

The Trump tape has transformed the 2016 election into a referendum on gender

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In less than a week, the release of a 2005 tape of Donald Trump making controversial comments about women has led to a number of Republicans withdrawing their support for the presidential nominee. But, writes [Nichole Bauer](#), the release of the tape has wider implications than the nose-diving of Trump's campaign. She argues that the views that Trump expressed about women have more definitively placed substantive women's issues at the top of the agenda in this presidential election.



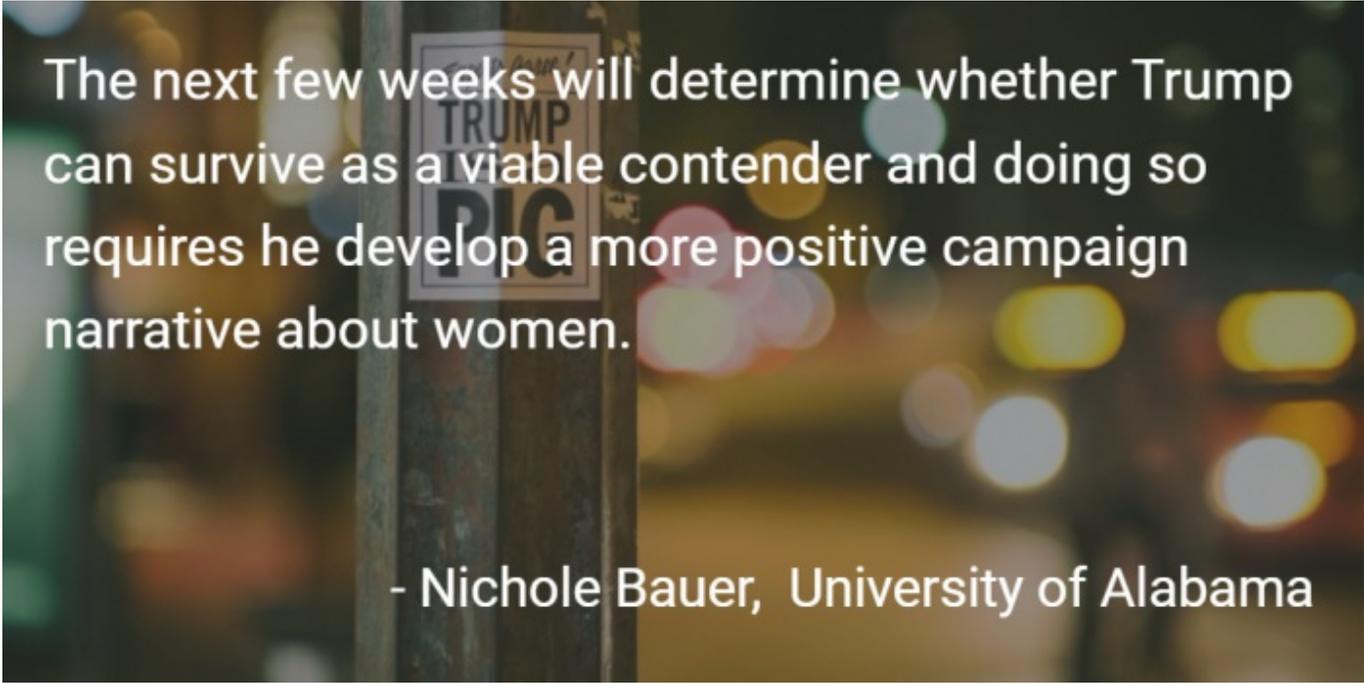
The now infamous “[Trump tape](#),” featuring the Republican presidential nominee making controversial statements about women with Access Hollywood’s Billy Bush, put the GOP nominee’s campaign in damage control mode this past week. Trump apologized for the remarks and justified them as “locker room banter.” The initial fall-out from the release of the tape is dissipating. Left behind in the wake of the Trump tape revelation is a fractured relationship between the Republican nominee and the Republican Party. A broader implication of the tape’s public release is that it has the potential to transform the final weeks of the presidential election into a referendum on gender.

Trump and the GOP: A Marriage of Inconvenience

The immediate collateral damage from the release of the Trump tape is the presidential campaign’s relationship with the Republican Party. Trump and the GOP never had a cozy relationship. Pre-tape release many Republicans only begrudgingly supported Trump. Post-tape release, Trump’s support in the GOP is dwindling. A number of high-profile Republicans not only denounced Trump’s crude and lewd comments, but also withdrew their support. Chief among the defectors is Arizona [Senator John McCain](#) who characterized Trump’s description of how he approaches women as sexual assault.

Important about the Republicans speaking out against Trump in the last week is that many are women. Senator [Kelly Ayotte](#), a Republican running for re-election in New Hampshire, withdrew her endorsement of Trump. Perhaps most notable among the female Trump defectors is House member [Martha Roby](#). Roby is a conservative Republican elected in the 2010 Tea Party wave and she hails from Alabama—a state where Trump has broad support. Roby and Ayotte are not alone. Five out of the six Republican women in the Senate condemned Trump’s “locker room banter” and withdrew their endorsements of Trump. Out of 22 Republican women in the House, 13 expressed their disappointed, disgust, and anger at Trump’s behavior of the tape, and four called on Trump to step aside as the nominee. Trump’s loss of support among female Republican leaders points to trouble ahead for Trump’s ability to hold on to the support of Republican women.

Trump never had strong support among female voters in the electorate. Now, his support among [female Republican voters](#) may be in jeopardy. Trump’s, arguably, predatory attitude toward women coupled with previous comments he has made about the physical appearance of women only further isolates him from female voters. To halt the loss of support from women within his own party Trump needs to establish a new narrative about how he views women, and accomplishing this goal requires more positive rhetoric about women.

The image shows a street sign on a utility pole. The sign has the word 'TRUMP' in large, bold, black letters, and below it, the word 'BIG' in a similar font. The background of the sign is white. The sign is set against a blurred background of city lights at night, creating a bokeh effect. Overlaid on the image is white text that reads: 'The next few weeks will determine whether Trump can survive as a viable contender and doing so requires he develop a more positive campaign narrative about women.'

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- Nichole Bauer, University of Alabama

Trumped with the Gender Card in 2016

With the first woman running for the presidency, gender was already a major theme of the 2016 presidential election cycle. Observers of the first presidential debate characterized Trump's [many interruptions](#) of Hillary Clinton as the type of everyday sexism women experience in their regular interactions with the opposite sex. And, criticisms that Clinton lacks a "presidential appearance" and the stamina for the office also bring gender to the fore at this election season. But, the views Trump expressed about women have more definitively placed women's issues, especially respect for women, at the top of the agenda.

A troubling aspect, for many voters, of Trump's now widely circulated comments is his objectification of women. And, the Trump tape is not the first time the Republican presidential nominee has made these types of objectifying statements. The treatment of women as objects strips women of their agency as independent beings. Social psychologists characterize these attitudes as [Hostile Sexism](#)—and they are dangerous because they treat women as entities that exist for the pleasure and benefit of men. The fairly widespread public denunciation of the tape sends a clear signal that voters do not share his views.

The election is not just about respect for women, but also about substantive women's issues. And, issues have been relatively absent from the election thus far. The Clinton camp will certainly push Trump on issues such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, family-leave policies in the workplace, pay equity, and issues that disproportionately affect the lives of women. These issues are not new for the Clinton campaign. And, [research](#) shows women care about these issues. Forcing the candidates to engage in a policy-based exchange on gender issues will surely be a victory for female voters eager to hear about how candidates will improve their lives.

The next few weeks will determine whether Trump can survive as a viable contender and doing so requires he develop a more positive campaign narrative about women. The Trump tape, unfortunately, is just one incident in a long line of Republican candidates making insensitive comments about women. Remember Congressman Todd Akin's [views](#) about rape and the female body just four years ago, or Richard Mourdock's [assertion](#) that pregnancy from rape is God's will. In each of these instances, the offending candidate lost the support of the Republican Party, female voters, and eventually lost the election. It is not clear if Trump will succumb to the same fate, as there are still four weeks to go until Election Day. It is clear, however, that Trump faces a steep uphill battle.

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Nichole Bauer is an Assistant Professor in the Political Science department at the University of Alabama. Her research examines how strategic campaign communication affects voters' decision-making especially when voters are considering non-traditional candidates. More specifically, her research agenda focuses on identifying the psychological underpinnings motivating political attitudes and behaviors.



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