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DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

Mapping Out a Potential Blueprint for Trump 2020

BY VICTOR SAADEH ON APRIL 23, 2019 • (LEAVE A COMMENT)

President Trump's scattered attempts to undermine the Democrats sometimes muddle what his main running points are. With that being said, what topics should Trump focus on in 2020?

I was scrolling through my Twitter feed the other day; sandwiched between all of the memes, March Madness, and blowback regarding Attorney General Barr's summary of the Mueller Report, was a **tweet**

(<https://twitter.com/NateSilver538/status/1110384117680619525>) from political analyst Nate Silver. In response to a tweet announcing the Department of Justice's call for the complete eradication of Obamacare, Silver griped over Trump's inability to focus on a few concentrated topics, damaging his chances electorally.

Silver, most known for correctly predicting the results of **all 50 states** (<https://mashable.com/2012/11/07/nate-silver-wins/#BDNs8Y638uqz>) in the 2012 election, sparked a debate inside my head: would a cohesive and consistent campaign message by President Trump be enough to get reelected?

While President Trump's approval rating has hovered around **40 percent** (https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/?ex_cid=rrpromo) for quite some time now, there are indeed some aspects of the Trump presidency that are worthy of approval. Using the guidelines established by Nate Silver's tweet, we will look at four talking points Trump could potentially use in 2020 and how well they hold up: good economy, "no collusion," no wars, and Democrats-too-far-left.

The Economy

The state of the United States economy has been a **talking point** (<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/06/trump-has-tweeted-about-stock-market-63-times-since-2016-election.html>) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/08/24/trumps-claim-that-he-himself-created-1-million-jobs-as-president/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6785fef1f66a) for Donald Trump ever since he was elected. Following the trend started and nurtured by President Obama, the metrics of the US economy have largely continued to improve. Unemployment has remained **low** (<https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/lms14000000>), and optimism about the state of the economy is **high** (<https://www.investors.com/news/economy/ibd-tipp-poll-economic-optimism-index/>). Because these favorable numbers have been paired with a president who always touts himself as a stellar dealmaker and businessman, confidence in the president and the economy has been consistently high and will likely remain that way.

While Trump is not **fully responsible** (<http://fortune.com/2017/07/20/donald-trump-economy-stock-market-jobs-reports-credit/>) for the improved health of the economy, and in some aspects is responsible for **damaging** (<http://fortune.com/2019/02/28/us-china-trade-war-cost/>) it, it is a talking point that he has used before. Because it is difficult to accurately dole out credit for economic improvement, Trump can continue to claim credit for improving numbers, with pundits unable to fully dispel his claims.

With **78 percent of registered voters** (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/244367/top-issues-voters-healthcare-economy-immigration.aspx>), as well as 85 percent of registered Republicans, listing the economy as extremely/very important to their vote, utilizing the state of the economy to garner votes would be very effective in wooing his base as well as some fiscally conservative independents.

“No Collusion”

With the release of Attorney General William Barr’s **summary** (<https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/24/politics/read-mueller-key-findings-doj/index.html>) of the Mueller Report, it has been declared that Robert Mueller did not find the Trump campaign guilty of collusion with Russia. There are still doubts among some, mainly **Democrats** (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/03/25/democrats-question-ag-william-barr-position-obstruction-justice/3264298002/>), regarding the bias of Barr and whether or not he is being fully transparent regarding the contents of the 300-plus page report. It is unlikely that the report itself would reveal anything that would change the conclusion Barr came to. Regardless of the bias Barr may possess, there is only so much he can legally misconstrue. Until the full report is released, we can only assume Barr’s summary and conclusions are accurate.

After the near constant coverage of the investigation by major news outlets for years on end, this conclusion comes as a major victory for Trump. Trump’s political allies have **enjoyed** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-w1MmbR3qw>) taking their **victory** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inCIT2YyF8g>) lap

(<http://time.com/5558066/robert-mueller-report-republican-response/>) and have called for the heads of **key Trump critics** (<https://www.vox.com/2019/3/28/18285513/adam-schiff-russia-trump-collusion>). While the investigation did **not** (<http://time.com/5556331/mueller-investigation-indictments-guilty-pleas/>) come up empty handed — there were 34 indictments and multiple Trump associates were found guilty of crimes — Trump and his allies will only focus on one thing: no collusion. And for most of his base, that is all that matters.

The questionable actions of Trump associates like Manafort, Gates, Stone, and more will continue to taint Trump's gloating for Republicans and Independents more tepid of him. However, it will be of no consequence to his base, which will be reinforced by the report clearing him of collusion. Trump focusing on himself being cleared of collusion will not win over any new voters for Trump, but it will shut the door on potential attacks from opponents and quell concerns of those on the fence about voting for Trump due to his potential dealings with Russia. Ultimately, "no collusion" does not raise Trump's ceiling in the polls, but it most certainly reinforces his floor.

No Wars

After being mired in war for almost two decades, it makes sense Americans would largely support **staying away** (<https://www.thenation.com/article/new-poll-shows-public-overwhelmingly-opposed-to-endless-us-military-interventions/>) from any more conflicts. Roughly half of the United States has said that the US has **mostly failed** (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/05/after-17-years-of-war-in-afghanistan-more-say-u-s-has-failed-than-succeeded-in-achieving-its-goals/>) in their efforts in Afghanistan, and with the Taliban **resurging** (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/08/19/5-key-lessons-from-the-talibans-deadly-resurgence-in-afghanistan/?utm_term=.b87679c244a2) last year, the outlook on the War in Afghanistan will only continue to worsen. Taking all of this into consideration, the Trump administration's handling of Afghanistan, mainly its decision to withdraw roughly 7,000 troops (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/us/politics/afghanistan-troop-withdrawal.html>) from the country, should be met with warm feedback.

Syria has been a more controversial talking point when it comes to US intervention in foreign conflicts. Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, as well as the rise of ISIS in 2014, discussions have focused on the **eradication of ISIS** (<https://www.vox.com/world/2019/3/23/18278630/isis-territory-victory-us-forces>) in the country and the support for Syrian rebels. With the US ultimately deciding to intervene, ISIS has been steadily pushed back by a US-led coalition, eventually reaching their self-proclaimed capital and slowly snuffing out the terrorist group. In addition, the United States also provided support to Syrian rebels until said support was cut off by Trump in 2017.

Public opinion has consistently been a tricky minefield to navigate when it comes to Syria. With multiple **proxy wars** (<http://time.com/5162409/syria-civil-war->

proxy-battles/) and complicated foreign relationships at stake, there has often been no correct answer. Take the change in opinion when it came to missile strikes in response to atrocities committed by the Assad regime. Under Obama, the majority of the public **opposed** (<https://www.cnn.com/2013/09/09/politics/syria-poll-main/index.html>) missile strikes, despite most thinking that Assad gassed his own people. When Trump did the exact same thing a few years later, the public opinion largely **shifted** (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/07/military-strikes-in-syria-were-very-unpopular-four-years-ago-but-trumps-could-be-different/>). While there has typically been a **general consensus** (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-public-opinion-polls-isis>) regarding ISIS and the need to combat them, the tepid reception by the American public to any extra action in Syria made handling the country a headache-inducing mess.

President Trump sparked **new discussions** (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/18/americans-divided-over-decision-to-withdraw-from-syria/>) regarding the US presence in Syria after declaring ISIS **defeated** (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1075528854402256896>) and ordering the **complete withdrawal** (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/12/19/donald-trump-orders-immediate-full-withdrawal-us-troops-syria/>) of US troops from the region. While ISIS has largely been eradicated, **thousands of fighters** (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595>) still remain in the region and pose a serious threat that could reemerge over time. As a result, Trump received major blowback from both his detractors and **allies** (<https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/19/politics/trump-syria-advisers-congress/index.html>) alike, who deem a US presence necessary for the stability of the region. Trump eventually walked back his command and settled on leaving **400 troops** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/22/world/middleeast/trump-troops-syria.html>) in the area.

With all of this being said, with the exception of his recent handling of Syria, President Trump's administration largely holds a track record that has distanced the United States from the conflicts American voters have come to despise. US military presence in the aforementioned countries is shrinking, and there is a possibility that we will be fully withdrawn from all major armed conflicts within the next few years. As a result, Trump touting his avoidance of unnecessary armed conflicts and the defeat of ISIS would likely be well received by the general electorate.

Far-Left Democrats

Different from the rest of the talking points, Trump focusing on the extreme left politics of the Democratic candidates would shift away focus from himself to the supposedly extreme policies of his opponents. Democratic policies have become increasingly mainstream in the past decade, and ideas once deemed to be too far left have garnered attention. As a result, policies associated with Democratic-Socialism, or just flat-out socialism, have come to the forefront of debates.

While these ideas, like Medicare-for-all and the Green New Deal, are more warmly received than in the past, the direction of the Democratic Party has been used to **scare many** (<https://www.npr.org/2019/02/12/693618375/socialism-vs-greatness-for-trump-that-s-2020-in-a-nutshell>), and a significant amount of voters are not yet ready to embrace the more progressive wing of the Democratic Party.

President Trump, already skilled at inciting fear and anger amongst his base, would bode well exploiting the increasingly progressive nature of his Democratic opponents. By doing so, he would increase his chances of luring in moderate Republicans, independents, and liberals all hesitant to accept the bold platforms put forth by leading Democratic candidates. This would be crucial in areas like the Midwest, where Trump effectively sealed his victory in 2016.

Is it Enough?

While it is too early to tell whether or not these talking points would be sufficient for Trump to win in 2020, each point provides a benefit. The strength of the economy appeals to fiscal conservatives and independents more concerned with strong economic leadership. Touting no collusion can dispel arguments against his legitimacy as president and quell fears of under the table dealings with Russia. Trump's oversight of the eradication of ISIS, withdrawal from Afghanistan, and ability to avoid inciting conflicts with North Korea and others all cater to the many Americans fed up with armed conflicts and can win over those seeking a strong leader who knows when to abstain from conflict. Finally, depending on who the Democratic nominee may be, Trump can extensively shift attention to the policies of his opponent and highlight the ones deemed most extreme. This can mask any potential lack of substance on policy he might have, as well as turn away swing voters from Democratic policies they may find too far left.

Donald Trump is by no means in stellar shape for 2020. He is still largely unpopular, and whoever is nominated by the Democrats will likely yield a more favorable approval rating than the controversial Hillary Clinton. However, Trump's performance also largely relies on his ability to press the right buttons among his own base, as well as among swing voters. If he can formulate the right message to appeal to these demographics, he can pose a formidable threat to whoever may challenge him in 2020, and these four talking points are as close to ideal as it can get for Donald Trump.



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