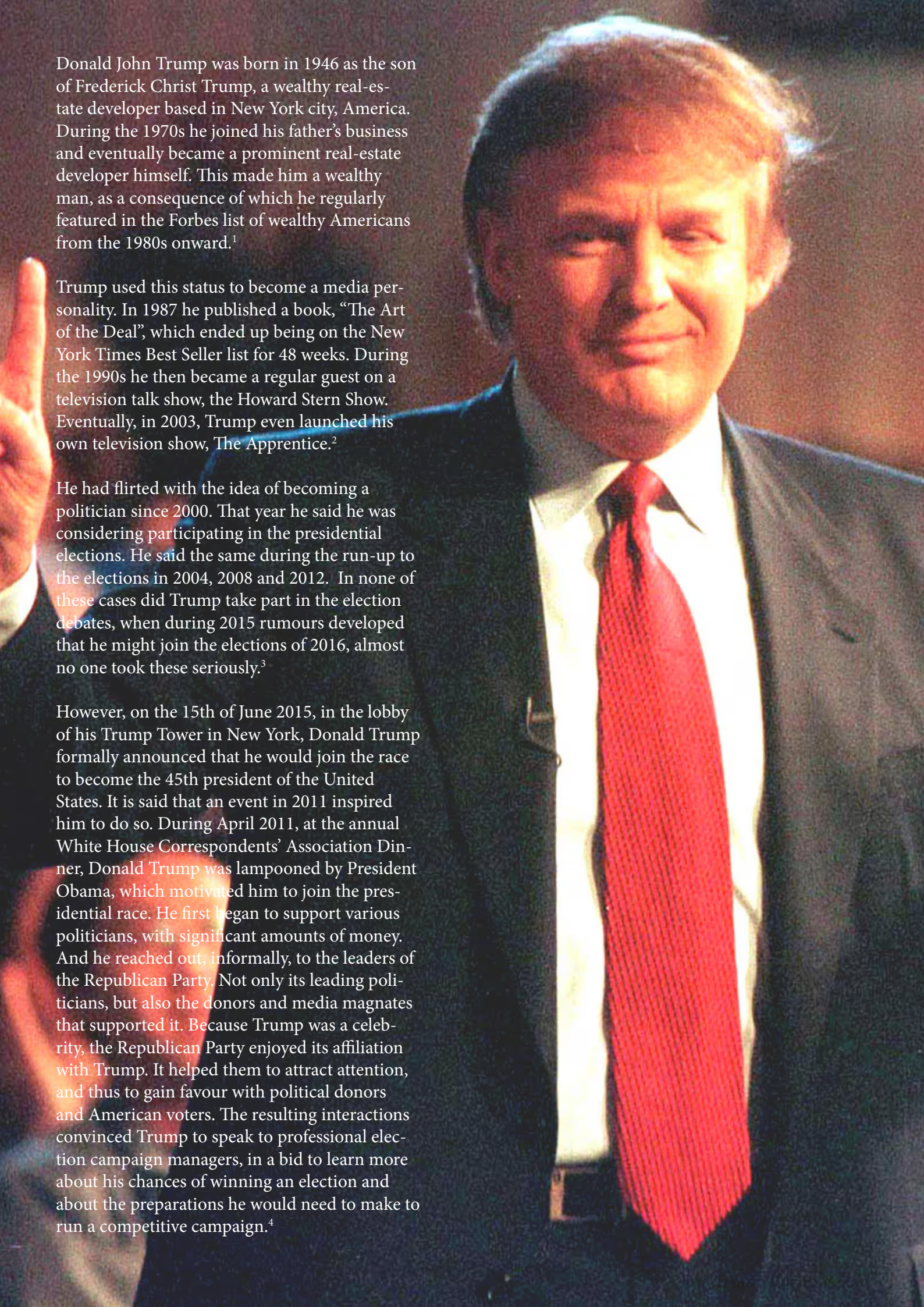
The Trump Platform

Both during and immediately after his 2015 speech, Trump set out the platform of policies on the basis of which he would run for president of the United States.[5]

This platform was markedly different from the one he formulated in 2000. At that time, he considered running for president as the candidate for the Reform Party, and he positioned himself as a progressive focused on anti-discrimination, gay rights, universal healthcare and tax reform to increase the tax burden on wealthy Americans.[6] In 2015, however, Trump presented himself as a strongly conservative political outsider. This time, his basic proposition was that established politicians of the previous years, both Democratic and Republican, had weakened the United States. *"Our country is in serious trouble",* he said. *"When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal? They kill us. (…) When did we beat Japan at anything? (…) When do we beat Mexico at the border?."* This, Trump said, had caused the problems the American people were experiencing, such as poverty, crime, a lack of jobs, drugs, and terrorism. *"They're laughing at us, at our stupidity. And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they're killing us economically. The United States has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. (…) A lot of people can't get jobs. They can't get jobs, because there are no jobs, because China has our jobs and Mexico has our jobs. They all have jobs. (…) We're becoming a third world country, because of our infrastructure, our airports, our roads,* *everything."* He promised that as president, he would fix all the mentioned problems. *"We need a leader that can bring back our jobs, can bring back our manufacturing, can bring back our military. (…) We need somebody that can take the brand of the United States and make it great again. (…) I'll bring back our jobs from China, from Mexico, from Japan, from so many places. I'll bring back our jobs, and I'll bring back our money. (…) I would build a great wall, (…) a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall. (…) Nobody would be tougher on ISIS than Donald Trump. (…) I will find the guy that's going to take that military and make it really work. (…) I will stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons. (…) I will immediately terminate President Obama's illegal executive order on immigration. Fully support and back up the Second Amendment. (…) Rebuild the country's infrastructure. (…) Save Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security without cuts. Get rid of the fraud. Get rid of the waste and abuse, but save it. (…) Renegotiate our foreign trade deals. Reduce our $18 trillion in debt. And strengthen our military and take care of our vets. (…) if I get elected president I will bring it back bigger and better and stronger than ever before, and we will make America great again."*

Perhaps most importantly, Trump promised that once in office he would not be like the other politicians. *"Well, you need somebody, because politicians are all talk, no action. (…) We have losers. We have losers. We have people that don't have it. We have people that are morally corrupt. We have people*

that are selling this country down the drain." And he promised he would place the ordinary Americans at the core of his policies, but promising, unlike the other politicians, he would not listen to America's elites. He promised he would not do the bidding of big business. And would not be influenced by their lobbyists or their money. *"I don't need anybody's money. I'm using my own money. I'm not using the lobbyists. I'm not using donors. I don't care. I'm really rich."*

> *"This platform was markedly different from the one he formulated in 2000. At that time, he considered running for president as the candidate for the Reform Party, and he positioned himself as a progressive focused on anti-discrimination, gay rights, universal healthcare and tax reform to increase the tax burden on wealthy Americans"*

Trumps platform in 2015 was markedly different from the one he formulated in 2000. Through this platform Trump positioned himself to tap into a sentiment that had been building for years among large segments of conservative America, but that had been ignored by mainstream Republican politicians.

Since 2008, namely, a majority of Americans told pollsters that they believed the country was on the wrong track. Foreign wars, terrorist threats, recessions, slow growth, political gridlock, culture wars, and declining incomes undermined the faith they had in America's systems and established politicians. One of the first expressions of this sentiment was the Tea Party movement, the first populist movement by angry, white middle-class, conservative, Republican voters of the 21st century. It was launched in 2009 in response to President Obama's handling of the Global Financial Crisis, which featured massive bailouts for the banks who had caused the crisis, but not for the people who suffered its consequences through loss of jobs and homes. The view of the Tea Party movement was that the American government, "Washington" as they referred to it, was incompetent. That wherever it intervened, it only made matters worse. The Tea Party movement therefore argued for a smaller government, with more freedom for the people, and lower taxes. It also called for America to return to an isolationist foreign policy.

Trump aligned himself with this sentiment regarding America and its federal government in Washington DC.

The Road to the Presidency

Initially, almost no one believed Donald Trump had any real chance to win the election. They thought other candidates from the Republican Party had much better prospects, because they were more experienced politicians, more capable, and more realistic in the policies they proposed. The opinion polls also suggested Trump could not win. According to a RealClearPolitics average of polls, only 3.6% of Republican voters supported Trump to become the Republican candidate for the presidency, the lowest of all Republicans vying for the position at that time.

Only a few analysts felt Trump stood a chance. Republican media strategist Adam Goodman believed Trump's status as an outsider billionaire, and his "America First" slogan, could be appealing to the segment of American voters that believed the country was not doing well. "*In a way he's sending a signal to a lot of Americans who are not making it, which is: 'Put me in place, and I will make sure America's brand is back on top again.' 'I will make sure that when I am president of the United States, I will do everything I can to put you first, and allow you the opportunities I had to make it and fulfil the American dream.' (…) That's a pretty sexy message for anyone to hear.*" But such voices were the exception, as evidenced by analysis of media reporting of the race for the Republican candidacy during 2015.[7] That year, Trump received much more media attention than other candidates.

Two indicators normally explain the news coverage a candidate receives.

First, standing in the polls. Second, the ability to raise money for campaigning. A strong performance in these areas indicates a person is a viable candidate, and thus worthy of being spoken about. Trump was neither high in the polls, nor did he have a lot of funds available to him to run his campaign. But, he benefited from the media personality he had created before turning to politics. And because journalists are attracted to the new, the unusual, the sensational, the outrageous, since that is the type of story that can catch and hold an audience's attention, Trump made for perfect media content. Consequently, from the 1st of January to the 31st of December, 2015, Trump received positive and neutral coverage by CBS, Fox, the Los Angeles Times, NBC, The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post worth an estimated $55 million, some 40% more than his main competitors Jeb Bush, Mark Rubio and Ted Cruz.

> "almost no one believed Donald Trump had any real chance to win the election. They thought other candidates from the Republican Party had much better prospects, because they were more experienced politicians, more capable, and more realistic in the policies they proposed."

This positive media coverage for Trump was not because of his analysis of America's situation, or

the solutions he proposed. The focus of by far most media reports is on the results of the polls, and the activities and events undertaken by the candidates. During 2015, only 12% of media reports on Trump focused on his policies, and 6% on his personal characteristics. The media typically applies four basic story lines when reporting on elections. A candidate is either "leading", "trailing", "gaining ground", or "losing ground." Of these four, the most positive one is the "gaining ground" storyline, as it creates an image of a candidate as the underdog, who emerges from the back of the pack, against the odds, to defeat the expected winner. It is a storyline that is very impactful in American society. The media typically reported on Trump as the underdog candidate gaining ground. He started with very low poll numbers, but was able to make these numbers increase almost consistently. The activities and events Trump participated in also drew large crowds. Two out of three media reports were really about this.
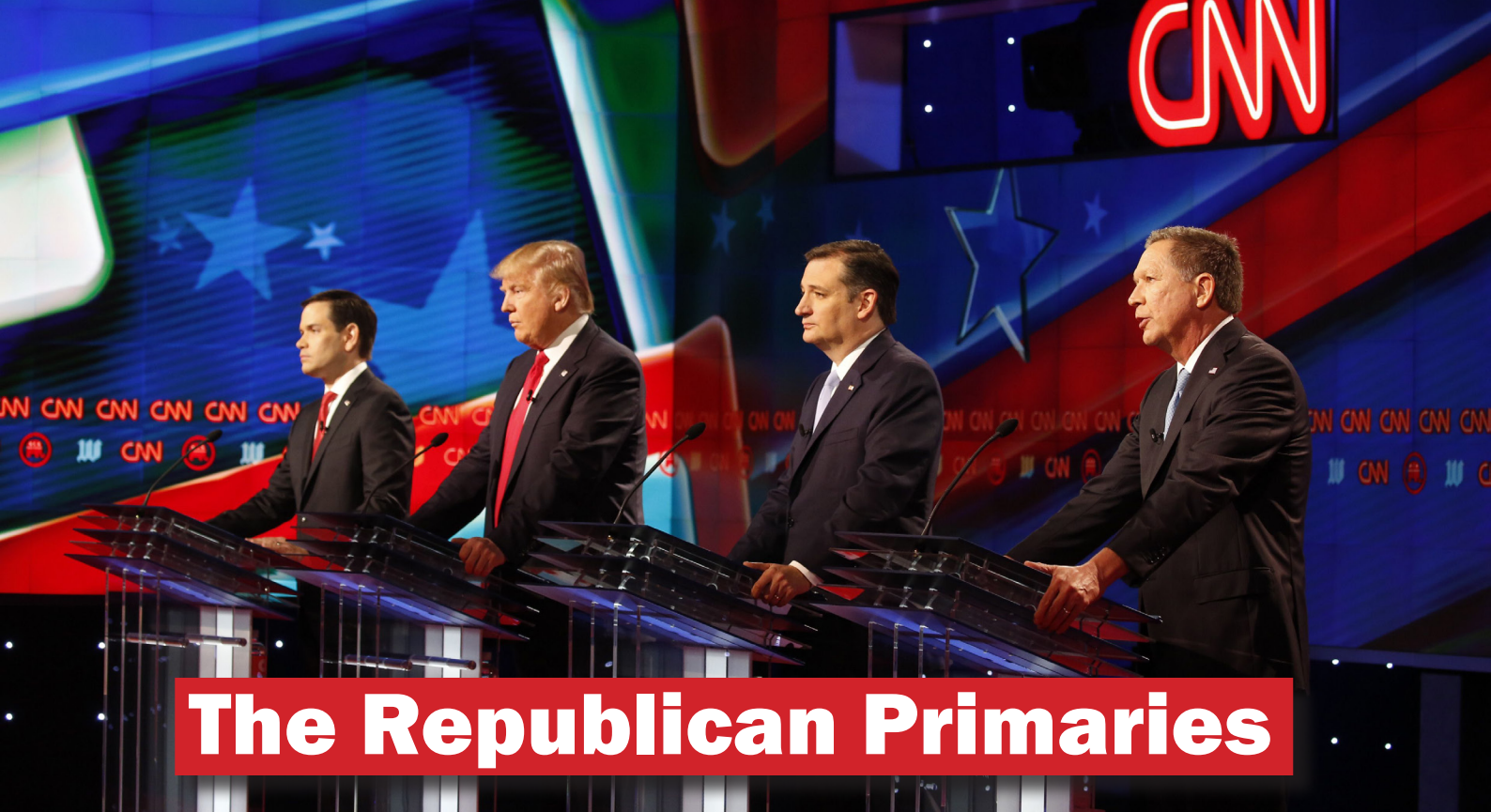
Trump was not the only candidate who experienced this support from the media. Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio all received substantial coverage during 2015. Jeb Bush led the polls early on, and as a result received mostly the "leading candidate" positive coverage during the first half of 2015. This changed during the second half of 2015 when his results in the polls worsened – causing the media to refer to him as the candidate "losing ground", a negative portrayal.

Marco Rubio's results in the earliest polls hovered around 5 – 10% support, which made him a viable candidate, as a result of which he received substantial positive media coverage early on. Ted Cruz also achieved 5 – 10% support in the early polls. For most of 2015 this didn't change, which supported his media coverage in the same way it did Marco Rubio. Because Rubio's poll results did not increase as the year progressed, the media lost some interest in him as nothing exciting happened to capture their interest. On the other hand, in the last two months of 2015 Cruz's poll numbers began trending upward, which drove the positive media coverage for him upward.

The second largest category of subjects covered by the media when it came to Trump in 2015 was scandals. During 2015 scandals involving Trump received more attention than scandals involving the other Republican contenders. 12% of all media coverage of Trump addressed his scandals, of which 43% was negative in tone. For Ted Cruz, for example, the numbers were 9% and 32%, respectively.

Taken together, by the end of 2015 all these media reports had created an image of the Republican Primary election that would take place in 2016, as a race in which Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio were the candidates with a realistic possibility of winning.

FOX NEWS POLL
"WOULD NEVER VOTE FOR"
AMONG LIKELY REPUBLICAN PRIMARY VOTERS

DONALD TRUMP 59% | CHRIS CHRISTIE 37% | JEB BUSH 24% | MIKE HUCKABEE 24% | RAND PAUL 20% | CARLY FIORINA 17%

TED CRUZ 16% | JOHN KASICH 15% | BEN CARSON 12% | MARCO RUBIO 12% | SCOTT WALKER 8%

MAY 31 - JUNE 2, ± 5%

The Republican Primaries

Trump's platform, his personality, and the media attention, significantly increased support for him. This showed in the poll numbers throughout 2015. In fact, from July onwards, he was the favourite candidate of Republican voters in almost all major polls. The polls also found that those who supported Trump generally did so because they were "disgusted" by the conventional Republican Party politicians, so they wanted to give an "outsider" a chance. Nevertheless, throughout 2015 the leaders of the Republican Party refused to acknowledge that Trump had a chance of winning the Republican Primary and becoming the Republican candidate for the presidential elections of 2016. They assumed he would make a mistake that would turn off the voters. Or that a scandal would damage him beyond repair. And that eventually the voters would realise that only a conventional, established Republican politician could do the job of president better than him.

Early 2016, however, some in the leadership of the Republican Party, the so-called GOP, started to become worried. They realised Trump was becoming a serious candidate. But, they did not want a Republican candidate for the presidency who was not a conventional, established Republican politician. They did not want someone who criticised the other Republican politicians. Worse still, someone who criticised the policies the Republican Party had been promoting for decades. Leading Republicans therefore began efforts to unite the Republican Party against Trump. Karl Rove, the master strategist of George W. Bush's campaigns, argued that a Donald Trump victory in

the Republican Primaries would be catastrophic for the Republican Party. Mitch McConnell, the leader of the Republican members in the United States' Senate, laid out a plan to try and make sure all Republican politicians would explicitly argue against Trump. The Republican strategists Alex Castellanos and Gail Gitcho, both presidential campaign veterans, reached out to dozens of the party's leading donors, including the casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and the hedge-fund manager Paul Singer, in an attempt to gather money for a media campaign against Trump. But none of these plans were able to unite the Republican Party against Trump. For one, because many members and donors continued to believe that Trump could not win, and thus that action to prevent it was not necessary. For another, because the other Republican politicians in the Republican Primary race did not want to collaborate against Trump. So, when Mitt Romney, himself a former Republican candidate for the presidency in 2008, tried to embarrass Donald Trump by asking him to show his tax returns, because this would reveal that Donald Trump was not as wealthy as he had said he was, almost nobody paid attention and even fewer supported him in his efforts.

> "Some in the leadership of the Republican Party, the so-called GOP, started to become worried. They realised Trump was becoming a serious candidate. But, they did not want a Republican candidate for the presidency who was not a conventional, established Republican politician"

While the elites of the Republican Party grew colder towards Trump, the media continued to love him. Its fascination with Trump's candidacy, which had begun in 2015, carried into the Republican Primary election phase, which lasted from the 1st of January until the 7th of June, 2016. Week after week, Trump got the most press attention. There was not a single week when Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, or John Kasich topped Trump's level of coverage.

For as long as there were competitors in the race, this Trump coverage was slightly balanced toward the positive (53%). After Trump's competitors all left the race, however, and Trump became the only remaining candidate, the media coverage flipped to become largely negative (61%). This had to do with the subjects the media likes to cover during an election race. Most media attention looks at the polling results. During early 2016, Trump performed well in the first four contests, Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina. This made for an interesting story, as it meant the "underdog" who was "gaining ground" in 2015, had closed the gap with his rivals to become the "leading candidate", and thus explains the positive coverage Trump received over this period. However, the small amount of coverage dedicated to Trump's policies and character was an almost constant source of negative coverage. Here the number of negative reviews was 10 times larger than the number of positive reviews. Therefore, as Trump's

eventual victory in the Republican Primary became more certain, and media attention for his successes in the primary-elections reduced while attention for his policies and characteristics increased, the overall media coverage of Trump turned decisively negative during April and May of 2016 (54%). During June, the last month of the Republican Primaries when it had become certain that Trump would win, the coverage Trump received even became significantly skewed to the negative (61%).

Trump's ultimate victory in the Republican Primary was not, therefore, because he was supported by the elites in the Republican Party, or because the media pushed him. The media did feature him, but not any more positively than the other candidates, who could rely on support from leaders within the Republican Party. Trump won the Republican Primary because the Republican voters really bought into the persona he created for himself, an outsider candidate who would not do the same thing all other politicians did, but would sincerely and honestly address their complaints, the complaints which they had been having for a long time, but that had never been listened to by the conventional, established Republican politicians. As a result, the more these conventional, established Republican politicians criticised Donald Trump for not conforming to the Republican orthodoxy, the more these Republican voters loved him.
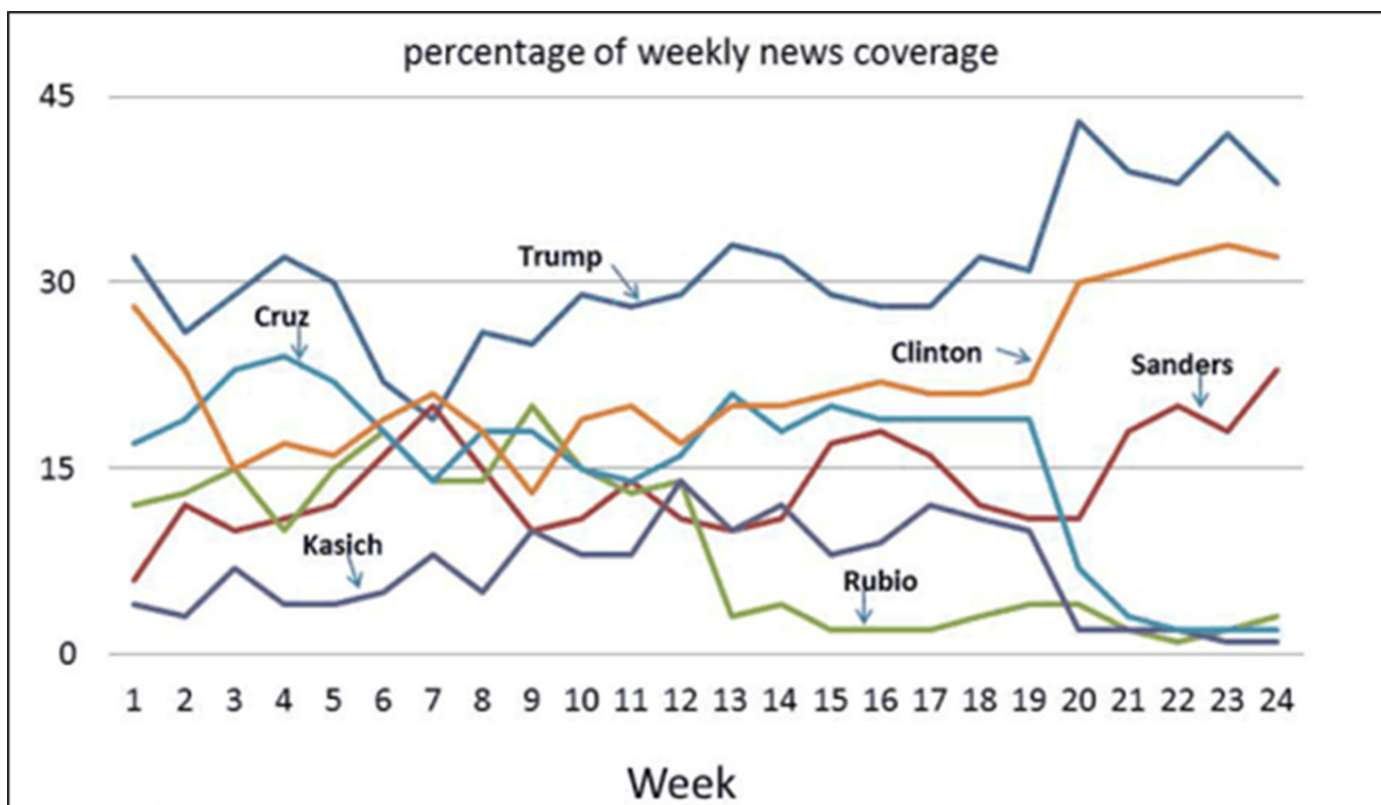
The Presidential Election

The Presidential Election of 2016, which ran from August to November and saw Donald Trump as the Republican candidate take on Hillary Clinton from the Democratic Party. Despite Trumps victory in the Republican primaries this did not change the attitude of the conventional, established Republican politicians towards him. Throughout the presidential campaign large numbers of prominent Republican politicians called for people not to vote for the Republican candidate for the American presidency, and instead vote for the candidate of the Democratic Party. In August of 2016 former Republican congressman John LeBoutillier told the BBC he believed many Republican politicians would support Clinton. *"I think in private a lot of Republican congressmen are going to vote for Hillary, they can't stand Trump"*, he said. Among the Republican elites who at that time had already said they would not vote for Trump were Barbara Bush, the former first lady; Jeb Bush, the former Florida governor; Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina senator and 2016 presidential candidate; Larry Hogan, Maryland governor; John Kasich, Ohio governor; and Mitt Romney, the former Massachusetts governor and 2012 Republican presidential nominee.[8]

However, the media maintained its preference for Trump, giving him 15% more coverage than Clinton. Trump's coverage was more negative than that of Clinton. Clinton's coverage was 64% negative while that of Trump was 77% negative. For Clinton this was largely a continuation of the kind of media coverage she had received earlier in 2015 and 2016. For Trump this was a change, as earlier his media coverage had been predominantly positive.

Clinton's coverage during the general election was negative across CBS, Fox, the Los Angeles Times, NBC, The New York Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post, but by varying degrees. The Los Angeles Times was 53% negative, while Fox was 81% negative. For Trump, coverage was significantly negative across all media outlets. Fox provided Trump his most favourable coverage, but it was still 73% negative.

> *"Throughout the presidential campaign large numbers of prominent Republican politicians called for people not to vote for the Republican candidate for the American presidency"*

As during the Pre-Primaries and the Primaries, media coverage was extremely light on policy and the characteristics that defined the candidates. By far most coverage, 42%, concerned the competitive race between the candidates. This coverage was overwhelmingly negative for Trump (78%), as he was presented as the "likely loser" throughout the period. For Clinton this coverage was 62% positive. Just 17% of media coverage discussed the policies proposed by the candidates or their suitability for the presidential

office. In this area there was no difference between the candidates in the tone of the coverage, however. For both candidates the coverage was 87% negative and only 13% positive. A further 17% of media coverage was dedicated to controversies surrounding the candidates. In this area, coverage of Clinton focused on her use of a private email account for official email communications; the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya, which led to the death of the American ambassador in the country; and FBI investigations into her conduct. This coverage was 91% negative. For Trump the controversies were his verbal attack on the parents of an American soldier, Khizr and Ghazala Khan, after they had criticised him in a speech at the Democratic convention; the dealings of the Trump Foundation; his refusal to release his tax returns; his avoidance of paying federal taxes; his allegation that the election system was rigged against him; his refusal to say that he would accept the election outcome; the video that captured him bragging about groping women without their consent; and his alleged ties to Russia. Coverage of Trump's controversies was 92% negative, a level similar to Clinton.

While media coverage of both candidates was negative throughout the period, a noticeable change occurred during the last two weeks of the election campaign. The media increased the amount of coverage of Clinton's controversies, from around 7% on average throughout the campaign to almost 33%. Consequently, negative coverage of Clinton increased from the previously typical 50 – 60% to more than 70%. At the same time, negative coverage of Trump reduced, from the previously typical 70 – 90% to around 65%. This is explained by the fact that one of Clinton's major scandals, her handling of confidential government emails, was escalated on the 28th of October, 2016, just 11 days before election day, when FBI Director James Comey announced a new investigation into the matter. Although this investigation was mostly presented by the media as "damaging but not damaging enough to cost her the election," and was officially closed on the 6th of November, 2016, 2 days before election day when it was announced Clinton had not done anything wrong, it was used by Trump to attack Clinton during the critical last days. This explains the sudden increase in negative coverage for Clinton during the last two weeks of the campaign.

President Trump

In the end, Donald Trump was elected as the 45th president of the United States. This did not happen because the Republican Party supported him – over 50 leading Republican politicians called upon the people not to vote for Trump.[9] It also didn't happen because the media supported him– they were more negative about Trump than about Clinton even during most of the election period. And it wasn't because Trump had the biggest support from the voters – in fact, 3 million more people voted for Hillary Clinton than for Donald Trump. What helped Trump win was a combination of events and decisions.

Firstly, the timing of the Comey Affair enabled Trump develop an edge over Clinton in the important states Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Florida, North Carolina and Arizona. This refers to a letter FBI director James Comey sent to the United States Congress just a few days before the election, to inform them that Hillary Clinton would be investigated by the FBI for storing sensitive official information on her personal computer. This accusation turned a significant number of voters against Clinton.

Secondly, Trump's so-called Electoral College strategy was better than that of Clinton. Trump did not focus on winning as many votes as possible. He also did not focus on winning as many states as possible. He focused his resources on the states in America where he could beat Clinton, and that would give him enough of the electoral votes that determine the president. This is why Trump focused on states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Thirdly, the platform Trump chose to run his election on, his rallying against conventional, established politicians and orthodox policies, attracted the segment of the voting public that enabled him to beat Clinton in the critical states. This segment was the typically older, primarily working class, lower educated, white men. Clinton had referred to the exact same segment as "deplorables."

Fourthly, the techniques Trump chose to use to identify these voters and communicate with them.

Trump was able to perfect his messaging to his audience through his collaboration with a company named Cambridge Analytics. Cambridge Analytics had invented a way to create profiles of individuals by using Facebook data. The elections of 2016 were the first where this technology could play a role, as Facebook was founded only in 2006 and did not reach significant scale until late 2012-early 2013. For the Trump campaign Cambridge Analytics gathered data from over 50 million American voters, and processed this data to develop a deep understanding of both the thoughts and emotions of these people – what they thought was important, what made them angry, and so on. This then enabled Trump to send personalised messages to these people, using platforms such as Facebook, but also Google, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube, to convince these people to vote for him. It was a revolutionary new approach to campaigning, which took the Clinton campaign by surprise.

Commander-in-Chief

After confirmation of the electoral result, the conventional, established Republican politicians manoeuvred to manage Trump's cabinet decisions. Trump chose to make Mike Pence, a long term Republican politician, his vice-president and the leader of his transition team. He further appointed Reince Priebus, who was the Republican National Committee chairman and a long term ally of Mitch McConnell, the leader of the Republican members in the United States' Senate who had been campaigning inside the Republican Party against Trump throughout 2016, as his chief of staff. Republican stalwarts also appointed Elaine Chao, the wife of McConnell, as Secretary of Transportation. Tom Price, who Trump appointed as Health Secretary, was a close friend of another of Trump's main rivals in the Republican Party, Paul Ryan, the Republican speaker of the United States House of Representatives.

Further established, conventional Republicans in Trump's cabinet were senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama who was appointed as attorney general; Mike Pompeo of Kansas who became CIA director; and Tom Price of Georgia who became secretary of health and human services. As Education Secretary Trump appointed Betsy DeVos, not a politician but a long term Republican donor who was much liked by and very close with the leadership of the Republican Party.

Trump agreed to appoint Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of oil giant ExxonMobil, as Secretary of State, based on the advice of Republican foreign policy veterans Condoleezza Rice, who was Secretary of State under George W. Bush; Robert Gates, who served as Secretary of Defense under both George W. Bush and Barack Obama; Stephen Hadley, George W. Bush's national security adviser; and James Baker, who served as White House Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Treasury under Ronald Reagan.

"the man who had promoted himself as an "outsider", ended up working with nothing but conventional "establishment insiders" in the critical positions in his government."

Steve Mnuchin's appointment as Secretary of the Treasury could be considered surprising, as he was not known as a long-time Republican. However, this appointment followed the long-standing tradition of American presidents to appoint Wall Street insiders to lead the Treasury. Mnuchin worked for Goldman Sachs for two decades, after which he founded his own hedge fund, Dune Capital. Under Bill Clinton, from 1995 until 1999, Robert Rubin, a former co-chairman of Goldman Sachs, was Secretary of the Treasury. Under Barack Obama another former CEO of Goldman Sachs, Hank Paulson, had served as Secretary of the Treasury, from 2006 until 2009. Trump

chose another former Goldman Sachs executive, Gary Cohn, to lead the National Economic Council. By and large, therefore, Trump made the kind of appointments that would be expected of a conventional, established traditional Republican candidate.

The only people on Trump's early team that were not either from, or closely associated with, the leadership of the Republican Party, were Steve Bannon, Trump's chief strategist, and Michael Flynn, a former Lieutenant General. Bannon was Trump's closest advisor and referred to as "the most dangerous political operative in America" by both Democratic and Republican establishment politicians who deeply resented him. While Flynn was appointed national security adviser, Bannon was given a leadership position in the "prin-

cipals committee" of the National Security Council, America's principal forum for national security and foreign policy decision-making. Not much later, however, Flynn was fired from his position, accused of lying to vice-president Pence. He was replaced by General H.R. McMaster, a long term member from the military establishment, who almost immediately began work to ensure Bannon was sidelined. That happened early April 2017, just 2 months into Trump's presidency, and resulted in a Trump administration purely made up of "establishment insiders". In other words, the man who had promoted himself as an "outsider", ended up working with nothing but conventional "establishment insiders" in the critical positions in his government.

Change the Trump Way

The policies executed by president Trump were largely aligned with the preferences of the Republican Party's leadership, or continuations of existing American strategies. Also, because in the rare instances where Trump threatened to interfere in the work of his cabinet members, and tried to push through his own unorthodox opinions, lower levels of the American state worked to block him. In 2018 a high-ranking civil servant wrote an article for the New York Times to explain how he and his colleagues worked to prevent Trump from having any influence over policy decisions. "We are trying to do what's right even when Donald Trump won't", he said. In 2020 the author was revealed to have been Miles Taylor, the chief of staff in the Department of Homeland Security. In 2020 another leading civil servant, Jim Jeffrey, revealed that he and his fellow diplomats regularly lied to Trump to prevent him from influencing policy decisions.

For example the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement between 11 Asian countries and the United States, from which Trump withdrew. It was set to become the world's largest free trade deal, covering 40% of the global economy. Negotiations were started during the presidency of George W. Bush, and were continued during the presidency of Barack Obama as part of his strategic pivot to Asia. Trump's

withdrawal is therefore often presented as him cancelling out the policy of his predecessors. However, during the 2016 election campaigns, various Democratic and Republican politicians had already begun to argue against it. This included Hillary Clinton, who as Secretary of State under Obama had been tasked with organising it.[40] In reality, therefore, Trump's cancellation of the TPP was less a "Trump aberration" and more an expression of broadly shared objections against it.

This is also the reality of Trump's decision to cancel and then renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between America, Canada and Mexico. It was concluded in 1994 and had already come under attack by both Democratic and Republican politicians over the years preceding the Trump presidency. For example, in 2008 Obama had also promised to renegotiate NAFTA. Consequently, Trump's renegotiated deal agreed in 2019 was supported by both the Democratic and Republican parties.

Consequently, the policies executed by president Trump were largely aligned with the preferences of the Republican Party's leadership, or continuations of existing American strategies

The tax reform implemented by Trump in 2017 was a continuation of Republican policy going back as far as 1981, when Republican president Ronald Reagan drastically reformed the American tax laws. In 2001 Republican president George W. Bush introduced a further tax reform.[42] Trump's tax reform was also passed with full backing by the Republican Party, many of whom also personally benefited from the new rules.

Trump has also been heavily criticised for his decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord and to cancel various forms of legislation designed to protect the environment. But as far the Paris Climate Accord is concerned, the Republican Party had always opposed it, even before Trump. In 2015 the leadership of the Republican Party even organised a global effort to try and cancel all the environmental policies implemented during the presidency of Barack Obama (2008 – 2016). Even currently the Republican Party is challenging president Biden's decision to re-enter the Paris Climate Accord. In other words, Trump's environmental policy was in line with preferences of the established Republican politicians.

Foreign Policy Continuity

As to foreign policy, Trump controversially cancelled the nuclear deal America had agreed with Iran during the Obama presidency, increased tensions with Russia among other ways through cancelling the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) of 1987, and also increased tensions with China by launching a Trade War using the accusation China practised unfair trade practices, spying and currency manipulation. Additionally, Trump controversially moved the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, organised the so-called Abraham Accords under which the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco agreed to formally normalise relations with Israel, pressured Germany to abandon the Nord Stream 2 project to pipeline natural gas from Russia into Europe, and supported a coup in Venezuela.

President Trump's acts regarding Iran, Russia and China were all natural continuations of the foreign policies defined and implemented during the presidency of Barack Obama, according to George Friedman, the leading analyst of geopolitics and founder of geopolitical risk consultancy STRATFOR as well as the geopolitical forecasting agency Geopolitical Futures.

The Obama policy consisted of reducing military forces in the Middle East and creating a new relation-

ship with the Muslim world; adopting a more adversarial stance on Russia, including Moscow's forays in its near abroad; and confronting China on trade relations and, specifically, Beijing's manipulation of its currency. According to Friedman, Trump similarly sought to withdraw troops from the Middle East and to create a new relationship in the region. He was instrumental in formalising a coalition structure consisting of certain Arab nations and Israel against Iran, and made some unexpected troop withdrawals. He brought economic pressure on China. And finally, he continued to confront Russia, maintaining American forces in Poland, Romania and the Black Sea. During both Obama and Trump's administrations, therefore, the key elements of foreign policy were the withdrawal and restructuring of the Middle East, containing Russia and confronting China. The language, gestures and general atmosphere were different, but the underlying reality was the same.

This analysis, that Trump continued the policies of his predecessors, rather than abandoned them, is confirmed by president Biden. From the very beginning, Biden announced he would not fundamentally change the policies Trump implemented on Iran and China. Regarding Iran Biden communicated that while he would reopen negotiations, he too would not return to the nuclear deal from the Obama era. Biden also continued with Trump's trade war with

China.

As to president Trump's policies regarding Israel, the fact that these were in line with a longer term American policy, rather than specific Trump initiatives, is evidenced by the fact that president Biden has confirmed his administration would continue to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. According to Ian Bremmer, another leading analyst of geopolitical affairs and founder of the geopolitical risk consultancy Eurasia group, the Abraham Accords were a major success for the Trump administration because they achieved what American policy had since long aimed to achieve, but which previous administration had failed to achieve.[54]

As a result of all this, the view among foreign policy analysts is that Biden's foreign policy is nothing short of a continuation of Trump's foreign policy. This is a clear indication that during his presidency, Trump did not go against the policies preferred by America's established politicians. Rather, as should have been expected after Trump's appointment of establishment insiders to his cabinet, he faithfully executed them. Just as Biden is doing at present.

Trump forced himself upon the American political establishment. They did not want him, but in the end they were unable to stop him, because they had ignored him while they still could. In the end, however, they controlled him, by ensuring his cabinet consisted of "their people", establishment politicians and civil servants. Thereby they ensured they limited the damage the "unwanted president" could do to the objectives, policies and plans of America, in the areas that are of critical importance to the country.

President Trump thereby revealed the reality of the American democratic system. The people get to vote for a president. But the objectives, policies and plans are decided not by the president. They are decided by people behind the scenes, the establishment politicians and civil servants who George Friedman refers to as America's "deep state".[10]

Nevertheless, during his presidency Trump greatly upset America's establishment. This he did through his outbursts, which undermined the status and image of America across the world, and through his general impotence as a president, which was clearly articulated by Trump's former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as well as by Trump's former National Security Advisor John Bolton, and which was evidenced by his mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis.

This explains why the American establishment went to great lengths to prevent Trump from achieving a second presidential term. The leadership of the Republican Party made sure it did not repeat its mistakes from 2016. It was organised in opposition to Trump. It established the Defending Democracy Together organisations to convince Republican voters that Trump does not represent their views. It also established Project Lincoln to actively campaign

against Trump. And it united its leading members to form a front against Trump, in support of Joe Biden. The American establishment also ensured the major social media companies prevented a repeat of 2016, when Trump used their platforms to establish an edge over Hillary Clinton. During October 2020 Twitter began tagging Trump's messages with a warning label saying his claims were "unsubstantiated". That same month, Facebook removed all accounts linked to the QAnon conspiracy group which supports Trump, and in November it blocked the Stop the Steal group that was used to rally support for Trump. From October onward Twitter and Facebook also prevented the sharing of news that was damaging to the Biden campaign – an act of censorship that was left unchallenged by American media. In January of 2021 these platform then took the unusual step of permanently removing Trump's access to their platforms.

Nevertheless, Trump is likely to have a lasting impact on America. Trump gave a voice to a large segment of American society that feels abandoned by the conventional, establishment politicians. This segment of society has been given confidence by Trump, and in return they gave him 74 million votes during the 2020 elections.

This has worsened polarisation in America. It has increased the level of division and animosity between the different segments of society, which is damaging for America as it undermines the willingness of these different groups to collaborate. Trump also undermined trust in America's democratic system, in particular through his claims the 2020 election was fraudulently won by Joe Biden, which undermines the legitimacy of the American government, the respect for its formal institutions, and consequently the stability of American society.

The Trump Doctrine ?

It's difficult to give President Trump a label or even a doctrine because he has never held public office. Trump is also a mercurial liar of the highest order. He has a loose relationship with facts. Because Trump flip-flops so much one has to rely upon his behaviour and instincts to ascertain his world-view.

1. Zero-sum Transactionalism

President Trump criticised US long-term alliances even more than his enemies. Trump has argued the US has been ripped-off and other nations need to pay their way. The murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi saw this on full display when Trump said Saudi buys US arms which helps US jobs so he would not be taking any action against the murder.

2. Raw Nationalism and Militarism

President Trump has constantly talked about America first. His worldview has not been composed of values but of nationalism and this backed up by a strong military. Despite his claims of bringing US troops back home, Trump approved a larger defence budget then his predecessor and increased the overall size of the US militray.

3. Authoritarianism

Trump has constantly exhibited authoritarian tendencies he has equated personal loyalty to patriotism and regards disloyalty as treasonous. Trump criticised numerous congressional hearings and individuals who opened investigations into his government as traitors.

4. Honour, Status and Respect

Trump has shown he has a very grandiose sense of himself and his standing relative to others is so inflated it rarely stands up with reality. As a result, he constantly feels undervalued. Respect and reputation has been a constant theme in the Trump presidency. In press conferences he held up letters from Kim Jong Un. After deriding Saudi Arabia, Trumps first visit was to the Kingdom as president and he was lavished with pomp flair.

Trump 2.0

Trump never acknowledged defeat in the 2020 elections. Instead, he claimed cheating had occurred. On the 6th January, 2021 this led to pro-Trump protesters storming the United States Capitol building, where at that time the members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives had gathered to formally appoint Joe Biden as the next president of the United States. This extraordinary event, which infuriated many Americans, forced Trump to finally concede and release a statement that he would be handing over power to the new Biden administration on the 7th of January.

When during November of 2022 Trump announced that he would again run for president in the 2024 presidential elections, it became clear he still caused strong concern among the factions of the United States establishment that collaborated against him during the 2020 presidential elections. Shortly before the announcement, Trump was brought to court by the State of New York on the accusation that he had committed fraud in his business dealings. Shortly after the announcement, in March 2023, Trump was brought to court by the District of Manhattan on the charge that he had falsified business records, to hide from the American public the fact that he had paid "hush money" to a prostitute in the runup to the 2016 presidential election. In June 2023 Trump was then also charged with stealing confidential documents during his time as president. In August of the same year a district in the State of Georgia brought Trump to court over an accusation of "election subversion", or conspiring with others in order to steal the 2020 election. In the same month Trump was also called to court in Washington DC over a similar accusation. Last but not least, a number of judges and professors of law developed a legal argument in an attempt to make it illegal for Trump to run for president again. In their view, the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, which disqualifies anyone who took an oath defending the Constitution and then subsequently participated in a rebellion or an insurrection, is applicable to Trump because of the events of the 6th of January, 2020. In response to this legal reasoning, in more than 30 American states cases were filed to keep Trump out of the 2024 presidential elections. Three states, Maine, Colorado, and Illinois, eventually issued rulings to disqualify Trump, but in the end the United States Supreme Court decided against this and allowed Trump to run as a candidate.

While these court cases have not succeeded in barring Trump from running in the elections, they have kept him very busy, given his opponents an opportunity to attack his personality, and cost him a lot of money.

But even inside the Republican Party there were debates as to whether or not Trump should be allowed to run for president as a Republican candidate. For example, in the aftermath of the events of the 6th of January, 2021, ten Republicans members of the United States Congress called for then-still president Trump to be removed from office with immediate effect. Some of these Republicans, most notably Liz Cheney, have continued to actively campaign against Trump. But these efforts all failed, and the Republican Party was forced to unite behind Donald Trump. The main reason for this is not Trump's policy proposals, but rather, as Liz Cheney confirmed, it is Trump's popularity among the electorate. This popularity remains so high that Republican politicians fear to speak out publicly against Trump, even if they disagree with him. Instead, they try to ally with him in order to personally benefit from his popularity.

Trump's popularity among the electorate remained so high that Republican politicians fear to speak out publicly against Trump, even if they disagree with him. Instead, they try to ally with him in order to personally benefit from his popularity

Trump's "electoral strength" is one of the things that enabled him to increase his influence in the official institutions of the Republican Party. He pressured the chairperson of the Republican National Convention (RNC), Ronna McDaniel, to resign, which she then did after meeting Trump in February 2024. The RNC is one of the key official Republican Party institutions. It is responsible for developing and promoting the Republican brand and political platform, as well as for leading fundraising and election strategy. With McDaniel out of the way at the RNC, Trump then publicly supported Michael Whatley to take her place.

At the same time, Trump's daughter-in-law Lara Trump joined the RNC election for the co-chair position. Both Whatley and Lara Trump won the election due to Trump's support, and they became the official leadership of the RNC in March 2024. Among their first acts was the appointment of the manager of Trump's 2024 election campaign, Chris LaCivita, as the RNC's chief operating officer. This ensured that anything the RNC now does, supports Trump's attempt to be re-elected as president in 2024. Any employees of the RNC who disagreed with this, were unceremoniously fired by LaCivita.

Trump Takes Over the Republican Party

Donald Trump's takeover of the Republican Party has been further enabled by a number of Republican "megadonors" who see a second Trump presidency as an opportunity to get their preferred policies preserved or implemented. This explains the significant support Trump received from think tanks in the United States, in particular The Heritage Foundation.

The Heritage Foundation is a conservative think tank which previously supported the administration of Ronald Reagan (1981 - 1989) to determine policy. Now, the Heritage Foundation has led an effort to create a "platform" for the Trump campaign. It's 2025 Presidential Transition Project is designed to establish for the Trump campaign team a specific policy agenda, a list of personnel whom Trump could employ in his administration if elected as president, and a "180-day playbook" to manage the transition period after his appointment as president.

The key policy proposals were documented in a publication from April 2023, entitled "Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise". At the core of the policy proposals included in this document is something called "the unitary view of executive power". In essence, it proposes that the United States president is given more power, at the expense of government institutions. In this way, the United States

president would be enabled to determine public policy. The role of the government institutions would then be limited to executing these policies which are presidentially decreed, and they would no longer be an active member in the deliberations that lead to the formulation of the policies as is presently the case.

As to the policy recommendations of the "Mandate for Leadership," it proposes that the United States end its support for the global climate change agenda and refocus its energy policy back on domestically produced fossil fuels. As a consequence, it proposes that the United States (again) withdraws from the Paris Climate Accord; ends all types of government support for green energy solutions, including electric cars; and instead supports coal, oil and gas companies to increase fossil fuel production inside the country. In the international domain the Mandate proposes that the United States works to restore its position of hegemonic power in the world via a focus on military strength. It identifies China as "the United States' most important enemy", and the Department of Defense is to be given significantly more resources to dominate it. These additional resources should be invested in additional soldiers, and in the development of new nuclear weapons and other forms of nuclear technology. This aggressive, militaristic approach to international relations is to

be supported by the United States diplomatic corps. The Mandate proposes that it adopts a more aggressive stance towards both American allies and enemies. Allies are to be put under pressure to become stronger and more active supporters of the policies of the United States, while enemies are to be threatened with regime change to make them fall in line. The United States' support for international institutions such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and even the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is to be scaled back or even ended if these institutions do not unquestioningly side with the United States. In an interview with the New York Times the president of the Heritage Foundation explained that it is also against the European Union, and more generally against the "European Project" that is targeting far-reaching collaboration between the European nations. Instead of the United States collaboration with regional coordinating or collaborating bodies such as the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Heritage Foundation proposes one-on-one, bilateral collaborations between the United States and other nations. In the economic realm, all relations with China are to be ended, says the Mandate.

Domestically, taxes are to be lowered and markets are to be deregulated further. The Mandate also proposes to end the Federal Reserve and establish a system of "free banking". Lastly, as far as social policy is concerned, the Mandate proposes a "Christian values" based approach, focusing on support for "the traditional family" and ending government policies that target "diversity" and "LBGTQ" promotion.

As to the "180-day playbook", it proposes that Trump fires thousands of civil servants upon his appointment as president, and replaces them with "conservatives" who support the policy proposals set out by Project 2025. After this "shock therapy", Project 2025 proposes that an even larger number of positions inside the United States government institutions are to become political appointments, meaning that the president and his staff determine who holds the position. This is to ensure the government institutions remain unquestioning executors of presidential policy decisions. These proposals are to avoid a repeat of Trump's experiences during his first tenure as president, when government institutions conspired to prevent him from having a real impact on policy and decision-making.
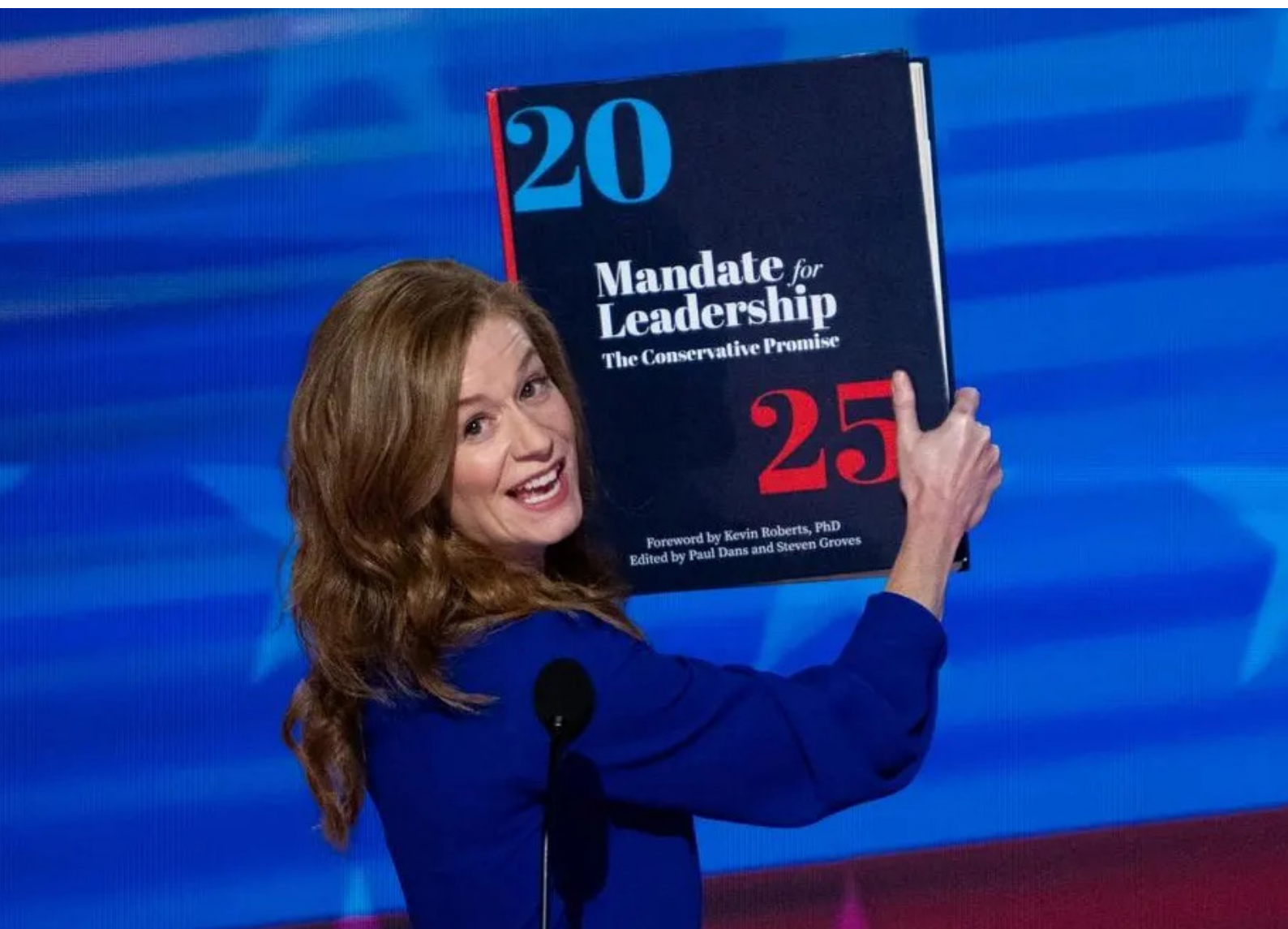
Conclusions

Today, Donald Trump's appeal to voters is as strong as ever – if not stronger. The main reason is the fact that the economic frustrations of a large section of the voting public in the United States, which Trump appealed to in 2015, remain. President Biden very explicitly positioned his policies as an attempt to address these frustrations, but they have had little to no real impact. Biden's "Build Back Better" policy framework was presented as designed to rebuild America's middle class, but only a small minority of American middle-class families actually believes this has been achieved. Only 16 percent say Biden's policies have benefited them a lot, 33 percent say they have benefitted them a little, 45 percent say they have not benefited them at all, and 7 percent aren't sure. This impression that "Bidenomics" has not helped America's middle class results from the fact that over the past 4 years inflation in the United States has been significantly higher than usual, which has made the essentials of life – food, energy – significantly more expensive. In response to this inflation, the United States central bank, the Federal Reserve, has increased interest rates, which has led to higher costs for housing, transport and education. The resulting financial challenges faced by many middle class families has maintained or even strengthened the appeal of Trump's image as a "political outsider who will do things really differently".

While Trump correctly identified these economic frustrations, and used them to his personal advantage, he himself does not have a real vision or practical plan to resolve them. Consequently, during his first presidency it was possible for the United States' establishment to "manage" him and to prevent him

from having any real impact on domestic and international policy.

Still, the United States' establishment considered president Trump a nuisance, as they considered him dangerously incompetent. For this reason, this establishment worked to prevent a return of Trump to the presidency in 2025. This is the real reason why Trump has had to deal with a variety of court cases since leaving the presidential office early 2020. The evidence for this assertion is that while Trump was taken to court for taking confidential government documents with him to his private home, current United States president Biden was not similarly charged for committing the exact same offense.

However, since Trump left the presidential office, elements of the United States establishment have come to see him as a "potentially useful tool" for preserving or implementing their preferred policies. This explains the support Trump's presidential campaign has received from the prominent thinktank the Heritage Foundation.

But, the policies proposed by the Heritage Foundation do not address the economic frustrations of America's middle class that supports Trump either.

Fundamentally, the economic policy vision proposed by the Heritage Foundation is a continuation of the neoliberal agenda that has caused the worsening of income inequality in the United States (and globally) since the 1970s that underpins these frustrations. The current United States' billionaire class support for a second Trump presidency is exactly because they

believe they can again "manage" him to implement lower taxes and market deregulations that "support business".

As far as international policy is concerned, the policy proposals of the Heritage Foundation are eerily similar to the proposals of the "Project for A New American Century (PNAC)" that guided the presidency of George W. Bush (2001 – 2009). PNAC also proposed a "military first" vision for the United States, based on the belief that the United States could best secure its interests by dominating the rest of the world militarily. The results of this policy are well known. The United States ended up entering wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that almost bankrupted it, while the neglect of diplomacy in its War on Terror caused it to lose significantly in the area of "soft power" – a geopolitical blunder that George W. Bush's successor as president, Barack Obama, tried desperately to correct.

All this indicates that a new Trump presidency is most likely to further worsen the polarisation of American society, weaken the United States' influence internationally, and lead to heightened geopolitical instability. Polarisation will worsen because Trump himself antagonises a large section of the American public, while his policies will not resolve the frustrations being felt by the section of the American public that supports him. The United States' influence internationally will weaken for a variety of reasons. One is that increased domestic polarisation weakens the United States. Another is that neoliberal economic policies not only worsen polarisation, but also weaken the United States' manufacturing base, which has been identified as a major risk to technological innovation and geostrategic strength.

Lastly, geopolitical instability will be heightened as it always is when a leading nation adopts a militarism. A nation that thinks it can secure its interests via war will turn to war whenever it faces an opportunity or challenge in the international arena.

Notes

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