

The Pros and Cons of Blocking Trump at the Convention

If he's denied the nomination, many of his supporters could bolt the party. If he gets it, the GOP could be throwing away the presidency and many down-ballot races.



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Would denying Donald Trump the nomination at this summer's convention destroy the Republican Party? Or has the developer-turned-reality-TV-star wrecked it beyond repair already?

It's a question the GOP will soon confront, as more and more party leaders, outside groups, and consultants sign onto a late, big-dollar effort to prevent Trump from winning the majority of delegates needed to secure the nomination, then give the nod to someone else in Cleveland—even if Trump has the highest delegate total.

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ing that Trump is taking on the state's airwaves ahead of next week's primary, and he calls the convention strategy an enormous mistake. "You can't have the convention take away the sovereign right of voters," said Clawson. "The voters are sovereign."

Tom Jensen, with the Democratic-leaning Public Policy Polling, said his surveys have found that Trump has many supporters more interested in Trump than in the Republican Party, and predicted that a significant percentage of them would not support the GOP nominee if the party establishment were to treat Trump that way.

"A lot of the voters Trump is bringing into the process are not loyal Republicans," Jensen said. "That makes their behavior unpredictable if Trump doesn't get it. What they do may depend a lot on what he tells them to do since there's a cult-like aspect to Trump's following."

Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski would not say what Trump's response would be. "We don't discuss hypotheticals," he said.

If Trump supporters do wind up bolting the party, well, that's an acceptable price for one key figure in the anti-Trump movement. "The Republican Party is not a democracy," said Rick Wilson, a Florida consultant who supports Marco Rubio's presidential bid. "If those people wanted to have a voice in the delegate process, they would have been involved in Republican, and not Trumpian, politics.... Listening to talk radio and tweeting about Trump is not the same as being a Republican Party activist and delegate."

While Wilson and others in the "Never Trump" campaign originally hoped to consolidate support behind the senator from Florida early enough for him to win the nomination outright, the plan now is merely to block Trump from winning a majority of the delegates by the end of the primary season in June. Implicit is the acknowledgement that no other candidate has a realistic path to 1,237 delegates, either.

In such an eventuality, most of the delegates who are "bound" to particular candidates are relieved of that obligation after the first ballot, with ever more delegates becoming free following subsequent votes. "And then the jockeying begins," said Josh Putnam, a University of Georgia political-science lecturer and an expert in the delegate-selection process. "Either way you slice it, some group of people in the Republican Party network is going to leave the convention with a bad taste in their mouth. Somebody's going home a loser."

In Wilson's view, that loser needs to be Trump. Otherwise, he said, the Republican Party not only throws away a chance at the White House in

November, but every down-ballot race that Democrats can tie to candidate Trump.

“We have to have a painful reassessment of who is in the Republican Party and who belongs in the Republican Party,” he said, adding that allowing Trump to win the nomination will drive away not only all the remaining Republican Latinos, but also close to half of Republican women. “He has accomplished the painful purpose of blowing up the party so we can start over.”

For months, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush was the only candidate regularly attacking front-running Trump, and even Bush was hitting other rivals harder. The candidates, like donors and most in the political media, assumed that Trump would fade as voters started paying closer attention to the election.

But back-burner concern about a Trump nomination became full-on panic after the bombastic political newcomer won three of the first four nominating contests in February. A super PAC created solely to stop Trump began collecting major donations, enough to start running anti-Trump TV ads in key states including Florida, whose winner-take-all primary Tuesday will prove critical. Last week, 2012 GOP nominee Mitt Romney gave an extraordinary speech lacerating Trump as unfit for the presidency and urging Republicans to vote strategically to deny him the necessary delegates.

With Trump’s continued success, though, including Tuesday’s wins in Mississippi, Michigan, and Hawaii, the winner-take-all contests in Florida and Ohio next week could be the anti-Trump movement’s last realistic stand. Should he win both, he would almost certainly be able to reach a 1,237-delegate majority. And even if he doesn’t, his delegate total will likely make for an ugly scene in Cleveland this summer, if party regulars go through with their plan.

“Believe me. This is the not the year we should be having,” Wilson said, but defended the strategy as necessary to protect the long-term interests of the party. “Does the gangrene kill us or do we chop off our arm?”

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