

# Could Any Republican Have Beaten Clinton?

Last month, things were looking downright frightening for the Trump campaign. On the heels of the party conventions (and Trump's belittling of a Gold Star family), Hillary Clinton was dominating the Republican presidential nominee, not only in the national polls (an 8-point lead in the *Real Clear Politics* average), but also in key swing states.



The election was shaping up to be the landslide defeat many disaffected Republicans and conservatives (including myself) had long predicted. After all, poll after poll throughout the primary season had revealed that Trump was deeply unpopular, and would have the hardest time of just about any of the Republican candidates beating Clinton in the general election. And this was *after* Clinton had already spent months demonstrating how utterly weak, untrustworthy, and unlikable of a candidate she was.

Yet, a plurality of Republican voters disregarded the electability factor, and chose Trump to be their nominee.

For those of us on *The Right* who have deemed the premise of a Trump presidency to be no less destructive than that of a Hillary presidency (aka the #NeverTrump crowd), the primary concern became whether or not the GOP could hold onto the Senate and the House. It was a legitimate worry; last month, the polls indeed suggested that Trump was a drag on many down-ballot Republican candidates.

But then, something happened... Hillary Clinton began proving

herself to be a far less appealing candidate than even her harshest critics could have imagined.

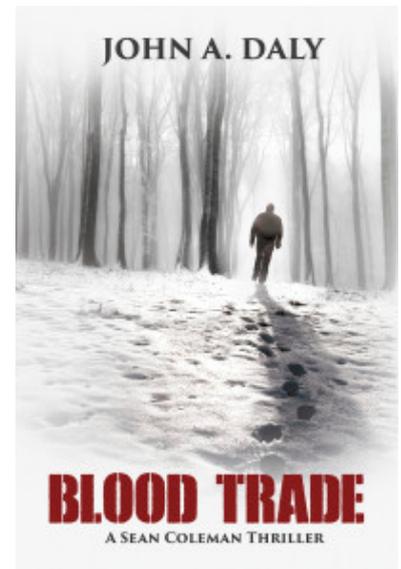
Just when it seemed that Clinton had successfully navigated past an email-server controversy and an FBI investigation that should have sunk her, more details of the scandal emerged: tens of thousands of subpoenaed emails deleted, BleachBit used on the disk, smartphones destroyed with hammers, and Colin Powell tossed under the bus as a scapegoat.

After weeks of holding Trump's feet to the fire for his divisive language, Clinton decided to publicly refer to "half" of his supporters as a "basket of deplorables." In condescending, elitist fashion, she branded them as racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and Islamophobic.

Next, her fainting spell at the 9/11 memorial in New York lent credence to the Trump campaign's narrative that she has health problems. Perhaps more importantly, her reflexive dishonesty about the incident drew attention, again, to her untrustworthiness.

All it took was a more tempered (and teleprompter-ed) Trump, over a few weeks, for Clinton to begin losing her edge in the polls. She now has just a one-point lead nationally in the RCP average, with Trump suddenly topping her in a number of key swing-states.

Clinton's campaign free-fall has hurt the rest of her party as well. Now the good money is on the GOP retaining both the House and Senate, with several Republican candidates managing to shake the Trump stigma, and take significant leads over their Democratic opponents.



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Of course, we're still a number of weeks away from election night, and *anything* can happen. Clinton remains the odds on favorite (with a big electoral edge), and all it could take are a couple of fresh, asinine remarks from Trump to put the presidential race back to where it was last month.

What this shift in the polls *does* tell us, however, is that a *lot* of swing voters now find Clinton so unbelievably unappealing that they're willing to entertain the notion of lending their support to someone as widely detested as Donald Trump.

That's quite remarkable, and it makes you wonder what kind of landslide defeat Clinton would be queued up for right now, if the GOP had nominated practically anyone else.

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# Why This Republican Won't Vote for Trump in November



For years, I've been a strong believer in the notion that if you're a Republican, or merely a conservative-leaning individual who understands the damage caused by liberal policies, you're doing yourself and the country a disservice if you don't vote for the Republican

presidential nominee every four years.

Like many Republican voters, I rarely end up with the nominee I want. In 2012, I initially favored Rick Perry and later found myself drawn to Newt Gingrich. Four years earlier, I strongly supported Rudy Giuliani (even volunteering for his campaign). I think all three of these men would have made great presidents, but in the end, I sucked it up and lent my support (and my votes) to John McCain and Mitt Romney.

My reasoning was simple: They were decent men who far better represented my interests, and a more promising future for the country, than their Democratic counterpart. It wasn't so much about party loyalty, as it was a choice between two different directions.

A number of conservatives disagree with my voting philosophy.

Some stayed home on election day in 2008 and 2012 because they didn't believe, in each case, that the Republican nominee was sufficiently conservative. The actual number of these voters has been vastly overstated by many people (mostly conservative pundits), but the estimated 1.5 million members of the electorate that did fall into this category in 2012 shouldn't

be ignored. Neither should the right-leaning voters who bought into Democratic wedge-issues like the *War on Women* and class envy, or in 2008, embraced the historical significance of the first black president.

As is the case with both major political parties (or any campaign for that matter) *united we stand, divided we fall*. It's a tenet I wholeheartedly subscribe to.

That being said, I cannot in good faith, and in the best interests of me, my family, and my country, vote for Donald Trump in November, should he become the Republican party's nominee.

It's not because I'm not impressed with Mr. Trump's campaign. On the contrary. He's achieved amazing things throughout this primary. He entered the race last summer with single-digit support, and was interpreted by nearly everyone as a *joke-candidate* whose application was merely part of some elaborate publicity stunt. He went on to become the Republican front-runner, a spot he's remained in for several months while only growing his support. He continues to have a strong, impressive lead in both national and state primary polls, and though his nomination is by no means inevitable, the odds of him taking it are firmly in his favor.

Beyond all of those feats, however, the one I find most astounding and historically momentous (especially in light of the sharp liberal slant our country has taken over the past seven years) is how his nomination (should he take it) will make it impossible for me to vote for the Republican presidential candidate this year. That would truly be an extraordinary achievement – one that I cannot stress enough the personal significance of.

Now, before you start screaming “establishment”, or accuse me of being happy with the status quo of our political landscape, let me assure that I'm not. If that hasn't been clear enough

in my columns, I'll elaborate now: I would certainly cast a general-election vote for Carly Fiorina, Ben Carson, or Ted Cruz – the other “outsider” candidates, both past and present. Even if I didn't believe they stood a chance of winning, they'd get my vote.

I'm also not a conservative purist. I never have been. I just want someone who's at least guided by conservative principles like small government, personal responsibility, and individual freedom. No one's ever going to strike all the right tones with me. I accept that.

I was even willing to hear out Donald Trump. Despite his liberal past and my suspicions of his intentions, I wanted him to lay out a case for why he would make an acceptable president. Believe me, I can be swayed. Back in 2009, I listened to fellow billionaire Steve Wynn (a Democrat) talk about the country's economic woes with Chris Wallace on *Fox News Sunday*. He was brilliant, and put forth some impressive ideas. I remember thinking afterward that Wynn might actually make one hell of a good president.

Unfortunately, Trump has never sounded like Wynn during this campaign. Not even close. His platform and conduct have been just as big of a slap in the face for me, my family, and my country as Hillary Clinton's has. I cannot sign on to that. I cannot sacrifice my dignity for a man that has none. I cannot compromise my most basic principles for a man who is completely unprincipled.

I didn't battle against Obamacare, lose my insurance plan, lose my doctor, and watch my friends suffer under higher premium costs than their home mortgages, just to vote for someone who wants single-payer (or at minimum an even larger role for government in our healthcare).

I haven't been pushing for entitlement reform for years, as a mechanism for addressing our national debt, just to vote for

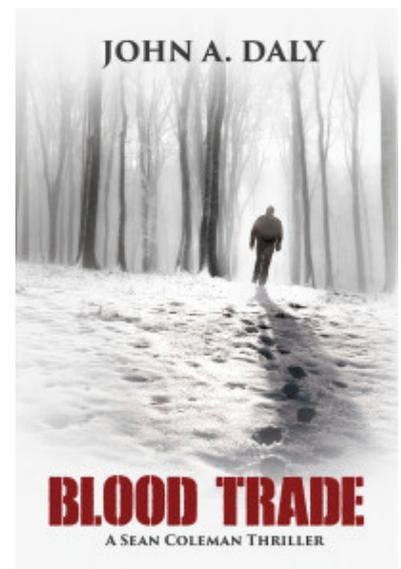
someone who says they won't change entitlements, and offers no serious plan for the debt. My kids' future is too important to me.

I didn't listen for years to all of that infuriating, conspiratorial nonsense from Michael Moore, Code Pink, and 9/11 Truthers, just to vote for someone who not only spews the same rhetoric (at the expense of thousands of dead Americans), but pushes additional conspiracy theories at will.

I haven't for years criticized President Obama's naive (and extremely damaging) foreign policy decisions, just to vote for someone who can't for the life of him express any knowledge on the topic, beyond saying that he's going to put in charge people who *know what they're doing*.

I haven't donated to wounded warrior causes, and made it a habit to respectfully walk up to veterans and thank them for their service, just to vote for someone who finds it perfectly acceptable to mock American POWs.

I haven't watched people close to me face the challenges of birth-defect health concerns, just to vote for someone who thinks it's funny to mock such individuals' disabilities.



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Calling women bimbos, and musing over their menstrual cycles. Comparing rivals to child molesters. Threatening journalists. Making up stories to vilify religions. It goes on and on.

For as flawed as our country is, and as low as the bar has been set for its leadership, there *has* to be a point where simply having the correct party initial at the end of one's name, and spouting out a few angry slogans, isn't enough to earn the reward of someone's vote. Donald Trump, through an enormous amount of effort on his part, has helped me realize this.

I'll either end up supporting a third-party candidate or writing-in a name on my ballot (contingent on Trump becoming the nominee of course). I can figure that out later. Hopefully, I won't have to figure it out at all. Either way, I intend to have a voice in this election, come November. If I'm forced to stray off the reservation to get it, I'm willing to live with the results.

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## **Why Rick Santorum Can't Beat Obama**



I have respect for people who want a president who's socially conservative. Many believe it's important that the person who leads our country shares their same belief system of traditional family values. In the world of politics where disingenuous pledges and shameless pandering are second nature, voters are understandably skeptical of politicians and they thirst for candidates they can trust. For many, a commitment by a candidate to socially conservative principles goes a long way toward building that trust.

The problem in the context of the upcoming election is that if social issues become the focal point of the presidential debate, the Republican candidate will lose. That's the cold hard truth.

Now, I'm not taking a swipe at the merits of social conservatism. I hold some socially conservative viewpoints myself and I believe many of those views resonate with a majority of the country.

The problem is that in today's political landscape, there is no easier cultural battle for the liberal media to exploit, manipulate, and misrepresent than that of socially conservative stances. Unlike economic issues where numbers and equations are used to support arguments based on concise logic, positions on social issues are often emotionally charged and instinctive. If not articulated carefully and relayed honestly, they can be used to decimate the person defending them. The mere fact that contraception has been part of our national dialogue over the past few weeks is undeniable proof of this.

Just over a month ago, no one in this country was concerned

with women losing their right to contraception. That's why ABC News' George Stephanopoulos took so much heat for trying to make it a political issue when he brought up the topic during a Republican presidential debate in January. At the time, Mitt Romney did a good job of squelching George's attempt to create a false narrative for the Democratic party to later run on. However, the spoiled bologna only sat on the shelf another month before it was pulled out of the refrigerator again.

When the Catholic church recently objected to an Obamacare mandate forcing them to pay for and provide free contraception for women, the media and the Democratic party saw another opportunity to inject the manufactured concern of a contraception ban into the news cycle. This time it stuck. What was purely an issue of religious freedom was twisted into the narrative of an attack on women's rights. During a House hearing on the Obamacare mandate, Democratic congresswomen Carolyn Mahoney and Eleanor Holmes received a huge amount of press for denouncing committee members for not inviting female witnesses to speak on the merits of access to contraception. The reality, of course, is that the Catholic church's conflict with the Obamacare mandate had absolutely nothing to do with the *right* to contraception. It had to do with the church paying for and offering contraceptives, which is against their religious beliefs. But if you didn't do your homework and scrutinize the story closely, you wouldn't know that.

Naturally, the media has used the false narrative to pose provocative questions to the Republican presidential candidates. Rick Santorum has been their favorite target due to his outspoken, socially conservative stances including a personal opposition to contraception. While I admire Santorum's eagerness to speak candidly about such topics, the problem with him defining his candidacy with his faith and conservative commentary is that it paints him into a corner. He allows himself to be pulled too deeply into discussions that are beyond the comfort level of most people. This invites

the media-driven suspicion that, if elected, he'll impose his personal religious beliefs on the American electorate. And if those beliefs are in conflict with those held by a significant portion of the country (which in some cases they are), they'll hurt him dramatically in the general election.

Though George W. Bush's detractors often tried to paint the former president as a religious nut, the criticism never really stuck in a way that was harmful to him because Bush was able to stay above the fray. He didn't allow himself to be pulled down into the mud and entertain narratives that haven't been on the political radar for decades. Yet, the base never questioned his conservative credentials. They trusted him to hold their best interests. Santorum doesn't seem to have that same capacity to get his message across without appearing judgmental and uptight. It hurts him... not so much to primary voters but to the general electorate, and I don't see it changing.

Sure, Santorum has made it clear in interviews that he makes a distinction between how he chooses to live his own life and how he would deal with social issues as president. Logically, his argument holds weight. After all, someone can choose not to own a gun but still be a strong supporter of the second amendment. Yet, it won't take a heck of a lot of effort for Super PACs and media commentaries to sway voters away from accepting that distinction. There's just too much Santorum material out there, from his speeches to Catholic groups to his opinions as a FOX News analyst. It's not something he can downplay in the run-up to the general election.

Look at the position Santorum has been in for the past week for evidence of what I'm saying. He's the front-runner in the GOP race but he hasn't been able to effectively promote his ideas on the economy. Why not? He's been busy clarifying his view that contraception harms society, explaining his 2008 speech about the threat of Satan in America, clarifying past comments about the legitimacy of specific Christian

denominations, and more. And we're just getting started. Sure, some of these criticisms are based on shifty premises that the media has introduced, but look how quickly and easily they have taken shape and have stolen the headlines.

Santorum often makes the valid point that if Mitt Romney becomes the Republican candidate, the powerful issue of Obamacare could be taken off the table. After all, the administration can point to the deployment of Romneycare in Massachusetts as a template for what they did in introducing the Affordable Care Act. It's a compelling argument. Using that same logic, however, I would suggest that if Santorum is the Republican candidate, the issue of the **economy** could be taken off the table.

There's nothing that the Democratic party and the national media wants more right now than to change the subject off of our economic problems. The one sure-fire way of doing this for the duration of the presidential campaign is to create a culture war over social issues. I've seen them do it here in Colorado, and I know their chomping at the bit to do it nationally.

The sure bet is that if Santorum wins the GOP nomination, he'll be on the defense over his social stances (both real and perceived) all the way until November. And if the Republican candidate is constantly on the defense at a time when President Obama should be on the ropes for his horrific handling of our country's economy, it spells certain defeat for the Republicans in November.

I believe Rick Santorum is a good man with several admirable qualities. Perhaps my strong belief that he's also unelectable is more of a statement on our culture than it is on him. Still, I think we would be foolish to overlook that what helps make him a good man also serves as his Achilles heel.

As Santorum himself has said, the 2012 election can't be about

the Republican candidate. I believe he's right.

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## Is “President Gingrich” Really That Frightening?



It's important for a political party to question the electability of its candidates, especially when it comes to the presidency. If a candidate isn't electable in the general election, it matters little how popular he or she is with the base. Thus, I totally understand Republicans' reservations with

Newt Gingrich. The man carries a lot of personal and professional baggage with him, which has been pointed out so often that it's not worth recapping here.

Up until a couple of weeks ago, the electability factor had been the greatest argument against Gingrich' candidacy. But that dramatically changed once he showed some staying power as the Republican front runner. Now, with the Iowa caucus quickly approaching, we've seen a dramatic difference in the type of *friendly fire* criticism coming from the right. It's now less about his prospects of beating Obama than it is about his mental competency to be the next president.

The current narrative is that he's no longer just the guy who cheated on two wives and fought ethics violations. He's now the Republican Boogie Man! A radical and reckless loon who would poison the presidency if elected! We expect this

caricature of Republican candidates coming from liberals (and the left has certainly been hysterical over Gingrich), but rarely do we see it coming from fellow conservatives...

Conservative writer Peggy Noonan recently wrote that Gingrich is a "human hand grenade who walks around with his hand on the pin, saying, 'Watch this!'"

Former Republican governor of New Hampshire, John Sununu, claims that Gingrich has a "congenital problem" of not being able to prioritize anything above his own ego.

Former Republican congresswoman, Susan Molinari, said she is "terrified to death" of Newt becoming the nominee.

Congressman Peter King and Senator Tom Coburn (both Republicans) have voiced doubt that they could even support Gingrich as their party's nominee.

The editors of the prominent conservative publication, The National Review, wrote a very rough piece on Gingrich, urging readers to exclude him from their consideration.

Conservative author Ann Coulter and radio host Glenn Beck have labeled him as a big government progressive with radical ideas, cut from the same liberal mold as Barack Obama.

Fellow candidate, Mitt Romney, even felt comfortable suggesting that Newt was *zany* and *unstable*.

What has happened here?

Is Newt really such an erratic individual that the thought of him representing the Republican party prompts prominent conservatives to seriously consider voting for a third-party candidate? Isn't this the same guy who lead the Republican party to their first control of the House of Representatives in 40 years? Isn't this the same guy who was instrumental in successfully reforming our welfare system? Isn't this the guy who helped balance the federal budget? Wasn't Newt's pressure

on the White House one of the reasons Bill Clinton is widely recognized as a fiscally successful president?

Is the idea of Newt as our president really that horrifying? To be honest, I'm not sure I know the answer.

Like many, I've always been impressed with Gingrich's knowledge of the issues, his abundance of practical ideas, and his articulate and unapologetic defense of conservative values and policies. I would love to see him debate our president, effectively expose the failures of the current administration, and promote conservative solutions using historical context to justify their worth.

That being said, I'm the first to recognize that he's a flawed candidate. Despite the assertion that he's matured since his days as Speaker, he's made some recent *off the cuff* remarks that I find unsettling. In fact, his criticism of Congressman Paul Ryan's entitlement reform proposal initially made him a non-starter for me.

But can't the same be said for the rest of the Republican field as well? They've all made the occasional sketchy statement, but no one's categorizing any of the others as being nuts. Well, maybe they are about Ron Paul.

Regardless of the motivations of his detractors, I think the conservative cause hurts itself when one of its most effective orators is treated by the rest as if he's Hannibal Lecter. I understand that time is running out, and people should speak out now if they have concerns over candidates who would go on to represent them. I just hope that such animated criticism of Gingrich is coming from an honest concern, and is not merely the right's borrowing of the left's smear tactics to promote a different candidate.

Members of the Republican base who have been leaning toward Gingrich are going to have to decide quickly which Newt they believe in: The bold and brilliant leader or the eccentric and

unhinged provocateur. And once they've answered that question, they'll need to decide if he's worth the gamble when they can pinch their noses, vote for the presumed more viable candidate in Mitt Romney, and hope they've made the right decision come the general election.

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## Should Giuliani Have Run This Time?

✘ Earlier this year, when former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani began sending signals that he might jump into the 2012 presidential race, there seemed to be a collective eye-roll from political pundits across both sides of the aisle. The general consensus was that Giuliani's time had come and gone. I tended to agree.

After all, Giuliani's fall during the 2008 presidential primaries was a thing of legend. He went from being the strong, early front-runner to earning only single-digit support by the time states began casting their votes. A poor campaign strategy and Giuliani's liberal stance on some social issues was largely thought to be responsible. So, if his widely praised leadership during the 9/11 attacks and his exceptional economic and security results as NYC mayor weren't enough to earn him even honorable mention by Republican voters in 2008, how could he possibly fare better in 2012? Right?

Well, I'm starting to think he might have.

As a registered Republican, I've been uneasy about the current GOP field. And if poll results are any indication, I'm not alone. The front-runner position has changed numerous times over the past few months, and most voters claim they could

still change their mind on who they'll support. The Republican establishment clearly hasn't been satisfied with the selection. They tried for months to draft Mitch Daniels, Paul Ryan, and Chris Christie to no avail.

In a nutshell, the dilemma stems from differences in the perceived electability and the conservative credentials of each candidate. Most Republicans want a principled conservative in the White House, which is why they're reluctant to support Mitt Romney who has a well-documented history of switching views on major issues to gain favor with whatever crowd he's courting. While they respect Romney for his business successes, debate skills, and electability, they recognize the need for drastic reforms and they're not sure they can rely on his commitment to pursue them. On the other hand, they largely trust the conservative purity of most of the remaining candidates, but are skeptical of their electability.

In this environment, I can't help but think Giuliani would have actually been in a pretty good position, had he made the leap. He clearly isn't a *social* conservative, but he's certainly a fiscal conservative with a pretty strong record in New York City to prove it. Sure, that record didn't help him much in 2008, but it was a different country then. The economy didn't tank until after the GOP candidate had already been settled on. When the Republicans were still battling it out, foreign policy was the key issue of the day and social issues were front and center.

That's not really the case these days. Look at how much trouble the strongest social conservatives in the GOP race are having right now. Michele Bachmann and Rick Santorum have sunk to the bottom of the polls, and Rick Perry's firm stances on social issues have done nothing to help his candidacy. Unsurprisingly, the 2012 election is about the economy, not social issues.

As we've seen with the popularity of Herman Cain and Chris Christie, GOP voters like plain talkers and bold thinkers who have no qualms in disregarding political correctness to press their agenda. I still see these qualities in Giuliani anytime he's interviewed or delivering a speech. In fact, the reason the media keeps coming to him for comment on the Occupy Wallstreet protests is because they recognize the stark contrast in styles between he and current New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg. Giuliani's criticisms of the Obama administration over the past couple of years have been clear, concise, and at times masterful. I sometimes think he looks more presidential now than he did in 2008.

The debates have possibly been more important than any other factor in this year's campaign cycle, and as many might remember, Giuliani's a pretty decent debater with a knack for getting crowds riled up. He's also been fairly consistent on the issues. It would be hard to imagine him getting caught up in a finger-pointing contest like with Romney and Perry.

Fundraising would have surely been a challenge for Giuliani. Big donors most likely would have been hesitant to invest in his campaign, considering the outcome from three years earlier. But as we've seen from Herman Cain, a shoe-string budget with constant media appearances can go a long way toward rallying support. And with momentum, the donors who helped Giuliani in 2008 would have surely come back on board.

Most importantly, as odd as this might sound considering his 2008 performance, I think Giuliani would have been electable. He still has more name recognition than probably all GOP candidates in the race, and polls earlier this year actually showed him in the lead of all Republican candidates in the important primary state of New Hampshire... a state he barely campaigned in, in 2008. Nationally, he still polls well with independents, and at a time when the country is crying for strong leadership, he's one guy who has rarely been challenged on his credentials to lead.

There's no doubt that his biggest advantage as a candidate this time around would have been the overall weakness of the field. Yes, I've come to terms that this is indeed a lackluster field. Most voters aren't quite sold on anyone. Every candidate seems to have an Achilles heel that would certainly be used as ammunition against them during the general election. At this point, Giuliani's past marital problems and stance on abortion don't seem like any worse obstacles than those faced by the other candidates.

In the end, it's all a moot point. The field is set. But one has to wonder if we'll look back to the presidential race a year from now and wonder why more high-profile candidates like Giuliani didn't take the plunge at such a dire time in our nation's history.