**Trump May Lose, But Trumpism Lives On**

**Trump entered as a masterful entertainer who could exploit people’s fears and insecurities**

[Dr. James J. Zogby](https://www.nation.com.pk/reporter/5749)

January 28, 2024

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns), [Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper)

Donald Trump’s decisive victory in the Iowa caucuses and com­manding lead in upcoming pri­maries should put to rest fantasies of Republicans hopeful that their party can be rescued from his clutches. These foes of the for­mer president don’t under­stand his hold over voters.

“Never Trumpers” and many establishment Democrats act as if the problem were just the man—that if only Trump could be beaten or shut down, all would be well.

Trump is a well-established prob­lem—pathological narcissist, outland­ish exaggerator and outright liar, fraud, misogynist, and inciter to violence. Yet, despite the best efforts of many to discredit or dislodge him, he has only grown stronger.

There are two major reasons for this failure. First, those seeking to depose him ignore that his support is ground­ed in deep discontent predating his emergence on the national political stage. Second, the attacks against Mr. Trump emanate from the very insti­tutions and individuals he’s targeted, and have only reinforced his popular­ity with his supporters.

[Weather turns cold after rain in Karachi](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Jan-2024/weather-turns-cold-after-rain-in-karachi)

Trump isn’t the first demagogue to lead a right-wing populist movement. Governor George Wallace’s 1970s seg­regationist American Independence Party, the late 1980s Moral Majority/Christian Coalition movements, Pat Buchanan’s 1988 “Pitchfork Brigade,” and the anti-Obama Tea Party and “Birther” movements—these set the stage for Trump’s rise.

What spawned these movements was more than a half a century when many, mainly white, middle/working class Americans experienced social, political, and cultural dislocations and an unsettling loss of control over their lives and futures.

The ‘60s and ‘70s were especial­ly traumatic for many Americans with the emergence of three transformative movements that shook society, poli­tics, and culture: the Black-led move­ment for civil rights; the deeply divisive movements for and against the war in Vietnam; and a cultural revolution that upended accepted social mores.

[Livestock minister takes notice of complaints regarding irregularities](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Jan-2024/livestock-minister-takes-notice-of-complaints-regarding-irregularities)

In their wake, what then-President Richard Nixon called “the silent major­ity” reacted: incidents of overt racism or fear of racially-motivated violence; displays of hyper-patriotism or a loss of faith in the country, its institutions, and professed values; and a sense of being unmoored by radical social and cultural change.

For fifty years Americans reacted to these stressful changes with manifes­tations of racially-motivated fear of the “others,” hyper-patriotism or a roman­ticization of America’s “great past,” and refuge in the embrace of fundamental­ist religious beliefs.

The 2008-2009 economic collapse and Barack Obama’s election brought these threads together, setting the stage for Trump’s emergence. In a mat­ter of weeks, pensions disappeared, unemployment doubled, and foreclo­sures skyrocketed. After Obama’s elec­tion, Republicans pounced on his race and “foreignness” raising questions about whether or not Obama was even an American—with Trump this craze’s major proponent.

[IGP meets delegation of welfare organisation](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Jan-2024/igp-meets-delegation-of-welfare-organisation)

With these preconditions estab­lished, Trump entered as a master­ful entertainer who could exploit peo­ple’s fears and insecurities and project the strength and certainty they craved. He warns of immigrants who bring vi­olence and take jobs, and of once-re­spected institutions, like law enforce­ment, courts, media.

A decade later, his movement has taken control of the Republican Party and may retake the White House. De­spite efforts by the Republican estab­lishment and Democrats, he has only grown stronger. Their efforts to hold him accountable rely on the very insti­tutions he accuses of conspiring against him. By questioning the integrity of the courts, FBI, media, and of course, Dem­ocrats, Trump inoculates himself.

By convincing his supporters that he alone understands their pain, fears, and frustrations, and can defend them, an attack on him becomes an attack on them. They cling to him for security and certainty. Neither a rape conviction nor concurrent trials for financial fraud, in­citement, mishandling and lying about illegal possession of secret government files will bring him down.

[PFA discards 2,000 litre substandard milk, 400kg inferior-quality sweets](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Jan-2024/pfa-discards-2-000-litre-substandard-milk-400kg-inferior-quality-sweets)

Trump may lose this election, but his movement will continue to pose threats, including violence, maybe even greater than that of January 6, 2021. Lawlessness and acts of bigotry can­not be tolerated. While punishment is required, simply defeating Trump and punishing him isn’t enough. Instead of demeaning or attacking Trump’s sup­porters, a concerted effort is need­ed to address the issues at the root of their insecurities and discontent. Find­ing constructive progressive solutions that demonstrate respect and concern won’t happen overnight, but if efforts aren’t made in this direction, “Trump­ism” will only fester and grow.

**Dr. James J. Zogby**  
The writer is the President of Arab American Institute.