

It's now or never for Bernie Sanders, the US-Iran conflict that never happened, and is Trump Palin 2.0?: US national blog roundup for 16 – 22 January

USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway.

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Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP

On Saturday this week, *The Fix* [looks](#) at polling on presidential approval rates – including President Obama's. They say that history shows that compared to past presidents, Obama's approval ratings have moved in a very narrow range just below 50 percent. They attribute this to the fact that his ratings among both Democrats and Republicans have also barely budged.

Some commentators have criticized the Obama administration for the amount of new rules and regulations that it has introduced, especially in recent months. *The Hill's Congress blog* [defends](#) what they say is 'Obama's regulatory flurry', arguing that in having a robust regulatory agenda in its final year, the administration is following a precedent set by past presidents. Obama has also gotten flak for being responsible for 'out of control' spending during his administration. *Perspectives* [says](#) that these accusations are completely false; a new report from the Congressional Budget Office has found that the government is actually spending less than it was the day that President Obama took the oath of office in 2009.

On Thursday, *PoliticoUSA* has the [news](#) of a big win for Obama – a three-judge panel for the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit has denied an application which sought to stay the president's clean energy plan while it is under litigation.

Moving on to the Republican Party, *No More Mister Nice blog* [says](#) that rather than destroying it, that New York billionaire Donald Trump may soon be the effective head of the GOP, and that the media seems to be in a state of denial about this fact. The 'establishment' wing of the Republican Party is increasingly concerned about the rise and popularity of Donald Trump, Texas Senator Ted Cruz and retired neurosurgeon, Dr Ben Carson. *The Conscience of a*

Liberal comments this week that while some in the establishment camp think that there is a 'silent majority' of more practical Republicans, the fact that Trump, Carson and Cruz collectively have the support of two-thirds of primary voters would seem to refute that assumption.

The 2016 election

Post Politics this week [writes](#) that the number of eligible Hispanic voters has now reached an all-time high, reaching 27.3 million, an increase of 4 million since 2012. Despite this large increase in population, they may not make a huge difference to the election: at 48 percent, Latino voters have a lower turnout rate than most other groups.

The Democrats' 2016 campaign

On Sunday, *Political Animal* [argues](#) that vote-by-mail programs might be a key tactic for the Democratic Party to use to retake the House of Representatives. They say that a key problem for the party is turnout, and vote-by-mail voters are much more likely to vote compared to poll voters. In a longform piece, *The American Prospect* [ponders](#) whether the Democratic Party will be able to channel the discontent in the country into electoral victories by moving to the left, as much of its base has done.

The Democrats' 4th debate

On Sunday evening the Democrats' presidential hopefuls squared off in the party's 4th debate in Charleston, South Carolina. Ahead of time, *The Fix* has the [eight big issues](#) in the debate, including Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders' election viability, national security, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's ties to Wall Street.

In their post-debate report, *The Fix* [reports](#) that Bernie Sanders was the winner, describing him as the 'prime mover' in the debate's first hour on most of the issues, and that Clinton was the loser because she did nothing to slow Sanders' momentum. *The Atlantic* [says](#) that Clinton and Sanders went 'to the mat' in South Carolina on the issues of gun control and health care. *The Fix* [comments](#) that there was a 'dark undercurrent' for Clinton in the debate – a list from Google showing trending questions during the debate were mostly quite hostile towards the former Secretary of State.

Turning now to the candidates that duked it out on Sunday night:

Hillary Clinton

- Holding debates at the weekend were supposed to help Hillary Clinton – turns out the small audience this time around may hurt her ([The Fix](#)).
- Is Clinton (and the Democratic Party) in trouble? ([Powerline](#)).
- Clinton 'hugged' President Obama's legacy during the debate – that may well work against her if the GOP uses her words in attack ads ([The Fix](#))
- Given Clinton's push to link herself closely to Obama, a Supreme Court ruling against the president's immigration actions could also puncture her campaign ([The Atlantic](#))
- In the early state of New Hampshire, Clinton is now polling 27 points behind Bernie Sanders ([The Fix](#)).
- A new report contends that Clinton's private email server – which she used while she was Secretary of State – contained information that was above 'Top Secret' ([Outside the Beltway](#)).



Credit: RBerteig (CC-BY-2.0)

Bernie Sanders

- With Iowa and New Hampshire around the corner, it's now or never for the Vermont Senator to become a bit more aggressive against Hillary Clinton ([Townhall](#))
- With a new ad out this week targeting Wall Street, Sanders may well be already going negative against Clinton ([PoliticusUSA](#))...
- ...and on Thursday the Sanders campaign called Clinton ally, David Brock, a 'mudslinger' for his criticism of Sanders' newest ad which shows mostly white people ([Post Politics](#)).
- A new poll shows that 43 percent of likely voters in Iowa would consider themselves to be socialist – maybe Sanders can win? ([The Fix](#)).



Credit: Bob Simpson (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

- Whether or not people in Iowa like the term, will calling him a 'socialist' elsewhere stop his rise? ([The Atlantic](#)).
- Millennials can't get enough of Bernie Sanders – they think that he's 'believable' ([The Federalist](#)).
- A Sanders nomination would actually help – not hurt – down ballot Democrats ([Political Animal](#)).
- On healthcare, Sanders this week [accused](#) Clinton of 'sounding like a Republican'. Sanders has a 'Medicare for all' policy which would replace Obamacare ([PoliticusUSA](#)).
- Sanders still has a non-white voter problem ([The Fix](#))...
- ... and a reparations problem as well ([Wonkblog](#)).
- If he did win the nomination, would Sanders lose all 50 states as Ohio Governor, John Kasich claimed recently? ([Political Animal](#)).
- Sanders apparently doesn't own a tuxedo – and that's quite telling ([The Fix](#)).
- Bernie Sanders is in the big leagues now – and it means he's getting a lot of negative attention from the media and commentators ([No More Mister Nice blog](#)).
- Sanders actually wants **more** media coverage – he should be careful what he wishes for ([The Fix](#)).
- Is the 'Bernie Bump' (or 'Sanders surge') actually real? ([FiveThirtyEight](#)).
- Sanders drew criticism this week after claiming that Planned Parenthood and groups like it were part of 'the establishment' ([The Fix](#)).

The Republican Party's 2016 campaign

Writing from the left, [Political Animal](#) [reckons](#) that we should celebrate the ascendancy of Ted Cruz and Donald Trump because it disempowers the moneyed conservatives who have tended to push the GOP's base in an angry direction, and because a Trump-Cruz power coalition is not likely to survive for very long. [Roll Call's Rothenblog](#) [writes](#) Tuesday

that the rise of Ted Cruz on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left may be setting the election to be a 'Goldwater vs. McGovern' campaign. *The Fix* [says](#) that, at the moment, the GOP establishment would prefer a President Trump to a President Cruz. Why? Trump's more of an opportunist and wants to be liked, while Cruz doesn't care. *Daily Kos* [reminds](#) us that at this point not a single Governor or Senator has backed Ted Cruz or Donald Trump.

If Trump and Cruz do end up dominating the early primary states, we shouldn't be too worried – the way that the states award delegates makes it hard for any candidate to gain an early commanding lead, says *FiveThirtyEight*. Speaking of the GOP's early primaries, *The Atlantic* [says](#) that blue-collar conservatives may be critical in determining who comes out on top. *Smart Politics* meanwhile [wonders](#) if all six candidates might be able to reach ten percent in the upcoming New Hampshire primary. *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that Cruz and Trump will have to break through South Carolina's firewall, if they want to really defeat the GOP establishment.

Looking to Congress, *Roll Call's At the Races* has the [news](#) that for the National Republican Congressional Committee, 2015 had the best December for off-year funding, with \$8.6 million brought in, giving the Committee \$30.1 million cash in hand.

Moving on to the GOP's field of presidential hopefuls:

Donald Trump

- The week began with Donald Trump accusing Ted Cruz of 'hypocrisy' over the latter's failure to disclose two-million dollar loans which helped fund his 2012 Senate campaign ([Post Politics](#)).
- He also called Cruz a 'nasty guy', and said that no one likes him after Cruz doubled down on his criticism of Trump for having 'New York values' ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Why the #NewYorkValues fight is a loser for Trump ([The Federalist](#)).
- This week saw Trump's first attack ad against Cruz, accusing him of flip-flopping on immigration ([Post Politics](#)).
- Could Trump be considering a pro-abortion vice-presidential candidate in the form of former Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown? ([Red State](#))
- Trump is apparently very unpopular with General Election voters ([FiveThirtyEight](#))...
- ... though those that do support him won't leave him no matter what he does ([Red State](#)).



• Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin speaks at a rally after endorsing Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa on Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2016. Credit: Alex Hanson (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

Why is Trump winning in New Hampshire? People there are more worried about illegal immigration than getting tax cuts ([Wonkblog](#)).

- Tuesday sees the news that former Alaska Governor, and 2008 vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, has endorsed Donald Trump. [FiveThirtyEight](#) reckons that Trump is actually Sarah Palin 2.0.
- Palin could potentially have a job in a Trump administration according to the man himself ([Daily Kos](#)).
- How Donald Trump and Sarah Palin saved Hillary Clinton from a terrible news cycle this week ([Red State](#)).
- The GOP sees black voters as the key to Donald Trump becoming president – though they don't think that he will garner much of their support ([Daily Kos](#)).
- There's a massive gap between whites and Latinos in how they perceive Donald Trump ([Monkey Cage](#)).
- Trump has a China trade plan. Most of it is wrong ([The Federalist](#)).

Ted Cruz

- Last week's 'birther' controversy over Ted Cruz's Canadian origins spilled over into this one; [Townhall](#) says suggestions that Cruz isn't a 'natural born citizen' would also mean that the first eight presidents were also ineligible.
- Why Cruz is correct about Trump's 'New York values' ([The Federalist](#))...
- ...and why that particular attack was a good strategic play against the New York billionaire ([American Thinker](#)).
- Cruz also said this week that Donald Trump is 'nothing' like Ronald Reagan ([Post Politics](#)).
- How the GOP establishment really, really, doesn't like Ted Cruz ([The Fix](#))...
- ... and may even be ganging up on him ([The Atlantic](#)).
- With the primary only weeks away, Cruz made a big push in New Hampshire this week with a five-day bus tour to all of the Granite State's ten counties ([Red State](#)).
- Iowa's 'ethanol monster' has followed Cruz all the way to New Hampshire ([Post Politics](#)).

Marco Rubio

- The Florida Senator 'blew it' this week, stating that he would let illegal immigrants stay if they haven't committed major crimes ([Red State](#)).
- Ten reasons to vote for Marco Rubio, including that he's the best chance to deliver Florida, and that he speaks Spanish fluently ([American Thinker](#))
- Rubio's recent push for young voters is wishful thinking ([The Fix](#))...
- ...and part of a 'dubious' campaign strategy ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- He's also having a 'nasty fight' for second place in New Hampshire ([Daily Kos](#)).

Jeb Bush

- In a poll shocker, the former Florida governor is now leading Marco Rubio in South Carolina – though still in third place ([Red State](#)).



New Jersey Governor Chris Christie Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Chris Christie

- The New Jersey Governor apparently has a plan to beat Trump ([Daily Kos](#)).
- Christie this week tried to capitalize on Ted Cruz's 'New York values' smear of Donald Trump ([Crooks & Liars](#)).

The rest

- Ohio Governor, John Kasich has risen to second in a recent New Hampshire poll ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Kentucky Senator Rand Paul needs to do well in Iowa on February 1st if his campaign is to have any future ([Hit & Run](#)).
- Former Hewlett-Packard exec, Carly Fiorina this week got into hot water for using a group of young children at a right to life forum ([Crooks & Liars](#)).

Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda

This week the US Supreme Court agreed to take a case challenging president Obama's immigration program of 'deferred action' for the deportation of certain groups of illegal immigrants. [The Atlantic](#) says that the case may well become a constitutional one, with the potential to redefine the balance of power between Congress and the president. [Monkey Cage](#) writes that of the four questions that the Supreme Court has asked about Obama's immigration program, the last one – whether the guidance violates the 'Take Care Clause' of Article II of the Constitution – is the most important.

On Tuesday, [The Daily Signal](#) has [five reasons](#) why America is headed to a budget crisis, including that spending continues to 'skyrocket' and that a weak labor market is weighing down the economy.

Moving on to Congress, *The Fix* [looks](#) at Speaker Paul Ryan's (R-WI) plan to get the House working again. They say that his two ideas – to give rank and file members more of a say, and to propose alternatives to Obama's policies – may actually be working against each other, as the latest Congressional GOP attempt to repeal Obamacare illustrates.



Heading to the Senate, *The Daily Signal* [writes](#) this week that Senators should want to preserve the filibuster. They argue that eliminating the filibuster won't actually bring order to the Senate, and will enable favor-trading and backroom deals. Staying in the Senate, *Roll Call's WGDB* [reports](#) that the body rejected taking up a bill this week which would have enhanced screening for refugees after the Democratic and GOP Senate leaders failed to reach a deal on the bill's amendments.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Sunday, *The Daily Signal* [comments](#) on 'Implementation Day' – the day when Iran's sanctions have been lifted following last year's agreement with the P5+1. They say that the day is the point where Iran will regain assets worth nearly one third of its GDP, something that will have a major impact on the geopolitics of the region. Late last week also saw Iran and the US swap prisoners – *Powerline* [says](#) that the swap is another bad deal, but not a scandal, and that Donald Trump would have likely negotiated something more favorable. *The Atlantic* meanwhile [examines](#) the US-Iran conflict that never happened, writing that Obama has argued that the new dialogue with Iran is yielding near-term benefits and opportunities that isolating the country never did.

On Thursday, *The Hill's Congress blog* [says](#) that in the upcoming election, the 'hawks' will pay a political price for their calls for a more aggressive US foreign policy. They say that voters haven't forgotten the disastrous consequences of the Iraq war, and now want more diplomacy like that which produced the recent nuclear agreement with Iran.

Earlier this month the drug kingpin Joaquin Guzman – also known as 'El Chapo' – was captured by Mexican authorities. *Hit & Run* [say](#) that El Chapo's capture will not reduce the flow of drugs into the US; now that he's behind bars, the drug trade will get more lucrative and more dangerous.

American Thinker this week gives [five reasons](#) why the new(ish) F-35 fighter bomber are too dangerous to be flown including needing a very long runway to operate and a high hourly operating cost of \$50,000.

Obamacare and health policy

This week saw debate over Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders' proposals for 'Medicare for all' to replace the current private insurance and Obamacare systems. *The Conscience of a Liberal* [says](#) that such single-payer plans are just not going to happen anytime soon, mostly because Americans aren't keen on healthcare rationing.



Credit: Fibonacci Blue (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

Republicans are also keen on healthcare reform, but most of their current focus is on repealing Obamacare. *American Thinker* [writes](#) that the question now for the right is what to replace Obamacare with. They argue that whatever the GOP does look to do, they shouldn't disrupt the current employer-based system, nor should they focus on covering the uninsured.

The Daily Signal [says](#) this week that Obamacare's special enrollment periods may well be driving up costs for customers. For the most part, consumers can only purchase coverage outside the November 1st to January 31st period in exceptional circumstances, but as many as ten percent of Obamacare customers are taking advantage of these special enrollment periods, with no way to verify whether or not they actually qualify. *The Federalist* has also been [looking into Obamacare](#). They find that healthcare coverage available to families actually gets worse as their income rises.

Forty-three years ago this week, the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* gave women the right to have abortions in the US. *The Hill's Congress blog* [reminds](#) us that for many women in America, abortion is a right on paper only as many state laws prevent women from accessing the procedure.

The economy and society

Recent years have seen cities and regions across the country bring in new minimum wage laws in an effort to increase prosperity for the lowest paid workers. *The Daily Signal* [says](#) that new data shows that minimum wage increases appear to have been damaging for six cities, especially to their leisure and hospitality sectors. *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at workers' rights from the other side of the issue, looking at why some states want strong public sector unions. They say that such strong unions help to curtail strikes and other public sector disruptions.

On Saturday, *Informed Comment* has an interesting [statistic](#) – even though more than half of Americans fear that they – or a family member – might be a victim of a terrorist attack, they actually are more likely to be hit by lightning.

Illegal immigration has been at the cornerstone of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, but new research shows that the country's population of undocumented immigrants has now fallen below 11 million – continuing a decade-long decline [says Federal Eye](#). *The Daily Signal* also [talks](#) immigration, commenting that 500,000 foreigners overstayed their visas last year in the US, and that this means that more needs to be done to solidify the country's entry-exit system and to track who is leaving.

Over the last few decades, cars have gotten safer and safer, thanks to technological advances pursued by car manufacturers. Why hasn't this also been the case for guns? *The Atlantic* [investigates](#).

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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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