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Trump Has Revolutionized Politics, First Campaigning, Now Governing

Donald Trump may last; he may go away. But the influence of his revolutionary approach to American politics will endure. What he learned and taught about campaigning will be studied and emulated for years to come.

Social media matters. In 2016 his free Twitter feed defeated Hillary Clinton's \$1.2 billion fundraising juggernaut.

Foot soldiers don't matter. Clinton was everywhere—every state, most counties. In many states Trump didn't have a single office.

It's not location, not location, not location. Clinton dropped buckets of cash on events in big expensive cities. Remember her Roosevelt Island launch announcement, the fancy stage using Manhattan as a backdrop? Trump rode the escalator down to his lobby. He held rallies in cheap, hardscrabble cities like Dayton and Allentown. He understood that his audience wasn't in the room. It was on TV. It doesn't matter where the event is held.

Stump speeches are dead. Stump speeches originated in the 19th century. In an era of mass communications you're an idiot if—like Clinton—you read the same exact text in Philly as you read in Chicago. CNN covered Trump's rallies more than Hillary's because not because Jeff Zucker wanted Trump to win. TV networks are in the ratings business; Trump's free-form extemporizing was entertaining because you never knew what he was going to say.

Now Trump is revolutionizing governance.

The biggest revelation from Trump's first term—at this writing, I assume he'll be re-elected—is that bipartisanship is dead. Even with the slimmest majority, a political party can get big things done. You don't need the other party. Not even a single crossover.

The president can be unpopular. Ditto your party. All you need to govern successfully is party discipline. Keep your cabal together and anything is possible.

Trump's approval ratings hover around 38%. That's Nixon During Watergate level. Republicans hold a 51-49 majority in the Senate. Conventional wisdom, based as it is on historical precedent, dictates that controversial legislation can only pass such a narrowly-divided legislative body if the majority entices some members of the minority to go along. There's a corollary to that assumption: the implicit belief that laws are politically legitimate only if they enjoy the support of a fairly broad spectrum of voters.

Not any more.

In this Trump era major legislative changes get rammed through Congress along strict party-line votes—and Democrats suck it up with nary a squawk. Trump's Republicans passed a huge tax cut for corporations and rich individuals. Protesters? What protesters? The GOP gutted Obamacare and suffered no consequences whatsoever...not even a stray attack ad.

The same goes for judicial nominations. Time was, a President would withdraw a nominee to the Supreme Court if the minority party wasn't likely to support him or her, as Reagan did with the controversially far-right Robert Bork. Trump rams his picks through the Senate like Mussolini, Democrats be damned.

Rightist extremist Neil Gorsuch was confirmed to the Supreme Court by a slim 54-45. Considering that Democrats were still seething over Republicans' refusal to consider Obama high court nominee Merrick Garland (a centrist) for 10 months, that was a remarkable success. We don't know what will become of the battle over Brett Kavanaugh, hobbled by multiple accusations of sexual assault and his anguished, furious performance trying to defend himself on national television; if confirmed it will be by the slimmest of party-line votes.

One can, and perhaps should, deplore the new normal. In the long run, it can't bode well for the future of a country for its citizens to be governed by laws most of them are against, passed by politicians most of them despise, and whose constitutionality is assessed by court justices most of them look down upon. But this is reality. Sitting around tweeting your annoyance won't change a thing.

Darwinism isn't survival of the fittest; it's survival of the most adaptable. Crocodilians have stuck around hundreds of million of years in part because they've learned to eat just about anything. The same goes for politics: if Democrats want to win power and score big victories after they do they'll learn the lessons of Trumpism or die.

Party discipline is everything. Traitors, Democrats In Name Only, cannot be tolerated.

There is no room in a modern political party for "moderates" or "centrists." Only a strong, strident, unapologetically articulated left vision can counter the energized GOP base and its far-right agenda.

Politics as bloodsport? It was always so. Republicans knew it. Thanks to Trump, Democrats can no longer deny their clear options: get real or get left behind.