

If Jeb Bush can learn from the past, he may have a real chance at winning in 2016.

This week, the former Governor of Florida, and presidential brother and son, Jeb Bush announced that he has decided to “actively explore” a presidential run in 2016. [Mary E Stuckey](#) writes that because of his relatively moderate positions on issues like immigration and Common Core, Bush faces a challenging route to the Republican nomination. Despite this, Jeb Bush’s announcement of his presidential intentions via Facebook, does show that he grasps the potential of new media, and is willing to learn from the Republican Party’s past mistakes.



In Jeb Bush’s non-announcement [announcement](#) that he is interested in running for the Republican nomination in 2016, there are indications both that there has been some serious learning since the Republican loss in the 2012 presidential election. There is also evidence, however, that they have not learned all that they may need to in order to win in 2016. Even more importantly, it seems possible that their political structures will keep them from winning in either event.

First, the good news for Republicans is that Bush’s announcement was made on [Facebook](#). My Twitter feed had the news long before either my local paper or the local news. This indicates that at least one of those likely to be considered front-runners in the Republican primaries has at least some awareness of the ways campaigns have moved off the nightly news and onto various social media platforms. Whether they can use this knowledge to create the kinds of fund raising and Get Out the Vote Activities that [characterized Obama’s two national campaigns](#) remains to be seen. But it is notable that Bush is exploring the possibilities of such media.

It is all the more interesting because the networks of Bush loyalists to whom Jeb presumably has access are graying. They are old school politicians and some of them are just old). Their pockets are likely to be deeper than the reservoir of technological know-how they bring to any Bush campaign. Such know-how can, of course, be bought—if the campaign organization sees the need. Bush’s organization may well be clear-sighted enough to develop its electronic capacities.

But no campaign is won on technological capacity alone. As my friends over at the Mischiefs of Faction have [noted](#), Bush has two major problems: an electoral one and one that has to do with governance.

Electurally, Bush’s problem is that he is a moderate, especially on things like immigration and the Common Core. It is worth noting that George W. Bush was also a moderate on immigration, and that he had considerably more support from the Latino/ Latina communities than Romney mustered, but this is unlikely to help Bush in the primaries, where even the fact that Bush is [talking to Spanish speaking media](#) may be greeted with some suspicion. His support for Common Core educational standards is already being discussed by other candidates as a [problem for Bush](#). Bush’s positions on both these issues are [problems for many Republicans](#).

This is less interesting in terms of the issues themselves than as a barometer for the nature of the conversation Republicans seem ready to have in the primaries. If this is any indication, those primaries are going to be firmly to the Right on cultural issues. A moderate candidate may well have an uphill climb to the nomination.

Republicans worry, again as my friends over at the Mischiefs of Faction have noted, that a moderate candidate won’t bring out the Party faithful, won’t energize the base, and thus won’t be able to get out the vote come November. This fear is heightened by their belief that had Romney been more enticing to the base, the 2012 outcome would have been [different](#). If Bush is perceived as “too Romney,” by the Republican base, he could have the same problems getting out the vote.

Republicans might not vote for a moderate like Bush because for the true believers among them, a president who compromises with Democrats is every bit as bad as a Democrat. And it is true believers on both sides of the

partisan aisle who vote in primaries.



Jeb Bush Credit: [Gage Skidmore](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-SA-2.0](#))

And this is the structural problem Republicans face: their primaries are controlled by those who would rather be right than elect a president. Their candidate must show both substantial agreement with the Right wing of the Party on policy issues, and sufficient rage to make them believe that he (and I use the pronoun advisedly) will be up to the challenge of defying the Democrats at every turn. Not most turns, not the turns that matter the most, but every single turn.

Primaries are won at the edges of the parties. General elections, on the other hand, are won in the middle of the national electorate, which is a very different group of people than primary voters—less extreme, less knowledgeable about the issues, less passionate about the outcome.

So Obama could well afford to aggravate Progressives by taking moderate stances in 2012—they had nowhere to go and they feared a Republican president more than they worried about a continued Obama presidency. But a moderate Republican like Bush will have to find a way to reassure those on his Right who have candidates much closer to their positions on the issues to choose from.

Romney's strategy was effective in 2012—he positioned himself as the grown up in the room and watched while his opponents imploded. Bush can hope for a similar outcome while working on a better organization and positioning himself, like his brother did, as a sort of down home aristocrat, and earning support among the Spanish communities in key states.

If he can learn from the recent and more distant past, and position himself accordingly, he may have a real chance.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USApp— American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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Mary E. Stuckey is the author of nine books focusing on presidential communication and rhetoric, national identity, strategic failures, the pre-presidential and presidential rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, the Challenger address, and the theory and practice of political communication research. Among her recent books is *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda* (Texas A&M Press, 2008), which won the Marie Hochmuth Nichols Award, and *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity* (Kansas 2004), which won the Gronbeck Prize for Scholarship in Political Communication. Her more than 50 articles and book chapters expand understanding of the presidency, the media, and governmental rhetoric aimed at American Indians. She is currently working on a book on Franklin Roosevelt.



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