

# Why the GOP Will Have a Tough Time in 2016 – and Why It Won't



In July of this year, President Obama visited his favorite “anchorman” – Jon Stewart – and told him that the economy “by every metric, is better than when I came into office.”

When he came to office, you may recall, the economy was in free-fall, so telling Mr. Stewart that things are better today is not necessarily saying much.

What Mr. Obama conveniently forgot to mention is that on his watch, middle-class Americans aren't doing all that well. Median income has gone down – and the percentage of Americans living in poverty has gone up. The number of Americans on food stamps has also gone up – dramatically.

It's true that the unemployment rate has dropped since Mr. Obama took office, but so has the labor force participation rate – which is at its lowest level in about 40 years. Some of that is due to baby boomers retiring, but a lot of it is due to the crummy economy, one in which people who desperately want to work can't find jobs.

Most Americans – more than 60 percent – say they think we're on the wrong track.

And now we have the latest jobs report, which in a word was terrible. The experts expected the economy to create 200,000 new jobs. Instead we got a measly 142,000.

None of this is good news for the American people, but it could be good news for the Republican Party trying to take back the White House. If Hillary Clinton essentially represents Barack Obama's third term, why would a majority of Americans vote for her? And why, in one recent poll, does Joe Biden beat every Republican running for president?

The short answer is because most Americans like him more than they like any of the GOP candidates – and never underestimate the power of likeability. But there are other factors Republicans should worry about.

One is the Electoral College. As I've noted before, in the last six presidential elections, the same 18 states have voted for the Democratic candidate – and that comes to about 90 percent of the Electoral College votes needed for victory. So the Republican candidate is behind the 8 ball before the polls open.

Republicans need lots and lots of white people to vote for them and the percentage of whites in the population keeps dropping.

And there's a third reason: Unlike the Democrats, the Republicans have a significant ideologically pure wing of the party – a wing, ungenerously, but to some extent correctly, called the Suicide Wing.

The true believers love Trump and Carson and Cruz ... and detest Bush and Christie and to a lesser extent the other moderates, like Kasich and Fiorina.

If Trump and Carson fade and if GOP primary voters pick one of the moderates as the party's nominee, there's a good chance the true believers will sit home on Election Day as they have the last two times around. And that of course means a Democratic victory.

That's the downside. The upside is there are two factors going

for Republicans. One is that historically, the American people rarely elect the same party three times in a row. The other is ... Hillary Clinton. Even a lot of Democrats don't like or trust her.

But will history, Hillary and the weak economy gang up on the Democrats and put a Republican in the White House? The only honest answer at this point is ... who knows? But this much we do know: Democrats have won 5 of the last 6 popular votes for president. If the Republicans can't convince enough minorities to vote for their candidate, if they can't win over those Reagan Democrats, then 5 out of 6 may turn into 6 out of 7.

But in memory of the late great Yogi Berra let's remember that it ain't over 'til it's over. And while October may represent the final days of the baseball season, in politics, the season has barely begun.

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## Hillary Clinton and My Crystal Ball

✘ I have looked into my 2016 presidential election crystal ball and what I saw is scary.

I saw the so-called mainstream media covering the GOP convention as if it were an anti-abortion rally. And I see them covering Hillary's campaign like a coronation.

Given the way things go with the media, this makes sense. Hillary told a gala at Emily's List the other day, "I suppose it's fair to say, don't you someday want to see a woman president of the United states of America."

Understandably Hil got loud applause for that. Emily's List, after all, is a progressive outfit whose purpose in life is to get liberal women elected to office.

But my crystal ball tells me this is just the beginning and that we're going to hear a lot of "I Am Woman Hear Me Roar" campaign talk before Election Day.

Through the cloudy haze, I can see Republicans going after Mrs. Clinton on Benghazi. And I can see (and hear) James Carville, Paul Begala, Howard Dean, Lanny Davis, Rachel Maddow, Chris Matthews, the New York Times editorial page, and ten thousand other Clinton cronies screaming, "Sexist!"

That's what we have to look forward to. Every time someone says something the Clinton campaign doesn't like, her detractors are going to be portrayed as women haters – Neanderthals who think women should know their place ... and that place is the kitchen baking cookies for her man and their 15 children.

The crystal ball is telling me that this is going to be the "Here We Go Again Campaign." Last time around, there was another historic candidate who wanted to be president. And if you didn't like him, you might be a racist.

This was an actual headline from the liberal online magazine Slate in 2008.

If Obama Loses

Racism is the only reason McCain might beat him

My crystal ball says there will be other headlines just like that one. And they will all say the same thing

If Hillary Loses

Sexism is the only reason (fill in the blank) might beat her

But, you say, the press is going hard on Hillary right now over those emails. Why should we think they'd go easy on her later on?

Because even though the press will send out the invitations to the coronation they'd much prefer a food fight. So if there's a scandal – emails or almost anything else – they'll be all over it. Until ...

Until there's an actual, living, breathing Republican opponent. Then they'll put on their short skirts and pick up their pom poms and go all out for the liberal woman Democrat.

Would the lamestreams prefer that some other liberal Democrat jump in? Absolutely. Even to them, Hillary feels like yesterday's news. She's been around since (as Dan Rather might say) Moses was in short pants.

And my faithful crystal ball sees a few others putting a toe or two in the water. But Hillary will survive. So says the ball.

Of course, my crystal ball could be wrong. It did pick the Seahawks to win the Super Bowl. So I guess Hillary can also do something really dumb just before the final gun goes off. And I guess the media could throw its substantial weight behind some right wing conservative Republican and cheer for him all the way to the White House.

I know. I'm a riot.

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## Family Feud: The GOP Version

☒ When I was a kid growing up in the Bronx I was infinitely more interested in the Yankees, the Knicks, the Rangers and

the New York Football Giants (as we used to call them) than I was in politics. What 10-year old kid cares about politics? Ten year old kids in the Bronx care about Mickey Mantle and Whitey Ford, not their congressman who – if my life depended on it – I couldn't have picked out of a lineup.

Still I knew we were Democrats. My father was a blue-collar worker so that made sense. I also knew that everybody in the neighborhood – and by “everybody” I mean *everybody* – was a Democrat. Republicans don't live in tenements in the South Bronx.

And I knew one other thing, a tidbit I picked up from up my father: “Republicans are for rich people,” he told me. He said it with absolutely no malice. He delivered the message as a simple matter of fact. And since we were hardly rich, we were Democrats.

Cut to today, many years from my days growing up in the shadows of Yankee Stadium. How much has really changed? Ask folks whom Republicans care about most and they'll tell you what my father told me: Republicans are for rich people.

Never mind that it's not that simple. Never mind that Republicans want everybody to have the opportunity to move up the ladder and accumulate wealth. Never mind, too, that poor people and the middle class haven't done well under the most liberal Democrat ever to occupy the White House – and almost certainly would have done better if a conservative Republican who understood how business works had been president instead of Barack Obama.

So what's the take-away? For openers, Republicans need to change their image or they're doomed. Except they don't have a clue how to do it – or they would have done it by now.

Republicans need a strong PR firm that specializes in disaster cases to do an image makeover. One example of the GOP problem: Republicans are against raising the minimum wage. That may be

good economics – the Congressional Budget Office says a hike to \$10.10 an hour would cost the economy 500,000 jobs – but the public is on the Democrats' side. The Republican position on the minimum wage bolsters the opinion that they only care about rich people.

Quick: Tell me who has made the most convincing case for Republicans that raising the minimum wage is a bad thing for poor people? I don't know, either.

No matter what happens November 4<sup>th</sup>, Republicans will continue to have a terrible image the next day. Ebola is only slightly less popular than the national Republican Party. So, ditch the political strategists (who are part of the problem) and bring in that smart PR firm loaded with people who have fresh ideas.

The GOP may take control of the Senate in about a week, but the party's image problem doesn't bode well for the party in 2016. Whoever the Republicans nominate he (or she) will start out as the underdog. Democrats may be incompetent, but when you promise to take from the rich (with higher taxes) and redistribute the booty to everyone else, that goes a long way to trump incompetence. That's one of the reasons Democrats have won the popular vote in five of the last six presidential elections. Pandering to the supposed "have nots" is in their DNA.

Is it a form of bribery – promising (and if you win, actually giving) money in exchange for votes? Sure, but there's no law against that kind of bribery. There is a name for it though: politics as usual.

So if the Republicans want to win in 2016 they're going to have to do a few things – now!

First, they need to find a likable, attractive, articulate front man or woman to explain Republican/conservative principles to a nation made up disproportionately of low

information voters (which is a nice way of saying “dopes”). Every time I see the Republican leadership in their blue suits, white shirts and red ties, I cringe. Politics is part entertainment and these guys are duds. No one listens to duds.

They need someone who speaks plain English and never (to use one easy example) utters the letters CR (for continuing resolution) when they’re on TV. That’s when MEGO (my eyes glaze over). They need to find someone who is not like Mitch McConnell who is always on TV making the Republican case – but comes off as, humorless, cold and stiff.

The GOP has a few likable men and women who know how to talk. So the party needs to pick one – *one!* – and let that person make the case. You can’t have 10 different people talking for the party. It waters down the message. Besides, 10 messengers equal no messengers in the world of politics.

So which wing of the party is going to decide whom the spokesperson should be? That gets us to point number two.

The moderate wing and the hard right wing (sometimes called the “suicide wing” of the Republican Party) must – repeat *must* – make peace. They must figure out a way to unite. The Ted Cruz wing must come to terms with the Jeb Bush and Chris Christie wing. And vice versa. If the Civil War continues – and that’s what it is – the Republicans cannot win. Family Feud is a TV game show that provides a few chuckles. If in 2016 it’s still a Republican reality show, the only ones chuckling will be Democrats.

Barack Obama did not beat John McCain and Mitt Romney. Conservative purists (the aforementioned suicide wing of the party) beat the GOP candidates. How? They sat home. And every one of the four million or so ideologically pure conservatives who refused to vote for a moderate (despite the fact that the moderate was way more conservative than Barack Obama) in effect, voted for ... Barack Obama.

I get emails from conservatives who are proud members of the suicide wing. They tell me that there's "no difference between Chris Christie and Hillary Clinton." These people are delusional. They tell me if Christie or Bush winds up with the nomination they definitely will not vote. They're like children who want everything to go their way. And when they don't, they pout, stomp their feet and storm off to their room. The purists can defeat the Republican nominee in 2016 just as they did in 2008 and 2012.

And, as I say, there's an obligation on the moderates too. Figure out a way to make peace with the hard right. Make concessions. Both sides need to understand that compromise is not akin to selling out your principles; compromise is not a crime against humanity.

I know: easier said than done. What happens if you're a Republican who thinks gays should have the same right to marry as heterosexuals? How do you compromise with the religious right that will never consent to that? And how does the religious right compromise on such an important issue to them? Bring in a mediator, for crying out loud. *Figure it out*. If you don't you lose.

And if you lose, I hope you like Hillary Clinton – because she is going to be your president for at least four years – and probably eight.