

Obamacare repeal progresses, Biden the record-setter, and how do Americans get rich?: roundup of US academic political blogging for January 7-13th

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USAPP Managing Editor, **Chris Gilson** looks at the best of the week's political blogging from academics and think-tanks. Don't see a blog referenced here that you think we should be reading? [Let us know](#) what we've missed out and we'll try to include it next week.

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President-elect Trump and the Republican Party

On Saturday this week, *ImmigrationProfBlog* [reports](#) that President-elect Donald Trump has insisted that Mexico will pay for his proposed border wall. His new idea is apparently that the US will construct the wall, which Mexico will then reimburse it for later on.

Bradford DeLong [wonders](#) who Donald Trump will turn out to be as president and suggests he could be like Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Silvio Berlusconi or even Benito Mussolini.

On Monday, *Beat the Press* [reckons](#) that it would be “fun and easy” for Donald Trump to divest from his businesses: all he need do is get an insurance policy which guarantees a certain estimated value for his properties, and then turn them over to an executor for sale, with Trump giving any excess monies to charity if the value exceeds the original estimate.

American Power [writes](#) Tuesday that Monica Crowley, a commentator who Trump had tapped for an administration job, has been accused of plagiarizing her PhD dissertation as well as her recent book.

On Wednesday this week, *Crooked Timber* [reviews](#) the political thought of another Trump appointee – Breitbart news co-founder, Steve Bannon. They say that as far as they can tell, Bannon believes that capitalism is in crisis, endorses the idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’, and is a defender of far-right populism both at home and abroad.

With much concern over Donald Trump's Cabinet appointments, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [writes](#) Friday that his pick of Rod J. Rosenstein to be Deputy Attorney General should be one which is “completely free of controversy”.

Do you want to oppose Donald Trump? Well, there's really no one right way, [says Lawyers, Guns & Money](#); he can be resisted on many different fronts, and he needs to be opposed by a broad coalition of people.

The Democratic Party

With the end of President Obama's White House tenure rapidly approaching, many commentators this week began to make their own assessments of the 44th President's record. *Beat the Press* [looks](#) this week at Obama's job creation record, commenting that the lower apparent participation rate for working age women has likely been falling due to weak demand. *Bradford Delong* [wonders](#) if "trusting to good luck and the accuracy of the forecast" rather than trying to pass a bigger stimulus package in early 2009 was President Obama's biggest mistake.

Speaking of Obama, *Two Weeks Notice* has the news that the President has ended the "wet foot, dry foot" policy which until now has allowed any Cuban who arrives in the US to stay and become a legal resident.

On Tuesday, *Outside the Beltway* [comments](#) that Vice-President Joe Biden is on the verge of setting a record for Vice-Presidents by not having casted a deciding vote in the Senate. He would also be the only two-term Veep not to have done this.

After their surprise defeat in last year's presidential election, many Democrats have been debating why they failed. *American Power* [warns](#) Democrats to resist the urge to heavily embrace identity politics – lest it balkanize their movement further. On Friday, *Epic Journey* [says](#) that "Left Coast" Democrats in states like California are moving further left, after progressive victories in in the Democratic Party delegate elections in the Golden State.

On Thursday, *Lawyers, Guns and Money* [says](#) that New Jersey Senator, Cory Booker has a "reasonably high chance" of becoming the Democrats' choice to run against Donald Trump in 2020, given that he is charismatic and has a good chance of reviving the Obama coalition. Looking back to the 2016 election, *Angry Bear* [argues](#) that the roots of Hillary Clinton's defeat stretch as far back as 1964, when the Democrat Party began to embrace tax cuts and 'trickle-down' economic policies.



The House and Senate

This was the second week of the 115th Congress, one which was dominated by hearings to vet Donald Trump's Cabinet appointees in the Senate, and debates over the repeal of Obamacare in the House and Senate. *American Power* [writes](#) on Saturday that Democrats are scared of the fact that Republicans actually do have a plan to replace the Affordable Care Act.

On Sunday, *Duck of Minerva* has [twenty five\(ish\) questions](#) for Senators to ask Trump's national security appointees on topics such as terrorism, human rights, the use of military force and climate change. Trump's pick for Attorney General, Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, faced the Senate Judiciary Committee this week. *Lawyers, Guns and Money* [says](#) that despite what some media outlets have been claiming, Sessions is no "lifelong outsider", having been in the Senate for two decades. *The Volokh Conspiracy* [writes](#) this week that the Senate should "just say no" to Sessions, commenting that his record should trouble libertarians, conservatives and others who care about property rights and constitutional liberty.

Monkey Cage [reports](#) that on Wednesday night the Senate voted on a bill which would push forward the repeal of the Affordable Care Act via a procedure known as reconciliation. They say that the GOP are burning their bridges, meaning that they will be unable to retreat from their guarantee of repeal and replace for Obamacare. *Rule 22* also talks reconciliation, [arguing](#) that while Republicans do have a legislative strategy, they probably won't follow it, given the lack of a plan to replace Obamacare.

Elections and American democracy

The Recall Elections blog gives its [2016 report](#) for legislators across the US: 119 recall attempts, which include 60 removals, 17 resignations, and 42 survivals. On Sunday, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [wonders](#) whether “effective foot voting” depends on ballot box voting, as people move to new areas which have governments which they approve of, which in turn encourages those governments to care about attracting migrants.

On Monday, the *OUP Blog* has [three myths](#) about the Electoral College; that it always favors the GOP, for the candidate who wins it to lose the popular vote is uniquely American, and its “winner take all” nature is bad. *Monkey Cage* wonders this week, was the 2016 election democratic? They [see](#) seven serious shortfalls, including the scapegoating of minorities and security agencies behaving in a partisan way. Speaking of democracy, many are worried that it's currently under threat by populism. *American Power* [says](#) that rather than being a threat, populism is actually a vibrant manifestation of democracy.

Smart Politics [writes](#) Wednesday on Senator Dean Heller of Nevada – the only Republican among 15 Senators who serve states where their party holds a minority of US House seats. Why does this matter? Heller will be one of the few Republicans at risk during next year's Senate elections, while the Democrats will be on the back foot on the whole.

The Government, Beltway and the Supreme Court

On Monday, *Marginal Revolution* [wonders](#) when the federal government should own land and states a few possible reasons; from for some specific purpose such as siting a nuclear weapons facility to running an asset surplus (which cannot be redistributed via political processes).

On Tuesday, *FiveThirtyEight* [reports](#) on a case before the Supreme Court this week which centers on whether or not businesses are allowed to tell customers about fees which credit card companies charge them when their cards are used. Staying on the topic of SCOTUS, *Lawyers, Guns and Money* [says](#) that one of the greatest tragedies of a Trump presidency may well be that the GOP will impose a view on the country – via the Court and other institutions – that voters have consistently rejected for decades.

Foreign policy, defense and trade

The Russia/US relationship stayed in the spotlight this week, with the circulation of a dossier which alleged that the Russian government possessed material which could be used to blackmail the president-elect. The dossier and the continued accusations of Russia's alleged hacking of the 2016 election means that there are many questions over how President Trump will deal with Russia. *OUP blog* [writes](#) Tuesday that the US should look to rethink its relationship with Russia, not reset it.



Exxon Mobil Chairman and CEO Rex Tillerson Credit: CSIS (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

On Friday, *FiveThirtyEight* [wonders](#) if the US really needs to improve its image abroad, after former Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson promised during his Senate confirmation hearing for the post of Secretary of State that he would restore the US' lost leadership role and fix its damaged reputation. They say that President Obama made very similar promises when he first came into office, as did George W Bush in 2000. Based on the available evidence, they conclude that such statements are actually both a political move, and a reflection of reality – recent presidents have often inherited a need to do some reputation-building abroad. Many US allies are wary of a Donald Trump occupied White House and what his foreign policy might be after he stated on the campaign that he would like them to “pay their fair share”; *Monkey Cage* [reckons](#) that one way for the US to reassure them would be to give them weapons. *Epic Journey*, meanwhile [looks](#) at a new Pew study which gauges the views of Republicans and Democrats towards global threats. It turns out that both groups are even more polarized than ever.

Obamacare and health policy

On Tuesday, *The Conscience of a Liberal*, [says](#) that there will be no Obamacare replacement forthcoming from the GOP, mostly because you can't remove the scheme's individual mandate without “throwing tens of millions of people out of coverage”. The following day, *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [writes](#) that while the war over the Affordable Care Act is not over, the first battle has been lost after the Senate voted to send the budget resolution discussed above to the House which would repeal – though not replace – Obamacare. *Angry Bear* [says](#) that they would love to tell us what the cost of repealing Obamacare would be, but House Speaker Paul Ryan – along with 234 House Republicans have voted to restrict the Congressional Budget Office from examining the cost automatically. This comes after a 2015 study which estimated that a repeal might increase federal deficits by as much as \$353 billion over the next eight years.

FiveThirtyEight this week [looks](#) at whether Donald Trump will make vaccines a partisan issue, after he asked Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to chair a commission on vaccines and scientific integrity. Trump's decision was met with protests from medical experts who warned that it could put children in danger.

The economy, society and criminal justice

Bradford Delong [wonders](#) this week if we are seeing the end of the 35-year long bond bull market in the current age of Trump and Brexit.

On Sunday, *Quantitative Ease* [looks](#) at how economic expectations have diverged between Republicans and Democrats since the elections, commenting that nearly half of Democrats anticipate rising unemployment, only 3 percent of GOP supporters feel the same way.

This week *Angry Bear* [looks](#) at how Americans get – and stay – rich. While over 50 percent of American 18-29 year olds think they will be rich, fewer than 5 percent actually make it. For the most part, wealthy Americans get ahead and stay there by holding on to their assets. *Orgtheory.net* meanwhile [contemplates](#) whether trade associations will exacerbate the growing economic inequality in the US. They say that the power of such associations has grown in recent years, which in turn crowds out the influence of other associations.

The Money Illusion [examines](#) the idea that there are millions of workers who are “discouraged” from finding work. They comment that despite assertions such as this, there is really not much slack left in the economy, and that many of those who are long-term unemployed will simply never work again.

Turning to criminal justice policy, *FiveThirtyEight* this week [reports](#) that most US police officers now feel that their jobs have become more difficult due to the increased level of scrutiny placed on them after recent high profile deaths of black people due to police actions.

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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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