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Separating Donald Trump From Trumpism

Donald Trump the candidate and his mixture of attitudes and positions aren't the same thing



Donald Trump has tapped into discontent that will outlast his candidacy, whether he wins or not.

PHOTO: MARK WALLHEISER/GETTY IMAGES



By

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This is a good time to remember that there is Trump, and there is Trumpism. They aren't the same, and their fates aren't necessarily linked.

Trump is, of course, Donald Trump, Republican presidential nominee. And he is in some trouble. He spent last week being even more of a controversy magnet than usual, alienating some key figures within his own party, falling further behind Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in the polls and leading some to wonder whether he is fatally flawed as a candidate.

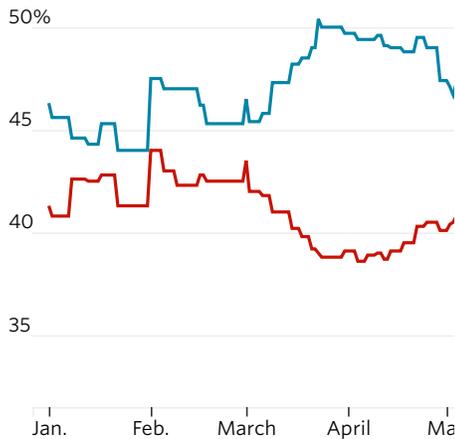
Then there is Trumpism—the mixture of attitudes and positions that catapulted its namesake to the Republican nomination in the first place. Trumpism is a populist mix of anger at the status quo, skepticism about the virtues of free trade and immigration, doubts about the need for U.S. intervention abroad, fondness for law and order and a dose of nationalism. “Americanization, not globalization, will be our new credo,” Mr. Trump put it in a speech in Detroit on

Monday.

Donald Trump didn't create these attitudes. He tapped into them. There is every reason to believe that, even if he fails this year, they will have a life of their own going forward. That is something both parties would do well to keep in mind.

CLINTON is currently leading **TRUMP** by 6.8 pct. pts.

In the Real Clear Politics average (—) of several individual polls (•)



The appeal of Trumpism can be seen in data from a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll completed last week, in the midst of Mr. Trump's fight with the family of a Muslim U.S. soldier killed in Iraq who spoke at the Democratic convention and his feud with top figures of his own party. Even as his own standing was sliding, including with his core audience of white working-class voters, his core message continued to resonate.

When voters were asked whether Mr. Trump or Mrs. Clinton would be better at changing business as usual in Washington, Mr. Trump prevailed in a runaway, by 48% to 26%. That is a powerful sentiment in an antiestablishment year.

Despite a lack of specifics in his economic plans—something Mr. Trump started to address with a fairly conventional economics speech and backup supporting materials Monday—he retained an advantage over Mrs. Clinton as the candidate best able to deal with the economy, though his lead in that category has shrunk. And he enjoyed a 44% to 36% advantage on who could best deal with crime.

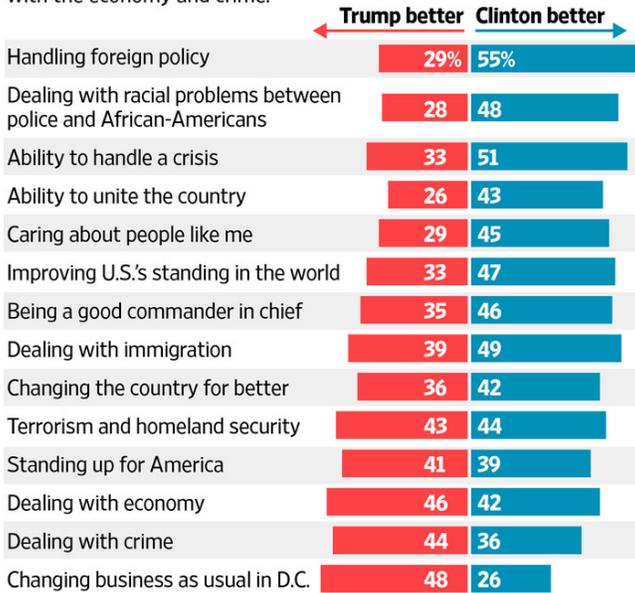
Perhaps most telling, the poll tested voter reactions to core messages that Mr. Trump and Mrs. Clinton each delivered in their convention acceptance speeches—without saying which candidate delivered them.

Mr. Trump's core message in the poll talked of "a moment of crisis for our nation" and said attacks on police and terrorism "threaten our very way of life." Mrs. Clinton's core statement was less dark, saying "do not let anyone tell you that our country is weak...Do not let anyone tell you we don't have what it takes. We do."

By a 52% to 36% ratio, more voters said the Trump statement

Qualities of the Candidates

Poll respondents believe Hillary Clinton would be better at foreign policy and handling crises, while Donald Trump would deal better with the economy and crime.



Source: WSJ/NBC News telephone poll of 800 registered voters conducted July 31-Aug. 3; margin of error: +/-3.46 pct. pts. THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

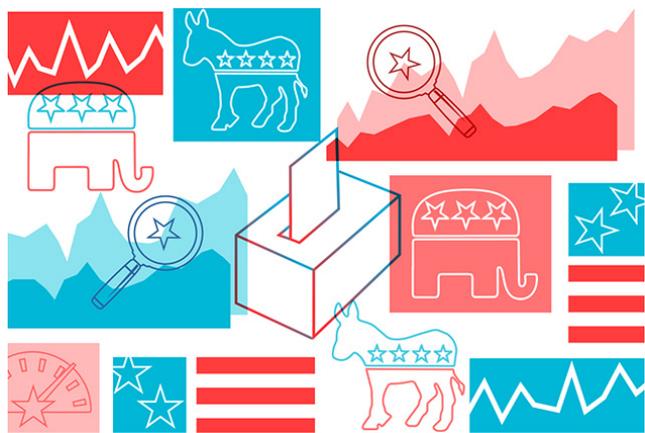
described what they are thinking “very well.”

Even on the personal problems that plagued each candidate last week—Mr. Trump’s fight with the family of the fallen Muslim soldier and Mrs. Clinton’s continued wrestling with her use

of a private email server while secretary of state—concerns about the two candidates were about even.

So the Trump message retains power, even if the messenger is flawed. “There is a Trump campaign lurking in this data,” said Republican pollster Bill McInturff, who conducts the Journal/NBC News poll along with Democrat Fred Yang. He added: “If Donald Trump were capable of running the campaign that sits here waiting for him in this data, there is a capacity to close this gap” with Mrs. Clinton.

Where Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump Stand on Foreign Policy



It isn’t clear that’s

possible. Doubts about the Trump temperament aren’t abating at all, nor are deep concerns about his knowledge and experience. These are critical problems.

But they also distract from the fact that Mr. Trump put his finger on a public attitude of some significance. Whether he actually sensed it or simply stumbled onto it doesn't really matter. Somebody was bound to come along to crystallize it, because it has been building for years.

Its roots go at least as far back as the insurgent candidacies of Ross Perot and Patrick Buchanan in the 1990s, maybe to George Wallace's run in 1968. Eight years ago, former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty warned his party that it was missing the rise of working-class "Sam's Club Republicans" with more populist economic views. Three years ago, after off-year elections, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, a Democrat, warned of the emergence of a radicalized center looking for a pragmatic problem-solver not associated with a dysfunctional Washington.

Now Trump forces, having entered the arena, aren't likely to simply exit quietly. If Mr. Trump wins, they will be empowered. If their standard-bearer fails, Republicans will have to learn to deal with an unhappy, establishment-hating army within. Eventually, Democrats may have to as well.

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