

The Real Election Surprise? The Uprising of the American People

By Patrick Caddell

For more than two years the American people, in a great majority, from left to right, have been in revolt against the political class and the financial elites in America. It is a revolt with historic parallels, most closely resembling the Jacksonian revolution of the 1820s. It is an uprising. It is a peaceful uprising of a people who see a country in decline and see nothing but failure in the performance of their leadership institutions. And they have signaled their intent to take back their country and to reclaim their sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the analysts, the pollsters and most importantly the commentariat of the political class have never understood, and in fact are psychologically incapable of understanding what is happening. And for the entire cycle of this presidential campaign they have failed to grasp what was happening before their eyes – for it runs counter to everything they believe about themselves.

In truth, they are suffering from cognitive dissonance believing in their righteous superiority and are not capable of realizing that it is they who have become the adversary of the American people. And therefore they have been wrong, in this entire election cycle, every step of the way.

For them, American politics only began yesterday. They know little history and have no appreciation of the collective consciousness of the American people. Whether it is the campaign of Bernie Sanders, who came within a hair's breadth of knocking out the coronated nominee of the Democratic establishment or on the other side, the emergence of the total outsider Donald Trump, the most improbable candidate of all. In truth, Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, sucked from the same trough even if it was from opposite ends. But the critical point that is missed, by almost everyone, was that neither Sanders nor Trump created this uprising. They were chosen vehicles – they did not create these movements, these movements created them.

In less than a day we will know how far this revolt has come. But, make no mistake, whatever the outcome, this revolt is not ending, it is merely beginning.

Several years ago, I began, with my colleagues at Armada, an ongoing, in-depth research project on what has become known as the "Candidate Smith" project. A good friend of mine, Lee Hanley, who sadly just passed away, volunteered to begin this project with only one charge: that we explore my hypothesis that something profound was happening in the collective consciousness of the American people.

What we learned in our in-depth research was as astonishing as it was unexpected. It became clear from this really deep public opinion inquiry that American politics has entered an historic paradigm. What is emerging in what had been assumed to be the static political system was about to be reconfigured in ways and that we still do not know fully. But one thing is certain: the old rules of politics are collapsing and a new edifice is emerging.

The conventional wisdom that America is absolutely divided into warring tribes is a tired falsehood. Overall, in the attitude structure of the American people, the elements of this new paradigm are commonly shared by upwards of 80 percent of the population – from the Occupy Wall Street movement on the left to the Tea Parties on the right. The political battleground is no longer over ideology but instead is all about insurgency.

The larger atmosphere is dominated by three overriding beliefs:

First, the American people believe that the country is not only on the wrong track but almost 70 percent say that America is in actual decline. The concept of decline is antithetical to the American experience.

Second, for more than three centuries, the animating moral obligation of America has been the self-imposed obligation that each generation passes on to its children a better America than they themselves inherited. This is what makes us Americans. In Armada's polling we found that a majority of Americans believe that they are better off than their parents were. But a great majority says that THEIR children will be worse off than they themselves are today. This is the crisis of the American Dream. And it is no surprise that a majority of Americans agree that if we leave the next generation "worse off" that there will still be a place called "the United States" but there will no longer be an "America."

Third, when asked whether or not everyone in America plays by the same rules to get ahead or are there different rules for well-connected and people with money, a staggering 84 percent of voters picked the latter. Only 10 percent believed that everyone has an equal opportunity.

These over-arching attitudes provide the framework for today's political revolt.

Unfortunately, I suspect, if you asked these questions of the political, financial and media elite they would have a very different response.

From the time I was a teenager and a self-starting pollster I have had an acute interest in the phenomenon of political alienation. In our research, the current level of alienation that now grips the American electorate is staggering and unprecedented.

Here are some of our latest results among likely voters from early October 2016:

1. The power of ordinary people to control our country is getting weaker every day, as political leaders on both sides, fight to protect their own power and privilege, at the expense of the nation's well-being. We need to restore what we really believe in – real democracy by the people and real free-enterprise. AGREE = 87%; DISAGREE = 10%
2. The country is run by an alliance of incumbent politicians, media pundits, lobbyists and other powerful money interests for their own gain at the expense of the American people. AGREE = 87%; DISAGREE = 10%
3. Most politicians really care about people like me. AGREE = 25%; DISAGREE = 69%
4. Powerful interests from Wall Street banks to corporations, unions and political interest groups have used campaign and lobbying money to rig the system for them. They are

looting the national treasury of billions of dollars at the expense of every man, woman and child. AGREE = 81%; DISAGREE = 13%

5. The U.S. has a two-track economy where most Americans struggle every day, where good jobs are hard to find, where huge corporations get all the rewards. We need fundamental changes to fix the inequity in our economic system. AGREE = 81%; DISAGREE = 15%
6. Political leaders are more interested in protecting their power and privilege than doing what is right for the American people. AGREE = 86%; DISAGREE = 11%
7. The two main political parties are too beholden to special and corporate interest to create any meaningful change. AGREE = 76%; DISAGREE = 19%
8. The real struggle for America is not between Democrats and Republicans but between mainstream American and the ruling political elites. AGREE = 67%; DISAGREE = 24%

These numbers and many, many more from our research paint the true outlines of the emerging political paradigm and the insurgency that it has ignited. In fact, it is the last question above that is agreed to by “only two-thirds” of the American people. Despite everything we are told day and night – that political battle in America is between Democrats and Republicans – two thirds of the American people believe that the battle lines are drawn between mainstream America and its ruling Political Class. THIS is the battle of 2016 and beyond.

These are findings that the reader has likely never been told. For they reflect the legitimate dissent of the American people from the actions and leadership of their establishment institutions. This is something the political class and mainstream media refuse to recognize much less acknowledge.

Befitting the emerging new paradigm, 2016 has already been an election like none we have ever known. But it is not without some parallels to another election.

In 1980, America was gripped with a foreign policy crisis, there hostages being held in Iran, inflation was exploding and the electorate was very unhappy. The country had two candidates for president: the incumbent – President Jimmy Carter and Republican challenger Ronald Reagan. For the first time in polling history both candidates, Carter and Reagan, were viewed negatively by the American people – although their negatives were nowhere near the level of Clinton and Trump’s unpopularity. While the shock of Vietnam and Watergate had helped propel an unknown peanut farmer to the presidency, there was nowhere near the level of alienation and discontent that now grips America.

I was Jimmy Carter’s pollster and strategist in 1980 and I know, more than anyone, about what really happened. The entire Carter campaign was premised on painting the controversial Ronald Reagan as too risky to be president and too dangerous to entrust with nuclear weapons.

Exactly a week before Election Day there was a fatal presidential debate (that I wanted to avert) which gave Ronald Reagan his chance to make his case. It shook up the election.

The coalescing of voters around Carter began to break down. Within a couple of days Reagan had established a small lead over President Carter.

On the Saturday before the election the race had rebounded into a tie or slight Carter lead. And then it all fell apart.

My polling for the campaign told the story. By Sunday night President Carter was 5 points down and by Monday night the margin had exploded to 10 points down.

*The uniqueness of 1980 is this: In the history of American polling this was the only presidential election that entered the last weekend close and finished in a landslide. **The only one.***

The question on the table now is: could 2016 be the second such election? If it is, it won't be for Hillary Clinton.

The political class and the mainstream media have a narrative that Trump's late surge is the result of an intervention by FBI Director James Comey. That narrative, like every one they've had over this cycle, couldn't be more wrong. The momentum of the election was already moving toward Trump /before/ Comey's announcement to reopen of the Clinton email investigation. That event, like the presidential debate in 1980, tended to accelerate what was already in motion.

No two elections are really the same, whatever similarities they share. And neither are 1980 and 2016.

Here are a couple of differences – In 1980 there was no early voting. Without thinking through the consequences, this reform has resulted in millions of ballots being cast long before the campaign culminates. And that is almost surely an edge for Hillary Clinton and the better organized Democratic Party.

While both elections in 1980 and 2016 feature an American public that attitudinally wants real change there are differences that have already been noted: Many polls show that by just about 2 to 1 voters do not want to continue the policies of President Obama. In 1980 disapproval of Carter's job performance did not extend to the personal feelings Americans had for Carter and the deep respect they had for his integrity. (And of course, in both elections, Americans saw the country headed in the wrong direction.)

As suggested before, the alienation and discontent of the American electorate is way beyond that of 1980.

In 1980 the mainstream media was far more even-handed in its coverage and prided itself on journalism and not partisanship.

As I look at some of the deeper polling results, the questions I have been able to inject into the Breitbart/Gravis polling questions of recent days, may be in the end, instructive. As with Jimmy Carter in 1980, Hillary Clinton is far more likely to be viewed as qualified to be president and possessing a better presidential temperament.

But the results of the latest poll are worth pondering: Here are the most interesting questions and answers. First, voters were asked to agree or disagree with following question:

For years, the political elites have governed America for their own benefit and to the detriment of the American people – this election is the best chance in our lives to take back our government. AGREE = 63% (with 46% strongly agreeing); DISAGREE = 31%

Voters were then asked the same two questions of each candidate: **Which is closer to your opinion if (Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump) wins: the political elites and special interests win; the political elite and special interests lose.**

By 65 percent to 35 percent voters said that if Hillary Clinton wins the political elites WIN. And by an opposite margin, the majority of voters said that by 57 percent to 43 percent the elites LOSE if Trump wins.

Significant numbers of Clinton's *own voters* believe that her win is a victory for the unpopular elites and special political interests.

So the question is, if these attitudes are salient in the voters' minds as they vote on Tuesday it could produce the biggest surprise of all in 2016.

But regardless of who wins on November 8 this uprising of the American people has just begun.

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