

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.