

Clinton versus Trump promises to be an extremely negative presidential campaign

Following his defeat in Indiana's primary election yesterday, Texas Senator Ted Cruz has suspended his presidential campaign, essentially handing the Republican Party's nomination to Donald Trump. LSE US Centre Director [Peter Trubowitz](#) looks ahead to the general election, where Trump is now almost certain to face Hillary Clinton. He writes that while the odds – and demographics – currently favour Clinton, we should ignore talk of a landslide for the former Secretary of State. What is certain is that the coming presidential campaign is going to be an extremely negative one.



Yesterday's primary in Indiana puts Donald Trump on a glide path to the Republican nomination and does little to stop Clinton from winning the Democratic nod. Trump's victory was impressive, beating Texas Senator Ted Cruz by nearly 17 points in a state that Cruz simply had to win to keep his presidential hopes alive. Having dispatched Cruz, and with Ohio Governor John Kasich running way behind the putative nominee, Trump will now turn his attention to shoring up the support of anxious Republicans and reaching out to independent voters to prepare for the fall general election campaign.

The big test for Trump in the days and weeks ahead is how downstream Republicans running for re-election in the Senate and House respond: will they begin to grudgingly line up behind Trump or continue to sit on their hands or worse, jump ship as Republicans did in the [1964 campaign](#) when the party nominated someone (Barry Goldwater) that many party leaders could not support? In response to yesterday's victory, Reince Priebus, the Chairman of the Republican National Committee, [called](#) on Republicans to unite behind Trump to defeat Clinton. Will other party leaders follow his lead?

On the Democratic side, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' victory in Indiana yesterday is unlikely to change the final outcome: the percentage of delegates he needs to win going forward (70 percent) is just too high a bar. He will win some of the upcoming primaries (e.g. West Virginia, Oregon), but it is all too little too late. Like Trump, Clinton will be turning to the fall campaign and thinking through how best to counter Trump. But she will also need to find ways to win over Sanders' supporters in the coming weeks, where there is little enthusiasm for Clinton.

As of this moment, the odds strongly favor Clinton in a fall match-up. She leads Trump by roughly 10 points in head-to-head [polls](#). However, as Nate Cohn of the NY Times [notes](#), presidential candidates have overcome such deficits before. George H.W. Bush did against Michael Dukakis in the 1988 campaign: Dukakis was also leading Bush by [10 points](#) in May of that year. Still, Trump has his work cut out for him. He's got a lock on [about 25-30 percent](#) of the American electorate. That's simply not enough to win the presidency.

The coming days will be filled with talk of a Clinton landslide in November. That's possible. But she is going to be dealing with an unconventional candidate in Donald Trump — not only one who is prepared to say anything (which must strike fear in the Clintons' hearts), but who will be attacking Clinton from the left (on trade, Wall Street, and foreign policy) as well as the right (national security and immigration). Trump's bet is that he can put Rustbelt states that are normally out of reach for Republicans in play. The risk is that he will hand Clinton states like Florida that are nominally in the Republican column.

It is way too early to make predictions and much will depend, as it always does, on contingency and events: a terrorist attack, a sudden slow down of the economy, and major gaffe on the campaign trail. However, this much does seem certain: if it is Clinton versus Trump, this is going to be an extremely negative presidential

campaign. Clinton's unfavorable/favorable rating is in the 50s; Trump's is in the 60s. Both campaigns will do everything they can to drive the other side's unfavorables up. In the end, the November election may turn out to be a referendum on just how polarised America is.

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