

AFJ Report

Peter Roff talks about America No.6

The Beginning of the End

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With less than a month to go before the U.S. presidential election the outcome is still in doubt. Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton remains in the lead according to most polls but not by so much that New York real estate developer Donald Trump cannot still catch her.

The latter scenario is increasingly unlikely with each passing day but Trump, despite the battering he has taken since an 11-year-old tape featuring him talking in unfaltering terms about women was released just before the second debate, retains a pathway to victory.

It is clear the American public has concluded both major party candidates are reprehensible. Trump is viewed as an egotist and a scoundrel while Clinton is seen as untrustworthy and representative of everything that is wrong with Washington. If “none of the above” were an option on November 8 it is quite clear it would be the favored choice in a landslide.

The outcome will likely be a direct result of voter intensity which, up to now, has all been on Trump’s side. Those who feel they’ve been left behind as the United States has integrated further and further into a truly global economy (rather than one it participates in by essentially leads) have been for Trump overwhelmingly because he talks about bringing back their jobs. This has brought many of them back into the political process, a place they’ve hardly been since George Herbert Walker Bush was elected in 1988.

When you look at the issues Trump prevails over Clinton time and again. He’s for a crackdown on illegal immigration while Mrs. Clinton is effectively for open borders. He’s for cutting the personal and corporate income tax rates while closing loopholes and eliminating special interest deductions while she wants higher taxes and intends basically to preserve the tax code as it is. She wants to make it harder for Americans to own guns while Trump has the full support of the 5– million-member National Rifle Association.

She wants to use Obamacare – which has produced higher premiums just as its opponents forecast – as the basis for further reform while he wants to end the barriers blocking insurance from being sold across state lines. She’s concentrating on bending the cost curve for healthcare down – which has led to more and more people having insurance they can’t use because they can’t pay the deductible – while he wants to improve the quality of care.

Neither has a particularly solid plan for dealing with world affairs. He's for renegotiating trade deals so they protect American workers while she's speaks about the issue from both sides of her mouth. It's no wonder the public is confused.

With the help of the American media however the closing days of the campaign are being used to shape it into a referendum on Trump's character alone. In that environment he's certain to lose. Consider the amount of time spent covering the so-called "sex tape" versus the lack of attention with any intensity outside the explicitly conservative press to the damaging information found in the latest round of materials made public by WikiLeaks. The issues involving the Clinton Foundation alone should be enough to bring her down – and would if she was a Republican – but they are being glanced over by the establishment media.

All this has thrown the Republican establishment into a panic. House Speaker Paul Ryan has publically announced he will no longer defend Trump and is advising congressional candidates to separate themselves from Trump wherever and whenever they need to. This is only divided the party further at a time when it needs badly to be unified behind its candidate, no matter how flawed he might be in the face of universal support on the left from interest groups and voters normally found in the Democratic column.

That Clinton has her problems too should go without saying. She will likely win a substantial portion of the Hispanic vote – running better than Obama did in either of his elections – because of Trump's position on immigration. Trump, however, may run better among blacks than Romney, McCain, or George W. Bush because he is talking about the issues of the inner city more than any Republican candidate in recent memory. Black voters are also being reminded on a regular basis about what she said about "super-predators" and her husband's aggressive support for the 1994 crime which many African-American community leaders blame for the increase in the number of young black men and women now in prison for relatively minor offenses.

Attitudes about the presidential race are also being driven by the polls which, as previously mentioned, have shown Mrs. Clinton with everything from a narrow to a substantial lead. Most of those surveys, at least the national ones, are using turn out models predicting far more Democrats and self-described independents casting votes than Republicans.

Now it may be the case this is what the electorate will look like but it's a highly suspect assumption. There were more votes cast in the 2016 Republican primary than ever before in a contested election – and Trump got a significant plurality of those. The GOP has also shown a considerable lead among newly registered voters in key states where voters register by party. In Pennsylvania, which the Republicans have not seriously contested for president since 1992, more than 100,000 Democrats in the last year have changed their registration to GOP. The NBC/Wall Street Journal poll released just after the second debate that had Mrs. Clinton leading by 11 points had a sample that was 34 percent Democrat, 24 percent Republican – out of which 46 percent had voted for Obama in 2012 while 33 percent had voted for Romney. Obama won that election by 4 points, 51 to 47, yet the sample has him winning by 13.

To some extent the trend these numbers reflect tie into the spate of stories negative about Trump personally, which is really an organized campaign by Democrats abetted by allies in the major media to suppress the center-right vote.

There is little enthusiasm for another Clinton presidency; roughly two-thirds of all Americans survey over the last six months told pollsters America is on the wrong track while just a quarter say things are headed in the right direction. It's a change election at the presidential level and Clinton represents the status quo.

Showing Trump to be a horrible human being , even while acknowledging that's a debatable point that may have little actual relation to his ability to lead the nation, is all about persuading soft Republican voters, pro-Trump independents, and people who consider themselves Republican because that's what grandmother and grandfather were to stay home on Election Day.

This will all have some effect on down ballot races. Speaker Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell expect it to be one adverse to their interests but that is not at all clear. If the election were held today is it probably the case the Republicans would hold on to control of both congressional chambers even if they go down one or two seats in the Senate and by a handful in the House. The data is suspect for the reasons just given. There's no way to really tell but there is also no reason to expect the polls in this American election are any more precise than those prior to the selection of a parliament

in the U.K. or BREXIT or the other recent elections where the pre-election polls failed by a wide margin to predict the outcome accurately.

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