

I'm going to go out on a limb: Hillary Rodham Clinton will be the next president of the United States. While predictions are often a fool's game, particularly for historians, I have been telling anyone who will listen that the US will have its first female president in 2017.

This prediction is less bold than it might seem. The 2016 contest is already eerily evocative of one before – namely the 1988 election that ushered George H W Bush into the White House. And if things keep going as they are, here are the key reasons why Clinton supporters should be optimistic.

In the throes of the 1992 campaign, Clinton strategist James Carville famously reminded his staffers to focus on “ [the economy, stupid](#) ” to defeat Bush during a sharp recession. But in 1988, the then vice-president had benefited from a thriving economy. After a brief recession that harmed the Republicans during the 1986 midterm elections, the US was on the up again, with the unemployment rate for the year averaging [5.5%](#) .

In such circumstances, voters are much less likely to demand a change of party, and Bush benefited from being the Republican candidate at a time when continuity made sense. The way things are going, Hillary Clinton is likely to inherit similar conditions.

Like Ronald Reagan, Barack Obama has presided over an economic recovery. In 2010, the yearly average unemployment rate peaked at 9.6% – eerily, almost the exact same average figure that Reagan faced during his second year); today, it's been brought down to [around 5%](#) .

If such an economic climate persists, it seems probable that Clinton will benefit from voters' goodwill. If historical precedent is anything to go by, plenty of people will be happy to reward the incumbent party with another spell in the White House.

Continuity candidates

Just as Bush did in 1988, Clinton is bidding to follow a two-term president who has amassed a significant legacy, both with regards to policy and in reshaping his party's electoral coalition.

The full extent of Obama's legacy is still to be determined, but his presidency is clearly going to be remembered as a highly consequential one, with the passage of "[Obamacare](#)", the ["thaw" in relations with Cuba](#) and the [Iranian nuclear deal](#) already under his belt.

Yes, Bush took a tentative step out of Reagan's shadow when he called for a "kinder, gentler nation" during his [1988 convention speech](#). Nevertheless, the GOP candidate sought to capitalise on Reagan's legacy by embracing the sitting president as his "friend", and often referred to the achievements of the "[Reagan-Bush era](#)".

Similarly, Clinton is already portraying herself as the protector of Obama's legacy, notably at a [recent Democratic debate](#) where she championed the current president's accomplishments on health care, financial reform and relations with Iran. Should Obama's numbers begin to tick upwards during 2016, [as Reagan's did during 1988](#), expect to hear more of this from Clinton.

Glittering resumé

By most standards, Bush senior and Hillary Clinton remain by far two of the most qualified people to be serious contenders for the presidency in modern political history. By 1988, Bush had been a congressman, senator, ambassador to the UN, [director of the CIA](#) and, of course, vice-president. While not quite matching that extraordinary CV, Clinton is hardly lacking in the experience column, having been a near co-governor and co-president in both her stints as first lady of Arkansas and then the United States, as well as senator and secretary of state in her own right.

There are other, more complex, similarities – the likely make-up of Congress after the election, or the way both candidates effectively handled foreign policy blow-ups that threatened to engulf them early in their respective campaigns.

Bush ably parried the fallout from the [Iran-Contra scandal](#), the revelation that the Reagan administration had violated an arms embargo to secretly sell weapons to Iran and used the

proceeds to fund anti-communist rebels in Nicaragua. Clinton, meanwhile,

[endured a marathon 11-hour hearing](#)

in front of a House of Representatives

[committee](#)

set up to investigate the 2012 attacks on a US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya – an investigation even top Republicans have admitted is

[deeply political](#)

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Now, a couple of disclaimers. Firstly, there was no Donald Trump figure in 1988. At a stretch, one could count the short-lived and quixotic primary campaign of former Ku Klux Klan member and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of White People, [David Duke](#), but his brief run for the Democratic nomination in 1988 never attracted anything like the attention or support Trump has. And whether or not Trump wins, his run

[could damage the Republican party for years to come](#)

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Equally, I'm making the assumption that Clinton will be the Democratic nominee, and that the Republican party will nominate a candidate with mainstream appeal – even if not Bush senior's floundering son Jeb, whose campaign has been on [deathwatch](#) for months. But if the Grand Old Party does end up nominating either Donald Trump or Ted Cruz, Obama may as well begin the [traditional note](#) a president leaves for a successor with "Dear Hillary".

History, as they say, doesn't repeat itself, but often rhymes. Despite the fact that, unlike each of their predecessors, both Bush and Clinton have been known to campaign in [prose rather than poetry](#), it now seems more than likely that between them, they will complete a neat stanza in presidential politics.

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