

What Was So Different This Time About Trump's Election?

By Victor Davis Hanson

In the weeks before the 2016 Trump Electoral College victory, Trump was polling between 35 and 40 percent.



He would average only about 41 percent approval over his tumultuous four-year tenure.

No one knows what lies ahead over the next four years. But for now, Trump already polls at well over 50 percent approval.

Trump's inauguration in a few weeks likely will not resemble his 2016 ceremony.

In the 2016-7 transition, Democratic-affiliated interests ran commercials urging electors to become "faithless" and thus illegally reject their states' popular votes and instead elect the loser, Hillary Clinton.

Massive demonstrations met Trump on Inauguration Day.

In less than four months after assuming the presidency, Special Counsel Robert Mueller was appointed to investigate the hoax of Russian collusion.

That wasted 22-month, \$40 million investigation found no collusion but did derail the first two Trump years.

What followed the collusion ruse was a consistent effort to undermine the Trump presidency—two subsequent impeachments, the laptop “disinformation” hoax, the COVID-19 nationwide lockdown, and news suppression of any mention of the Chinese lab origin of the virus or questioning the closing of schools.

In the Trump administration’s last summer of 2020, 120 days of riot, arson, looting, assault, and murder followed, with the denouement of the January 6 turmoil.

In contrast, during the 2024-2025 transition, Trump has all but assumed the presidency. Over 100 foreign leaders have elbowed each other to be invited to Mar-a-Lago or to phone in their congratulations to the newly elected Trump.

Remember that in 2016 the left screamed “Logan Act” if a Trump transition appointee even talked with foreign officials.

So why is newly elected Trump a veritable cultural hero in 2024 in a fashion unimaginable eight years ago when the media had rendered him a near demon?

One, Trump is now seen as a welcome relief.

A departing and unpopular Joe Biden will leave with about a 36 percent approval rating.

The prior Biden years are now seen as abnormal, if not disastrous.

The left’s cultural revolution championed fringe policies never quite seen before: destroying the border, welcoming in 12 million illegal aliens, nihilist critical race and legal theories, institutionalizing a third sex, and mandating woke/DEI quotas and indoctrination sessions.

Yet Biden had inherited from Trump a secure border, an economy

rebounding after the COVID quarantines, 1.23 percent inflation, no wars abroad, and cheap energy.

Four years later, the outgoing Biden administration is widely unpopular. Almost every one of its policies polls below 50 percent.

In response, Trump promises not just to restore his first-term success but to expand it.

Two, Trump personally remains transparent, upbeat, and energetic—eager to meet with anyone, anytime, anywhere, to talk about anything.

His energy offers a sharp contrast with the era of the non-compos-mentis Biden. The change is welcomed by an electorate exhausted by past presidential stumbling, wandering, incoherence, mind freezes, and angry, “get-off-my-grass” aged fragility.

Three, Trump is grudgingly admired, now even by some of his enemies who once sought but failed to destroy him.

He endured two impeachments, five civil and criminal court indictments, incessant lawfare, a 95% negative media, attempts to remove him from states’ ballots, and two assassination attempts.

Yet all these unprecedented hostile efforts to end Trump may only have made him stronger—and more empathetic when seen as a target of increasingly fanatical enemies.

Four, Trump has expanded his MAGA base and permanently branded it as an ecumenical movement that welcomes shared class interests rather than fixates on the tired old tribal racial and ethnic chauvinism.

Trump also brought in disaffected Democrats, independents, and minorities in a way the Democrats could not with the evaporating and bitter Never Trump dead-enders.

Trump's veritable campaign menagerie of RFK, Jr., Tulsi Gabbard, Elon Musk, Joe Rogan, Dana White, and Kid Rock made it impossible for the left to demonize MAGA Republicans as right-wing aristocrats, warmongers, or laissez-faire capitalists.

Fifth, the endorsements of the Biden-Harris legacy media, calcified Hollywood endorsers, blowhard university faculties, and tech barons proved overrated.

It was trumped by more popular and dynamic internet influencers, podcasters, bloggers, and maverick entrepreneurs.

Sixth and finally, Trump himself proved more experienced and reflective than in 2016. His team too was more disciplined and street smart, led by savvy chief of staff Susan Wiles.

2024 saw truly pivotal moments of Trump as everyman—posing for a mug shot after being railroaded by a weaponized lawfare indictment, serving McDonald's drive-through customers, riding in a garbage truck cab, and raising his fist and yelling "fight, fight, fight"—after having his head near blown off by a would-be assassin.

Add all of these once unimaginables up, and the people trusted more—and liked better—the Trump reboot than grouchy Joe Biden or inane, inauthentic Kamala Harris and their shared extremist agendas.

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