

6 Reasons We're in Trouble No Matter Who Becomes President

Approximately half the U.S. population will wake up tomorrow (or soon after) with a sense of general satisfaction. The person for whom they voted (perhaps grudgingly) will become the next president of the United States. Even if they do not love the candidate, they will be affirmed. *America is not crazy, they will think.*

The other half, particularly in this election cycle, will be horrified and disillusioned. *How could a majority of Americans vote for that monster?*

The sad truth is this: The U.S. is in very big trouble no matter which one of these candidates becomes president. Here's why:

1. The Federal Debt is Out of Control

The U.S. federal debt will be more than \$20 trillion when the next president is sworn in. This is nearly twice the \$10.6 trillion inherited by President Obama, which was double the \$5.3 trillion George W. Bush inherited. (Using accrual accounting, which the law requires corporations to use, the current debt would be closer to \$100 trillion.)

It's a trend that, frankly, is not sustainable. Whoever wins the White House will walk into the Oval Office with a \$350 billion tab just to finance this debt. That interest is projected to [grow to \\$880 billion](#) annually by the end of this president's second term, should he or she win reelection.

Because so much federal spending is on auto-pilot (i.e. baked into the budget), the debt is projected to swell even more rapidly absent entitlement reform.

2. The Economy is Not Growing Fast Enough

It has been more than a decade since the U.S. economy increased by 3 percent in a given year. You have to go all the way back to Herbert Hoover to find a president who failed to reach at least 3 percent growth, the metric often cited by economists to indicate a healthy and growing economy. (From 1790 to 2000, GDP growth averaged 3.8 percent.) Worker productivity [is mysteriously down](#), and [a record 95 million](#) workers are not in the workforce. This is a trend that cannot continue if the U.S. intends to stick to its [guns and butter](#) spending model.

3. Social Security is About to Go in the Red

A few years ago, the non-partisan CBO [published a report](#) showing that the Disability Insurance trust fund would soon be exhausted. The year this would happen: 2017. [This means](#) “the income collected through taxes will be enough to pay only 81 percent of the scheduled benefits.” The government will borrow more money of course; it’s good at that (see item #1). But the clock is now ticking on entitlement reform.

4. Obamacare is Falling Apart

The Affordable Care Act is [failing before our eyes](#), something even Democratic leaders [are finally admitting](#). It will likely require either full repeal or significant changes, which is likely to be very difficult and painful now that millions of people are enrolled in exchanges. This problem, like the others above, is fixable, but ...

5. Our Politics Are Broken

A generation ago, Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill were [able to work together](#) to address the structural problems the nation faced. They did this even though [the two were not exactly friendly](#) and had fundamentally different ideas on governance.

Those days are long gone. America no longer seems capable of fixing things. Politics has gone from a combat sport to a blood sport. Consensus in Washington, D.C., seems almost impossible. Our parties are ideologically polarized and beholden to favored constituencies whose mission is to hold the line on specific issues.

6. Americans Are More Divided Than Anytime Since 1860

The reason our politics are polarized is that Americans are polarized. People fundamentally disagree not just on policy issues but on [the purpose of government](#). They are [losing faith in their institutions](#), [the media](#), and [the legitimacy of elections](#). An election victory on razor-thin margins in a single state (a la 2000) would only fuel this division, and [polling suggests](#) this may very well be what we can expect.

Whoever wins the election will have their work cut out for them. It will be the job of the people and their elected representatives to put the vitriol of this campaign behind. This is difficult to do in a normal election; it's going to be much harder in this one.

But Americans should do their best to channel Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas, who in 1860 had this to say to Abraham Lincoln after a bitter loss in the presidential election: "Partisan feeling must yield to patriotism. I'm with you, Mr. President, and God bless you."

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