

Trump's successes, foreign and domestic, override his bluster and PR blunders

by Conrad Black



The presidential election campaign has become so intense and bizarre that even seasoned observers may sometimes wish to pause and consider the competing arguments. Practically the entire case for voting for Democratic nominee [Joe Biden](#) is dislike of the incumbent, magnified by the allegation that [President Trump](#) botched the country's response to the coronavirus and is responsible for the deaths of many of the [215,000 Americans](#) deemed to have died as a result (although many of the deceased had other ailments as well).

The new complaints concocted every other day by the Trump-hating media are too trivial and numerous to refute (i.e.,

he [risked the safety](#) of his security unit by greeting supporters outside Walter Reed hospital from his car on Sunday).

The more energetic environmentalists believe Trump is compromising the nation's future, and truckling to the oil industry, by not moving explicitly toward a goal of zero carbon emissions within 30 years. But he is almost certainly correct not to have severely restricted whole regions and industrial sectors in the pursuit of environmental objectives while the extent, nature and sources of climate change remain a matter of strenuous debate, even in informed scientific circles.

Many fault the president for insufficient progress in improving the status of the estimated [31 million Americans](#) not covered by comprehensive public or private health insurance plans. There is some truth to this, though he was let down by congressional Republicans – but he also removed the coercive aspect of ObamaCare and reduced drug prices.

Many special-interest groups are agitating, such as teachers' unions, which blame him for promoting private, faith-based, charter or home schools, even though those unions are chiefly responsible for the decline in public school systems.

More broadly, the rap on President Trump is that he demeans his great office by his thin-skinned pugnacity and intermittent boastfulness. Many previous presidents conspicuously failed to engage in unilateral verbal disarmament. But most maintained the high ground that only the presidency can confer and left it to subalterns to slug it out with opponents well down the ladder from the president.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, the most successful politician in American history, met every definition of a hard-baller but generally left it to underlings such as [Harold Ickes](#) to exchange fire with the president's most vocal critics. At his

final press conference, when President Eisenhower was asked if he had any grievance with the White House correspondents, he said there was nothing an individual journalist or a group of them could do that would seriously inconvenience a president. Richard Nixon was detailed to do most of Eisenhower's political dirty work, including undermining Sen. Joseph McCarthy and dispensing with White House chief of staff Sherman Adams; when he became president, Nixon left most of that work to Vice President Spiro Agnew, though he loaned the services of talented speechwriters Bill Safire and Pat Buchanan to raise Agnew to the task.

President Trump has often allowed himself to be dragged into undignified exchanges with lesser officeholders and reporters; he has been almost continuously engaged in undignified, tedious combat with people unworthy of his attention. This deafening climate of chaos and antagonism has been the largest generator of hostility to the president. A relatively high degree of combat was assured by the president's 2016 campaign against the entire political system, with Republicans scarcely less blameworthy than Democrats, in his view. He [changed parties](#) seven times in 13 years before becoming the Republican presidential nominee and was attacking "the system" more than any party or faction within it. In retaining presidential dignity, Trump should have learned faster and done better.

Former Vice President Biden is a thoroughly unprepossessing nominee with little to show for 44 years in Washington beyond his [malicious destruction](#) of Supreme Court candidate Robert Bork in 1987. He has faced in all four directions on most issues and now has signed on to a set of radical [policy proposals](#) from self-proclaimed socialists Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) (I-Vt.) and Congresswoman [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) (D-N.Y.). Meanwhile, the Democratic Party has been compromised by excessive dependence on its corrupt big-city political machines and by a much-too-intimate flirtation with urban guerrilla groups masquerading as advocates of civil rights.

None of this is very substantive, and there are many arguments for reelecting the president.

The Trump administration has almost eliminated illegal immigration, a scandal and a burden to the country for 30 years for which both parties were responsible. He has eliminated oil imports and, prior to COVID-19, there were 750,000 more employment positions to be filled than there were unemployed people. His is the first government in any important jurisdiction where the lowest 20 percent of income-earners were progressing more quickly in percentage terms than the top 10 percent – the closest that the advanced world has come to dealing with the income-disparity problem.

Trump comprehensively deregulated. He [reduced the income taxes](#) of all businesses and of 83 percent of tax-paying individuals. He identified the China challenge, to general bipartisan agreement, while maintaining civil relations with that country and avoiding the rabble-rousing and demagoguery that was an important part of America's recognition of the international communist threat in the years following World War II.

Trump revived the concept of nuclear nonproliferation regarding North Korea and Iran. He has made more progress toward durable solutions in the Middle East than any of his predecessors since President Carter at Camp David in 1978. Though it is still somewhat unfocused, the Western Alliance has been shaped up from the ragtag of slackers and freeloaders masquerading as "an alliance of the willing," which constituted NATO when Trump was inaugurated. He raised the U.S. military back to a very high level of capability and left interested parties (including the Iranians and North Koreans) in no doubt that he [would not hesitate](#) to use massive air-launched conventional military force if provoked. ISIS has been [practically destroyed](#), and terrorist activity in the Western world has been sharply reduced.

Apart from some public relations blunders, he has managed the greatest public health crisis in a century – [manufacturing](#) necessary equipment, [expanding](#) hospital capacity, [encouraging](#) rapid development of therapies and a vaccine, and now in setting the example that the country must [stop being intimidated](#) and deal, courageously and prudently, with a gradually shrinking problem. Fatalities are down by 70 percent from their high – a time when Democrats condemned his [early suspensions](#) of direct flights from China and Europe. Only a vaccine can exterminate the virus, and 99 percent of infections are of people who survive and seem comparatively immune thereafter, including the president himself. The average age of COVID-19 fatalities is 78, the average life expectancy of Americans. In comparison, the Democrats' incitement of panic has been a disgrace; it is time for positive leadership, and Trump is providing it.

Though he is unlikely to receive credit for it until historians replace journalists as the chroniclers of this time, this president has had the most successful first term in U.S. history, except for Abraham Lincoln, FDR and Nixon, with James K. Polk (who did not seek reelection) as the only other possible rival. Americans should look beyond cant and emotionalism and consider these facts before they vote.

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