

A new breed of post-Trump populist leaders could put the US on the path to fascism

Written by Mark Triffitt, Lecturer, Public Policy and Politics, University of Melbourne

Donald Trump's apparent derailment as a serious contender for the White House has brought sighs of relief from many political observers. But the future of US politics remains far from benign.

Trump has given voice to tens of millions of Americans expressing a hardening discontent with the political and economic status quo. The divide between the Establishment and anti-Establishment is now the main game in American politics – and it's a divide as entrenched and potentially toxic as that between North and South in the American Civil War.

Some label the anti-Establishment movement pervading America as "Trumpism".

But they've got it wrong.

"Trumpism" suggests an ideology. It suggests a coherent set of principles around which disenchanted Americans can articulate a game changing political agenda.

Trump is no ideologue. It should be clear by now that he is a misogynist and narcissist whose ability to outline a coherent agenda to America's voiceless is severely limited by his character failings.

However, as former Foreign Minister Bob Carr [recently highlighted](#), it doesn't really matter if Hillary Clinton defeats Trump on November 8. Far more competent, grassroots politicians will line up to take over the Trump mantle.

Without an infantile and pampered property mogul in their sights, it will be much harder for the US Establishment to discredit its anti-Establishment opponents.

A new, post-Trump breed of leaders will be more adept at shifting populism toward a more

A new breed of post-Trump populist leaders could put the US on the path to fascism

Written by Mark Triffitt, Lecturer, Public Policy and Politics, University of Melbourne

sinister “ism”, one that widens and deepens grassroots discontent. What we could be seeing is the emergence of fascism - American-style.

If you think America, the land of the free, is immune from such tendencies, just [look to history](#) .

During the Great Depression, when the US was split by similarly extreme divides between rich and poor, self styled “strong men” gained huge grassroots support from those who felt trampled and betrayed by the Establishment and saw liberal democracy as a plaything for the powerful.

Many looked to Nazi Germany for inspiration, claiming “rigged” democracy should be sacrificed to reduce economic disparity and allow the nation to recapture its former glory. Groups such as the German-American Bund and US Black Legion echoed the racist mantras espoused by Hitler and Mussolini.

These groups failed to break through, thanks to the innovative leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, who [rebuilt America’s democratic capitalist system](#) by blending it with a big, new welfare state.

Trump’s campaign has energised and empowered right wing, anti-Establishment groups across the US, effectively giving them permission to metastasise into something more mainstream and odious.

They trumpet Trump’s isolationist agenda to wider audiences, along with his threats to exclude Muslims from America and promises to restore the nation to its former glory.

Even if Trump loses in a landslide, there will be many millions who agree with [his claims](#) that he lost the presidential race due to moneyed interests rigging democracy. These supporters will be more likely to sacrifice a political system they see as delivering them nothing.

If Clinton wins, can we expect her to show the same innovative leadership as Roosevelt and

A new breed of post-Trump populist leaders could put the US on the path to fascism

Written by Mark Triffitt, Lecturer, Public Policy and Politics, University of Melbourne

curtail these threats? The answer is: unlikely. For all her high level experience, Clinton is reminiscent not of Roosevelt, but his predecessor, Herbert Hoover.

Hoover is often remembered as the well meaning but ultimately hapless President unable to comprehend, let alone contend with, the political and economic disruption brought on by the Great Depression and the deep societal splits it created.

Clinton will break new ground if she becomes the first female US President. But her campaign's [dependence on Wall Street donations](#) and [highly-scripted](#) style of communication make her a reflection of the deep disconnect that fuelled anti-Establishment populism in the US in the first place.

We should be deeply worried about what Trump's campaign signals for the future of American politics. As populism in the US hardens into something more ominous with Clinton's likely victory, we should be equally concerned about an increasingly fractious America turning its anger outward.

Mark Triffitt is a Member of the Academic Advisory Council of the newDemocracy Foundation.

Authors: Mark Triffitt, Lecturer, Public Policy and Politics, University of Melbourne

Read more <http://theconversation.com/a-new-breed-of-post-trump-populist-leaders-could-put-the-us-on-the-path-to-fascism-67645>