

# Strategic Analysis Paper

25 February 2020

## Trump and Trumpism: The Creation of a Legacy?

**Lindsay Hughes**

*Senior Research Analyst*

*Indo-Pacific Research Programme*

### Key Points

- It is likely that President Trump will win the US presidential election in November this year.
- There are equally strong signs that the support he now enjoys could result in a Republican takeover of the House of Representatives.
- Were that to occur, the Republican Party would control both the House and Senate.
- President Trump is, moreover, placing officials who share his views and who are loyal to him in key positions in the Intelligence Community and in the State Department.
- Combined with his nominations to the Supreme Court, the effects of “Trumpism” could have a major impact on US domestic and foreign policy for decades to come.

### Summary

President Trump delivered his State of the Union [address](#) on 4 February in true Trump fashion: he repaid the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, in her own coin for her dismissive attitude towards him the previous year and simultaneously played to the entire American gallery. He began by noting his economic achievements over the last year, which themselves were of a greater magnitude than any his immediate predecessor had achieved. Those, however, could never have satisfied this president's thirst for unbounded glory. He incorporated the stories of ordinary Americans into his speech, effectively demonstrating

how executive decisions – his decisions – affected the lives of people who live far from the elitist, stratospheric circles within which most politicians in Washington move.

President Trump first introduced a military veteran who had previously struggled with drug addiction. Homeless, the African-American man was eventually employed by a company in Cincinnati, Ohio, that, due to the booming economy, sought workers from areas that had until now been neglected. The company trained and then employed the veteran. As Mr Trump noted, the man is now a top-performing tradesman. He then introduced a World War Two airman who, after carrying out 130 missions, returned to “a country still struggling for civil rights”, then went on to fight in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He also introduced the 100-year-old African-American veteran’s great-grandson, who aspires to join the Space Force that the president recently created. He next introduced a single African-American mother, whose young daughter aspired to going to a better school but whose efforts to achieve that had been blocked by legislation enacted by the Democrat Governor of Pennsylvania, who vetoed a Trump initiative, “School Choice”, in that state. That veto blocked the young girl’s dreams of a better-quality education and those of an estimated 50,000 other students. The president announced, however, that an opportunity scholarship would be made available to the student, enabling her to go to the school of her choice.

He brought a serving military officer into the chamber, much to the surprise of that person’s spouse and family who thought he was still in Afghanistan and, in a show of defiance to the Democrats, conferred the highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, on a conservative radio talk-show host. Arguably the most impactful story was that of a mother and her two-year-old daughter, who had been born at just 21 weeks. The strongly pro-life president did not need to make a statement regarding the right-to-life debate; the presence of that child spoke volumes to “pro-lifers”.

This paper, then, will describe why many ordinary US citizens may vote for President Trump in the forthcoming November presidential election and act as a basis for a future examination of his possible foreign policies in his second term.

## **Analysis**

By referring to the factors that had most affected his invitees, President Trump was doing three things. First, he was drawing the entire American people into his narrative, conflating their hopes, aspirations, pride, sorrow and desire for justice – economic and social – that many felt to have been systematically eroded by the previous administration, with those of his invitees. Second, each of the invitees’ stories was posed as a challenge to Democrats, who have fought the president on policy issues pertaining to homelessness, the right to life, school choice, border control and the plethora of other issues that wrack the US today. By drawing public attention to each of his invitees, the president was putting a face on those issues, thereby removing them from the realms of abstract discussion. He also reinforced in the minds of his electoral base the fact that each of those stories related to real people and why they voted for him in the first place. Third, the applause that each invitee received from the Republicans stood in sharp contrast to the reluctance of the Democrats to do so. It

would have been noted by the African-American community across the US that the Democrats did not applaud the president's statistics regarding them: the lowest unemployment level and lowest poverty levels ever. The first five invitees to be recognised by the president were African-American; the recognition and applause they received from the Democrats was perfunctory.

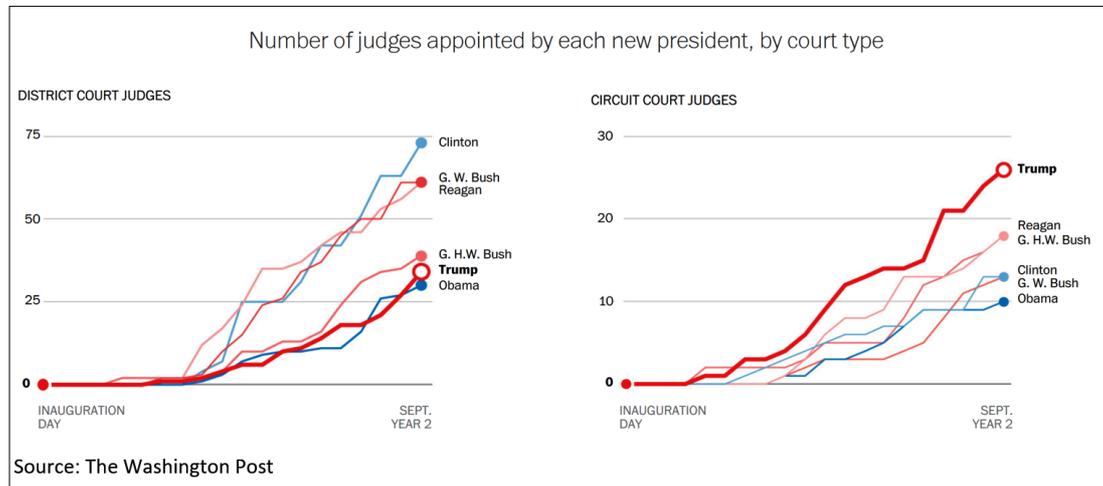
There can be little doubt that, in an election year, President Trump is chasing the African-American vote, recounting stories of aspiration, courage and answered hopes. When he asked Congress to work with him to ban late-term abortions, the face of the mother of the two-year-old girl showed pride, love and, above all, vindication. That remark was also directed at the African-American community which, although comprising [13.4%](#) of the total population, accounted for 36 per cent of all terminations carried out in the US for 2015, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's Abortion Surveillance [report](#) for 2015, which was published in November 2018. President Trump was letting the entire community know that the poverty and unemployment that forced African-American mothers-to-be to terminate their pregnancies was no longer a factor. The Democrats, on the other hand, have not helped their cause in this regard, as this [article](#) shows.

President Trump's policies, bills and speeches appear to be having their desired effect. As his Campaign Manager, Brad Parscale, noted in a [tweet](#) after a Trump rally in Milwaukee recently, of the twenty thousand voters who attended the rally, nearly 58 per cent were not Republicans and over 4,300 did not vote in 2016. Those numbers appear to show a developing trend. At a Trump rally in El Paso, [Texas](#), in June 2019, 70 per cent of the registrants to attend were Hispanic. At the 5 November rally in [Kentucky](#), of the 27,000 voters identified, 28 per cent had voted only once or not at all in the last four elections and a further 23 per cent were Democrats. At the 11 December 2019 [rally](#) in Hershey, Pennsylvania, of the more than 23,000 voters identified, only 20 per cent had voted in any one of the last four elections, twenty per cent were Democrats and 18 per cent were non-white. At the 12 January 2020 rally in Toledo, [Ohio](#), of the nearly 23,000 voters identified, over 5,200 did not vote in 2016, nearly 22 per cent were Democrats and a further 20 per cent independents.

While those figures have not been independently verified, they do appear to show a believable trend, as footage of people hoping to attend one of the president's rallies in various parts of the US shows (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), for example).

While there could never be absolute certainty of an electoral win, President Trump is ensuring that his legacy, sometimes known as "Trumpism", will live on long after his term in office ends. The first avenue towards that goal is to empanel "originalist" judges on Federal Court benches. These are judges who interpret the US Constitution in accordance with the perceived original understanding or intentions of its framers. By 6 November 2019, President Trump had [nominated and had confirmed](#) two Supreme Court justices, 44 Circuit Court judges and 112 District Court judges. It is the various Circuit Courts, which are also known as the Court of Appeals and rank second only to the Supreme Court, that will ensure his legacy. It is in these courts that most major cases are determined and terminated. The twelve Circuit Courts and 94 District Courts almost always provide the final judgement on

cases filed in the federal courts. In his three years in office, President Trump has appointed around [30 per cent of all Circuit Court judges](#) and nearly one in five District Court judges. His appointees have an average age of 49 years and are likely to remain on the bench for around 30 more. They will outlast by far the “activist” judges appointed by President Obama. Trump appointees are, moreover, replacing retiring judges appointed by other presidents.



It is undoubtedly galling for Democrat Senators that it is their own previous legislation that makes it easy for President Trump to appoint such large numbers of judges. In 2013, the Democratic Party, facing heightened resistance in the Senate to their nominees, passed legislation that reduced the number of votes required for presidential appointees and lower court judges from sixty to fifty-one, thereby eliminating the need for bipartisanship on those nominees. Any such appointment slowed to a crawl in 2014, when Republicans re-took the Senate, leaving a large number of vacancies to be filled by President Trump when he took office in 2017. The Republicans extended that process of obtaining a simple majority to Supreme Court nominations. This is particularly telling because one of the Supreme Court Justices, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, is 85 years of age and not in the best of health. If she were to resign her position, a Trump nominee would bring the number of Republican-leaning Justices to six and reduce the current number of Democrat-leaning Justices to three. Here again, the average age of the two Trump appointees – Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh – is around 54 years.

Not as obvious as his attempts to control the American judiciary, however, is President Trump’s selection of appointees to ambassadorial positions in the State Department. According to one [report](#), the president has appointed at least eight members of his private Mar-a-Lago club as ambassadors to countries in the Caribbean, South Africa and Europe, or to senior positions in the State Department. More importantly, however, Trump-nominated Ambassadors to Canada, France, Iceland, Romania, South Africa and the United Kingdom removed the career diplomats who functioned as Deputy Chiefs of Mission shortly before or after taking office. While around two-thirds of all US ambassadorial positions are traditionally held by career diplomats, the rest being political appointees, under the Trump Administration the [percentage](#) of political appointees has risen to forty-two and that of career diplomats fallen to fifty-eight. There is among the career diplomats, moreover, the perception of a distinct lack of support for them. The State Department is, in short,

becoming politicised to the extent that it is loyalty to the president that matters the most if career goals are to be successfully pursued. One fairly-recent [report](#) alleged that President Trump is “waging war” on the US’s diplomats. That is a myopic reading of the situation. President Trump believes that the diplomatic corps, who he classifies as “unelected officials”, appear to think that they know best what the US needs and see themselves as elitist. In his view, he is reasserting the control of the Executive Branch over civil servants that appears to have eroded over the years, thereby bringing that arm of the government back into line. He is not, in his perception, waging war against the diplomatic corps but reminding them of their duty, reminding them that they are an instrument of government that is to be controlled. His appointees are, by that reckoning, removing the pockets of resistance to that agenda. As President Trump perceives the overall situation, he took office based on his promise to the American people to return the US to greatness. He requires every civil servant and every government department, therefore, to work with him to achieve that agenda. If the views of a civil servant were not to align with those of the president, and if that individual did not work to achieve the president’s agenda, he or she would be perceived as being either disloyal to or working against that agenda and, by extension, against the American people. It is that tension between an elite class, who believe they are working towards the longer-term good of the US, and a president, who is determined to fulfil each of his campaign promises to the American people, that gives rise to allegations of a “Deep State”, a loose coalition of unelected civil servants who seek to “run the country” in accordance with their elitist views, no matter those of the elected political class. President Trump’s fight to wrest power from the political elite and return it to the American people has led to allegations of a war being waged against diplomats and other civil servants. That is plainly incorrect.

There is one other hurdle that President Trump knows that he has to overcome to truly establish a longer-term legacy: the Democrat-controlled House. The House, led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, has long been a thorn in his side. Speaker Pelosi, assisted by House Intelligence Committee Chairman, Representative Adam Schiff, and Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Jerrold Nadler, has, in his view, worked towards blocking his policies and hindering his authority in every way possible. Worse, they have sought to besmirch him as an agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin and, when that was shown to be not factual, sought to impeach him for abuse of office. Although that process failed when the Republican-controlled Senate dismissed the charges (the claim of the Speaker that the president was forevermore impeached notwithstanding), President Trump recognises the ongoing threat of further Democrat action against his policies and agenda. If that threat is to be removed, therefore, the Republicans need to re-take the House.

The Democrats recognise that they have, at best, a tenuous hold on control of the House. They have a majority of eighteen seats in it; in other words, if the Republicans could win eighteen seats more than they currently hold, they would re-take control of the House. The National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) has identified thirty-one vulnerable Democrats in districts that President Trump won during the 2016 election. President Trump, furthermore, won sixteen of those districts by five or more percentage points in 2016. The NRCC is not limiting its push to just those districts, however. It has [identified](#) fifty-five districts from where it plans to remove incumbent Democrat Representatives. Recognising

the danger, the the Chairwoman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Cheri Bustos, whose district in Illinois is one of those targeted by the Republicans, [announced](#) the creation of the “Frontline Programme” to defend forty-four vulnerable Democrat districts.

There are, however, two problems that the Democrats face in that regard, and they are both of their own making. First, the Democrats are now generally perceived as a party that has worked to block President Trump without offering any viable alternatives to his policies. As the economy booms, therefore, many Americans are asking why they should vote for a party that is apparently more concerned with political intrigue than trying to work for the betterment of the American people. Despite Speaker Pelosi’s statements, moreover, the more moderate Democrats were [against](#) taking any action to impeach the president. Intra-party politics, however, forced Speaker Pelosi to follow through with her threat to impeach President Trump.

That leads to the second problem. The American people recognise that there is a “civil war” being waged within the Democratic Party. It is being waged between the “progressive” faction, which speaks of free Medicare for all, the abolition of university fees, the termination of the Second Amendment, abortion on demand, open borders and the ending of the US’s oil and gas industries. That, apart from being anathema to all Republicans, is recognised by the more traditional Democrats as being fiscally unsound and unsupportable. The more Socialist-leaning Progressive Democrats, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortes and Bernie Sanders, however, appear to seek policies that move their party further and further to the left, leaving traditional Democrats, who have no inclination to vote for a Socialist, feeling that they have been abandoned by their party.

Speaker Pelosi probably went ahead with the impeachment process, despite knowing that she had no hard evidence of President Trump’s collusion with Russia or his abuse of office, in the hope that the progressive faction in her party would then desist from pushing the party further left. That gambit failed, however, and Senator Bernie Sanders is currently the leading Democrat nominee to challenge President Trump in the presidential election in November. She knows that the Democratic Party will probably fail to unseat President Trump in the November election due to perceptions of Senator Sanders as a Communist running the country, a Communist who took his honeymoon in the USSR towards the end of the Cold War and who speaks highly of “Socialist” Venezuela, despite that country’s myriad ongoing problems.

If President Trump is not beaten in November, however, she recognises that he will return to office more powerful than before, and this time with the vast majority of ordinary Americans supporting him. Were that to occur, he would have little difficulty in filling the judiciary with his appointees, formulating policies that would support and further his agenda, both domestic and foreign, and set in place a legacy that would have an impact on the political, economic and social fabric of the US that will last for years, if not decades, to come. It is likely that his foreign policy would continue to be predicated on making America great again, on decoupling the US economy from China’s and on once again re-establishing the primacy of the US in the international system.

A future paper will examine some of those possible developments.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Any opinions or views expressed in this paper are those of the individual author, unless stated to be those of Future Directions International.*

Published by Future Directions International Pty Ltd.  
Suite 5, 202 Hampden Road, Nedlands WA 6009, Australia.  
Tel: +61 8 6389 0211  
Web: [www.futuredirections.org.au](http://www.futuredirections.org.au)