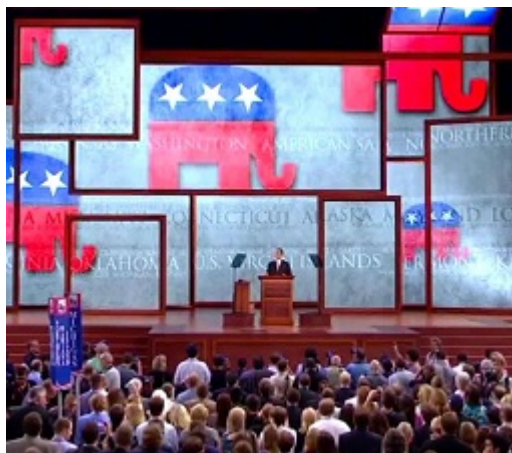


Can Any Winner Come Out of a Contested Convention?



In a piece for *National Review* last week, columnist Jonah Goldberg laid out a sobering assessment of the future of the Republican party:

“Nominating Donald Trump will wreck the Republican party as we know it. Not nominating Trump will wreck the Republican party as we know it. The sooner everyone recognizes this fact, the better.”

Goldberg made the point that if the GOP’s nominee ends up being decided at a contested convention in Cleveland this summer (increasingly likely after Ted Cruz’s big win in Wisconsin last night), there’s going to be a significant number of disillusioned Republicans who will refuse to support the party’s chosen nominee in the general election. I can’t imagine he’s wrong about this.

Donald Trump has of course been a very polarizing figure in this primary. He by no means created this sharp division we see within the Republican base, but he has fueled it and exploited unlike few others could have. The strategy certainly served its purpose of making him the party front-runner, but it has also earned him fierce resistance from a majority of the GOP.

Republican voters either love him and are adamant that he’s the country’s best hope, or they’re mortified by the prospect of him representing their party, making a mockery of their

principles, and losing in a landslide to Hillary Clinton in November.

The 30 to 40 percent of Republicans who back Trump are as stunningly loyal as any political following I've ever seen. As Trump himself has said, he could shoot somebody in the street, and he wouldn't lose a vote. If Trump (the candidate with the most primary votes and delegates) isn't awarded the nomination in a contested convention scenario, a large portion of his supporters will likely sit out the general election and leave the party.

On the other side of the coin, if Trump *is* awarded the nomination, a comparable percentage of anti-Trump Republicans (also known as the #NeverTrump crowd) will follow a similar course of action (likely voting for a write-in or third-party candidate).

At this point, it's incredibly difficult to fathom that *any* nominee named at the convention could possibly bring the party together after everything that has happened.

Trump has burned too many bridges. Cruz could only do it if he received an enthusiastic endorsement from a defeated Trump (which would never happen). Kasich or someone not currently running could potentially deliver the best unification speech anyone has ever heard, and it wouldn't make a difference. They would be viewed by much of the base as an *astroturf* selection, and could possibly even lose more Republican support than either Trump or Cruz.

No matter what happens, the prospects are pretty darned good for Hillary Clinton. Unfortunately, I think they're even better than a lot of people realize.

General election match-up polls (which a surprising number of Republicans haven't appeared to factor into their voting preferences as of now) show Clinton decimating Trump by double-digits. Cruz *had been* leading Clinton until just

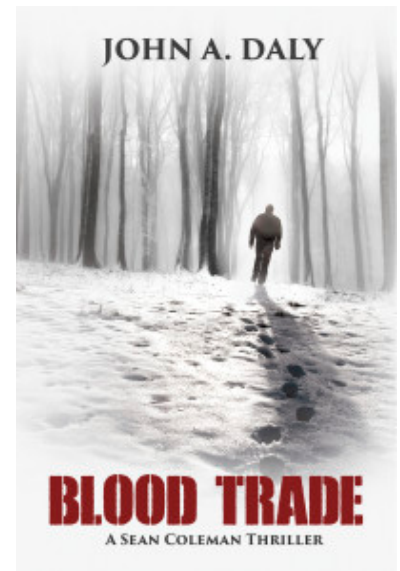
recently, but now he's losing to her within most polls' margins of error. Kasich is the only remaining GOP candidate who beats Clinton, and he does so largely outside of the margins of error.

At first glance, that's at least hopeful news for Cruz, and much better news for Kasich. However, those numbers would undoubtedly change as the result of a contested-convention scenario.

Why? Pollsters don't present their general election questions in the form of which primary candidates the poll-takers prefer. They run through each possible general-election match-up, one-by-one, and ask the poll-taker who they would vote for.

For example: Trump supporters (who have believed for months that their guy is going to win the nomination) have assuredly been responding to these polls with the answer that they would vote for both Cruz and Kasich over Clinton.

That stance would change for a lot (probably most) of them, however, if Trump ended up losing the nomination in a way that to them seemed cheap and disconnected from the will of voters (even with the process following rules that the candidates agreed to). If Trump would have been beaten by a candidate in the primary (who achieved the required 1,237 delegates), it might have been a different story.



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So what is the Republican Party to do, now that a contested convention looks inevitable? How can the GOP hope to stand any chance of competing with Clinton in November if it can't rely on a large enough portion of its own base to push its nominee across the finish line?

The only answer is *independent voters*, which both parties are going to be fighting hard for once the primary season is over. Is there a potential Republican nominee so breathtakingly appealing that they could attract enough independents to make up for the imminently smaller base *and* additionally beat Hillary Clinton?

One can dream. But as of now, I'm not seeing such a person, nor am I seeing a plausible scenario that results in one.