

# Trump—Once and Future King?

“I don’t know if he’ll run in 2024 or not. But if he does, I’m pretty sure he will win the nomination.” So says Mitt Romney, the sole Republican senator to have voted twice to convict President Donald J. Trump of impeachable acts. But is it possible Trump could win the nomination in 2024?

What does history teach us about Republican presidents who, after losing the White House, come back to win it again? Well, to be frank, there is no such history.

Consider. Four Republican presidents in the 20th century were defeated while seeking a second term. None was nominated again.

William Howard Taft lost the White House to Woodrow Wilson in 1912, and even ran behind the third-party “Bull Moose” candidate, ex-President Theodore Roosevelt. Taft never ran again but went on to serve as chief justice of the United States. Ex-President Teddy Roosevelt was considering running again in 1920 but died at 60 in January of 1919 at Sagamore Hill. After President Herbert Hoover lost to FDR in 1932, he never ran again. Gerald Ford, serving out Nixon’s second term, lost to Jimmy Carter in 1976 and packed it in for good, as did President Carter after losing to Ronald Reagan in 1980. George H. W. Bush lost the White House in 1992 and retired from electoral politics, never to run again.

As for Trump running in 2024 and winning the GOP nomination, he does hold high cards no other ex-president held, except perhaps Roosevelt. Trump has a vast and loyal following. Currently three-fourths of all Republicans see him as their leader. He won 74 million votes, the highest total ever for a sitting president or a losing presidential candidate. Their loyalty is traceable to what Trump achieved, whom and how he fought, and the new issues he introduced and has become

indelibly associated. Foremost among these is his struggle to secure the Southern border against endless illegal migrant crossings.

Unrestricted immigration from the South, the Third Worldization of America, is the true existential threat “climate change” purports to be.

Trump also succeeded in enacting the traditional GOP platform of low taxes and deregulation, producing record-low unemployment—before the pandemic hit in March 2020. His record of elevating strict constructionists, constitutionalists, and conservatives to the federal courts, and three Supreme Court seats, is unrivaled in the history of the modern Republican Party. Trump also forged a bond with Middle America by taking on a media whose treatment of him was remorselessly hateful and hostile. “We love him for the enemies he has made,” it was said of Grover Cleveland.

He brought a new and unique agenda to the GOP. He replaced a free trade globalist ideology with nationalism. He set out to rebuild America’s depleted manufacturing base and restore her economic independence. Under Trump, the slogan “America First” came to represent a new foreign policy where rich and prosperous allies carried more of the burden of their own and the common defense.

He wanted Americans to do their nation-building here in the USA. While Beltway Russophobes prevented Trump from achieving the rapprochement he wanted, and he failed to extricate us from the forever wars of the Middle East, he did drawdown U.S. forces in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and keep us out of an all-out war with Iran.

There is thus a specific Trumpian agenda, with which he is alone associated, that is becoming the issues agenda of the conservative movement and the party base, if not the party elites.

Yet, the drawbacks to a Trump nomination remain major.

He did, after all, lose in 2020. And he has been damaged by the months-long battle since to prove that Biden was the beneficiary of a stolen election. The Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol by MAGA militants was blamed on Trump and became the article of his second impeachment where every Democratic senator and six Republicans voted to convict him. And even some of those who voted to acquit, like Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, declared him guilty of inciting the mob. Moreover, Trump faces a blizzard of legal challenges and charges that will damage his reputation, his businesses, and him, personally.

In 2024, Trump will turn 78, the age Joe Biden is today. And between now and 2024, there is sure to be considerable attrition in support among the 74 million who voted for Trump.

But if Romney is right and Trump has the kind of strength that could make him the nominee in 2024, that strength will surely be sufficient to veto or sink any potential nominee who does not have the former president's blessing. And, from seeing both candidates of 2020 up close in recent weeks and months, does not Trump appear more likely to be the Republican leader of his party than does slow-moving "Sleepy Joe" look like the Democratic nominee 44 months from now?

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