

The GOP Has Lost Its Way

Guests:

For the Motion: Jeff Flake, Carlos Curbelo
Against the Motion: Kimberley A. Strassel, Ben Domenech
Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS

Before the debate:

59% FOR

28% AGAINST

13% UNDECIDED

After the debate:

62% FOR

33% AGAINST

5% UNDECIDED

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John Donovan:

In this time of extreme politics, what is at stake for the party that just lost The White House? Is it true, as some say, that the republican party has lost its way that it no longer stands for core republican values, losing power and respect and mandating a purge of whatever it was about today's GOP that brought Donald Trump to power? No, not at all is the pushback. The GOP should be doubling down on the Trump message and the Trump style, which spoke to millions and energized record turnout at the polls. The answer to this question could define American politics for a generation to come? Has the GOP lost its way? Hi, everybody. And yes, this is a defining question of this moment in our politics, and it's a question whose answer comes not without nuance. And our mission is to offer exactly that a deeper understanding of the issues that we find important by presenting competing perspectives. I'm your host, John Donovan. And this is Intelligence Squared.

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John Donovan:

Now let's meet our debaters arguing for the motion the GOP has lost its way is the former U.S. senator from Arizona, Jeff Flake, who served from 2013 to 2019, following six terms in the House of Representatives, Senator Flake is also the author of the 2017 New York Times Best Seller Conscience of a Conservative: A Rejection of Destructive Politics and a Return to

Principle, his partner, Carlos Curbelo, a former U.S. Congressman from Florida's 26th congressional district. Curbelo served on the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means.

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Their opponents are arguing against the motion that the GOP has lost its way, Kimberley A. Strassel, author and member of the editorial board for the Wall Street Journal. She writes a weekly Potomac Watch political column and authored Resistance (At All Costs): How Trump Haters Are Breaking America. Her partner, Ben Domenech, is the publisher of The Federalist and host of the Federalist Radio Hour. Domenech is also a fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

Okay, and now here we all are, our four debaters. I want to say welcome to Kimberley and Ben and Carlos and Jeff. Thanks so much for joining us. It's great to have you here at Intelligence Squared.

Ben Domenech:
Good to be with you.

Carlos Curbelo:
It's my pleasure.

Kimberley A. Strassel:
It's great to be here.

John Donovan:
And you're all over the world. Actually, Kimberley, you're in Alaska, and Jeff, you're in Arizona. Ben, you are in Virginia. And Carlos, you're in northern Michigan, and some of us in very cold places. And I am in Washington, D.C. Well, I want to get started on round one.

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And round one, our opening statements from each debater. In turn, those statements will be four minutes each. Our motion is the GOP has lost its way and first up to be speaking for the motion. Carlos Curbelo. The screen is all yours.

Carlos Curbelo:
John, thank you so much for this opportunity and everyone who brought us together for this important discussion. This discussion is critical for the Republican Party, but it is even more important for our democracy. And I'll tell you, for me, these questions about freedom, democracy, and our political system, are personal. Not just because I'm an American, and we're so passionate about our freedoms and our right to vote and to make decisions in our democracy. But also because I come from a family of exiles, Cuban exiles who lost their country in 1959 because there was a collapse of democratic institutions because a lot of people were proliferating lies and using those lies to sow resentment and anger, and fear in society.

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And eventually, everything was lost. So that's why this conversation is so important. And that's why it's so important for a country to have two strong, viable alternatives. There are only two parties in this country. We're not like some European countries where you can really pick the perfect party for you here. We only have two. And in order for one to be able to hold the other accountable, it has to be viable. It has to have credibility with a majority of the voters in a country. It has to be a reasonable choice for most people. And the problem we have today in our democracy is that the Republican Party is losing that position. Why? Because it has lost its way because it's a party engulfed in lies and in fear. I remember the good old days where Republicans used to get attacked and criticized by their own for maybe breaking a tax pledge or perhaps not favoring some restrictions on abortion.

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And that kind of tension within a party is natural. Jeff Flake and I, my partner today, we've had our disagreements when we served in Congress on some foreign policy issues and others. That's normal. And that kind of diversity in a big party, like the republican party and like the Democratic Party, is perfectly natural. What's not natural is that diversity within a party includes people who endorse and proliferate lies. So back then, 20 years ago, Republicans used to get disqualified over policy differences, or they used to get attacked. These days, Republicans are getting attacked simply for expressing simple truths. A lot of Republicans have the courage to step forward, and sadly, it does require courage in today's Republican party to recognize that Joe Biden had won the 2020 presidential election, while republicans outperformed in the Senate and certainly the House, those republicans were criticized for being disloyal.

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The people in the party tried to suppress them. And many others took the easy way out these days with which is representative of the problem, the easy way out, to endorse and to promote the President's lies. A party that cannot express simple truths is a party that has lost its way. Republicans are in so much trouble these days that they can only do the right thing when no one is looking, which is the opposite of what we used to hear as kids, you have to do the right thing all the time. But, you know, most people tend to behave when everyone's watching. Republicans misbehave when everyone's watching. However, when they're when base voters can't see them. They do things like overwhelmingly support Liz Cheney, someone who was pilloried publicly for recognizing that President Trump incited the riot on the 6th of January.

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So it's lies, and it's also fear. It's very difficult for a party for any leader to lead when they are driven by fear. And the reason why a lot of Republicans don't express simple truths. The reason why they will say things in private that they would never say in public is because they are afraid. Lies and fear are two major forces in today's Republican Party. There are a lot of good republicans fighting it, trying to save the party from those twin crises. But it is an uphill battle. And the fact --

John Donovan:

Okay, Carlos. I'm sorry, I have to jump in. Your time is up. But thank you very much.

Carlos Curbelo:

All right.

John Donovan:

And I'm sure you can add to those thoughts as we get into the discussion section of the debate. Our next speaker will be arguing against the motion that the GOP has lost its way. Here is Ben Domenech, then the floor is yours.

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Ben Domenech:

Thank you, John. The motion before us is the GOP has lost its way, and I don't think there's any question. Then when it comes to this motion. The media is entirely on the side of our opponents today from The Washington Post. The headline, "The GOP Isn't Doomed, It's Dead." From the New York Times, "There's Nothing Left: Why Thousands of Republicans Are Leaving the Party," or from my trusted source The Babylon Bee, "Absolute Legend: Trump Walks Away From Republican Party Without Even Looking Back At Explosion."

To say the GOP has lost its way, though, presumes that in the recent past, things were going pretty well for the Republican Party. But how well was that GOP really doing? It was a party that held the White House, the House, and the Senate together for only six years out of the previous 24. They squandered so much the goodwill of the voters that they gave Barack Obama a filibuster-proof Senate Majority. The Republican Party has been understood for a long time as being a fusion of different ideas, the three-legged stool that has fiscal conservatism, social traditionalism, and strong national defense.

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But how they've addressed these different factions has changed over the years in significant ways. As recent books by Henry Olson and Christopher Caldwell detail, Ronald Reagan made a deliberate decision to kind of sacrifice that fiscal stool because he felt he needed to confront the existential threat of the Soviet Union. He made peace with all those programs he criticized over the years and ended up raising the debt ceiling 18 times more than W., Obama, and Trump combined. That sort of fiscal irresponsibility would creep into the future under George W. Bush. The consensus of the nation's Republican elites was a tax program built for corporations, trade programs that hollowed out American manufacturing and welcomed cheap Chinese goods, and Ford adventurism, to recapture some of that Cold War mojo were things that ought to be good and noble for the party to achieve rather than build the permanent Republican majority that Karl Rove promised at the time. The voters rebelled against all of this.

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They turned against the GOP extra class that squandered opportunities around the world, mismanaged hurricanes, sent social conservatives disingenuous messages on gay marriage, and bailed out Wall Street in the name of saving capitalism, according to RealClearPolitics, and we should remember this, George W. Bush. After all, this happened left office with even an approval rating 10 points lower than Donald Trump's. Americans wanted something different. So they fired House Republican leaders they brought in Nancy Pelosi instead of Hillary Clinton, they tried their hopes on a young new senator. They reacted to the overreach of democrat partisans underneath him through some people out, including Pelosi and Harry Reid. And then, in 2016, they effectively threw everyone out by going with Donald Trump. 2016 was a response to our elite institutions had failed the people that they are meant to serve. And the failure of the GOP to live up to its constituents' desires for change.

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The representative government does represent, as Calvin Coolidge said, and if your constituents say the status quo is intolerable, it's better to genuinely listen to their concerns and understand why they have them and try to harmonize your policies with their desires. In this case, the rise of populism and reach in recent years has actually brought the GOP back closer to what it's been historically, the parties of Ike of Nixon and of Reagan, a party that is increasingly focused on national interest in defense in trade and immigration policy on prioritizing working middle class and small business concerns and taxes and regulation. And on fighting a culture war that defends the American idea and its founding as fundamentally good against the lies of woke anti-racism. They've shed the corporate cash for the small-dollar donor got the vestiges of Country Club republicans in favor of a more populist base. Given that the Biden ministration is already seemed intent on attacking the shared priorities of this new republican coalition. It's possible for them to hold this together in the future days. And finally, no party that comes 90,000 votes away from sweeping The White House, the House, and the Senate can be considered to have lost its way.

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Vote against the motion.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Ben Domenech. All right. So coming up next on-screen with an opening statement in support of the resolution that the GOP has lost its way, here is Jeff Flake. Jeff, the floor is yours.

Jeff Flake:

Well, it's great to be here, and I first want to associate myself with Carlos his statement. And I just want to remind us all Republicans, in my case, that, you know, our first article of faith has always been a healthy mistrust of concentrated power, particularly in the executive. And I would ask you if you're questioning whether we have lost our way, look at where we are right now. Today we're in the midst of an impeachment hearing, the second for this President. And we're discussing whether or not the words that he used in a speech just before the capital was sacked were sufficiently incendiary to cause that attack. What isn't a question at all is what brought us here?

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As Carlos has said, we have gotten away from the truth. Completely away from the truth. If we haven't lost our way, what have we done? We have lost our way. The question is, did the President lose the election? We all know. He knows. Everyone knows that he lost that election that there was no widescale fraud on a scale sufficient to overturn the election, yet the President promoted that lie. And too many elected officials in the Republican Party parroted that claim and amplified that claim. That's why we're here where we are today. Ask yourself when you're voting on this resolution. Where are we today? We're trying to decide whether to bar a president from ever running again, the head of our party, the Republican Party. Now, if you want to look and see where we are politically, and I would say that if you're not based on truth, what good is it to win elections?

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But fortunately, the American people are wise to this. And they're looking at us. And we see what's happened since President Trump was elected four years ago. We've lost the House of Representatives in the midterm elections. Now we've lost The White House for only the third time in a century. An incumbent president has lost reelection -- the first time in 30 years. We've lost The White House, the House, now we've lost the Senate. And if you know why it's because of the election. Yeah, well, the culminating event, the election in Georgia, where we have two republicans representing that state and also remind you we have for the first time in 72 years here in Arizona, Goldwater country, two republicans, or I'm sorry, two democrats representing the state. First time in 72 years. We came within a whisker of losing our statehouse and our state senate.

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We lost more than 400 legislative seats nationwide in the midterm elections. So for all this winning, I don't know where it is. We've clearly lost our way as Republicans. We cannot push on ahead unless we first recognize the truth. When I decided to retire from the Senate, I gave a speech. I said, "We must never regard as normal, the regular and casual undermining of our democratic norms and ideals. We must never meekly accept the daily suffering of our country. The personal attacks, the threats against principles, freedoms and the institutions and frequent disregard for the truth, and decency." That's where we are today. We have lost our way. We can and should and need to come back as a party. As Carlos said, for whatever reason, we've given ourselves to parties in this country.

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We need both to be sane and rational. And my feeling is that when Americans are given a choice, they will choose conservatism. We have to give them that choice. Thanks.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Jeff Flake. And our final opening statement will be coming against the resolution. It comes from Kimberley Strassel. Kimberley, the floor is yours.

Kimberley A. Strassel:

Thank you. To debate the motion that the GOP has lost its way, we first have to define it. I would argue you could do that in two ways. You could make the argument that it had lost its morality or its principles. Or you might make the argument that it has somehow lost the belief of the voters. I'm here to tell you today that on both of those fronts, in terms of evidence and history, they're simply not true. One of our worthy opponents recently penned an op-ed in which he claimed that the GOP had, quote, rejected its core conservative principles in favor of a demagogue, end quote.

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How so? Really, I would go and ask Nancy Pelosi, who at this very moment is contemplating how to reverse one of the more far-reaching tax reforms the country has seen since 1986. And I'm talking straight up trickle-down Voodoo Art Laffer, eat your heart out tax reform, we principled conservatives, we call that supply-side ism. And we got it three years ago. Tell it to Joe Biden, who's been directing his people to try to undo one of the greatest periods of deregulation in the history of the country. By some estimates, the federal government's reach declined by a third in the past four years. We principle conservatives call that limited government. Or ask all those democratic activists who are pushing to stack the Supreme Court. Why? Three numbers, 174 District Court judges, 54 appellate court judges, and three supreme court justices, we principled conservatives, we call that a win.

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Now, I would wager some of you out there are hating my describing all of this and cringing as I talk about these victories because you don't agree with them. And I would humbly submit to you that proves my point. Donald Trump went out, and he did confront a number of third rail topics within the GOP. But he then used his mandate to push through one of the more far-reaching republican and conservative agendas in 30 years, and he did so on the basis of foundational conservative principles. The GOP hasn't lost the way it's been reveling in them for the past four years. And the boldness of that agenda also allowed the GOP to demonstrate to Americans its virtues and how it works in effect. And as a result, you cannot make the case either that they have lost appeal with voters not after historic low unemployment rates, not after rising incomes and wages.

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The people saw that out there. And so let's look at the math of Election Day. Okay. Joe Biden won, but he did so with fewer than 44,000 votes across three key battleground states and the House of Representatives. The GOP did not lose one single incumbent seat, not one in the Senate, Chuck Schumer. He's got a 50-50, but he barely squeaked that through. And if you look down the ballot, Democrats failed to win a single state legislative house that they had targeted 12 in all. So I think the point here is that you can make the argument -- you cannot make the argument that the GOP has lost its way, especially when you look at the people that have been brought in the coalition that won the GOP those victories that day. They had amazing new

inroads with Hispanics, with Latinos, with black voters, with working-class voters, even with urban voters.

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This is the coalition that Ben is describing that has now come about. How do you make the case that a GOP that had its best policy run in 30 years and almost a near-perfect Election Day has lost its way? You can't. So I asked you to put aside the Beltway chatter, look at the actual facts on the ground and vote against the resolution.

John Donovan:

Thank you very much, Kimberley Strassel. And that concludes the first round of this debate opening statements. And now we move on to round two, and round two is a little bit more freewheeling. The debaters can question and challenge one another. And they'll also be taking questions from me. What I've heard in the opening statements in a variety of ways in which we could gauge this question and a variety of metrics. There's really the question of whether the party is internally cohesive and glued together? Or is it coming apart? Has it been successful in terms of policy? Or has it failed? Does it know what it stands for? Does it stand for morality? And also the practical question of can the party win?

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Is it winning? Can it do what a party is supposed to do, which is to affect policy by persuading voters to vote for it or not? I want to bring it back to you, Carlos, as you were the opening speaker, and say that what I heard from your opponents was no real direct response to the, I would say the moral question that you raised, and I would put it in the moral category that the party has stopped standing for truth, your partner, Jeff Flake also used the word 'decency' that the party has not been exhibiting, truth and decency. So can you, you know, go at that point in a way that perhaps would provoke a response from your opponents to address those particular issues?

Carlos Curbelo:

Well, John, I think what's important for our friends on the other side to understand is that this is not about policy. All of us here probably agree on policy. I voted for a lot of the bills that passed during the first two years of the Trump presidency that he signed into law.

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I believe in low taxes, I believe in a lot of what our friends explained, and those policy victories are important for the country. But this is not about policy. This is about integrity. This is about honesty. And we all know that a political party isn't a club. Okay? A political party is an organization that is designed to lead a country or to help people lead a country. And you can't lead a country when you're constantly lying to people. You can't effectively lead a country when you're using lies and conspiracy theories to divide the people who you're supposed to serve. That's why it's so important for everyone as they vote today to recognize the simple truth that the

republican party has indeed lost its way because while it may be doing some good things in terms of the policy, it is lying to people. And it is fooling people.

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John Donovan:

So Carlos, you're painting the entire party with quite a broad brush. So are you saying that this moral failing is endemic to the party as a whole right now, or is it? Go ahead.

Carlos Curbelo:

The current situation is endemic to the influence that Donald Trump had on the party. Most Republicans, most congressional Republicans will acknowledge this privately. And again, that's the problem, that people aren't telling the camera what they're telling their friends. Why? Because Donald Trump converted the Republican Party into a personal club to advance his interests, and even to question or to challenge free and fair election results, and in doing so, incited a riot that resulted in the defiling of one of the greatest structures in the history of democratic government, and in the death of five people. So this is way beyond policy.

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And if we're going to have an honest conversation about the Republican Party, we have to confront this crisis, this cancer that is preventing a lot of Republicans, not all, from telling people the truth from being honest with the voters and from serving with decency.

John Donovan:

Okay. I want to take this question to Ben Domenech. And, Ben, I heard in your opening statement that the thrust of your argument is that the present-day republican party has found its way that it is reestablishing the kinds of connections with voters that it represents that were you're arguing were more prevalent and rooted in the 50s 60s and perhaps early 70s. I know that that's your argument. I want to get to that. But right now, I'd like you to respond directly to the point that Carlos is making about. He's talking about deceit, dishonesty, absence of truth at the top of the party. He's named the President, former President Donald Trump by name, but I think he's by implication talking about other leadership members who have supported and abetted him. The question of honesty and truth is so corrosive that it makes it impossible to say that the party has lost its way.

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Can you address that? And I promise we will get to your argument later.

Ben Domenech:

Well, there are two parts of that that I'd like to point out. One is that you asked Carlos about sort of how deep this goes. I think the problem is that a lot of the critics of this moment won't go so far as to acknowledge that this is the approach that's been used here is really one that Republican voters have demanded. And one of the reasons that they've demanded it, I would say, is that they've adjusted what they believe and what they want in terms of morality from their politicians.

And a perfect example of that, I think, is the shift in terms of attitude between Mitt Romney in 2012, then Donald Trump in 2016. I think every republican would tell you that Mitt Romney is a nicer guy and someone that they would like to have as their neighbor. And certainly, I think that they respect that he's someone of faith and has, you know, personal, deep moral values. On the flip side, I think a lot of social conservatives in America basically said we want to elect someone so that we can stop having nuns getting sued. And so we can stop having taxpayer-funded abortions, so we can stop seeing the kind of religious persecution we care about.

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And that's more important to us than the fact that his personal life is obviously nothing like the aboveboard nature of Mitt Romney's. That's a calculation that I think the voters made, and we need to live in the reality where that's one that was made out of both pragmatism and, frankly, a real concern on their part that they saw a real encroachment under the Obama administration on their rights. As to the idea of sort of truth and conspiracy theories, I certainly concede that I don't think that we should be, you know, entertaining anything like what has been rolled out there in some portions of media over the last several months that fomented a lot of things, both online and the other avenues. At the same time, we lived through three years, and four years, I would really say continuing to this day, of being told that Donald Trump was a Russian asset, something that is absolutely a conspiracy. And it's something that is simply not justified by the facts, as we know them, not justified by the Muller report itself. That's something that we heard over and over on every cable news network and by prominent democrat politicians, including Nancy Pelosi and others.

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And so I think in that climate, you know, look, you're going to hear conspiracy theories on both sides of the aisle. I think that's going to be something we have to get used to in this modern age.

John Donovan:

All right. So Jeff, like I want to bring to you now, the thrust of the argument that been made in his opening, but to continue this thread of the conversation. In his response, he's basically saying that the behavior, the less admiral behavior of some members of the public and leadership, which I think he's conceding are real, and perhaps problematic, that that behavior, nevertheless, is the response to a response from the general public of dissatisfaction, frustration with as he said in his opening, the party elite, the party that was sort of running the show for the last 25 years. And he certainly did not single you out by name. But I think, perhaps by implication, he's talking about an establishment that he might recognize you as part of. So what he's saying is that everything that's not very pleasant right now is a rational, reasonable, understandable, dissectible response to bad behavior by the Republican Party.

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And by bad behavior, I mean, in the sense of behavior that did not live up to the expectations and needs of the voters. And that, in that sense, the problem began a long time before, and that the last four years have been a corrective, that the party has found its way. What about that?

Jeff Flake:

Well, that's the elephant in the middle of the room right here. We're in the middle of impeachment hearings, where a president lost an election and used every means at his disposal, including violence, to try to hold on to his job. Just to say that, you know, yeah, we got some good policy, but you know, so we'll excuse that kind of thing. Think about what we're saying here. But I would argue on the policy side as well, to argue that if Marco Rubio would have won the 2016 primary, or if Ted Cruz, or anybody else, Jeb Bush, that they wouldn't appoint conservative judges of who I voted for that they wouldn't have pursued tax cuts or regulatory reform, which I voted for as well.

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Those are good things. But the notion that only Donald Trump could deliver that, and that nobody else would the establishment somehow wouldn't have delivered that or other candidates. And that somehow, the fact that Donald Trump was able to get tax cuts, you know, across the transom, should excuse him losing an election and trying to hold on to that loss or say that he won by using levers of the Department of Justice or inciting a mob to go ransack the capital, that that's somehow worth it. And we as Republicans should be feeling grateful somehow, and we're in a better position. We're not, we're not. Since the sacking of the capital on the 6th of January, 140,000 registered republicans across the country have re-registered as something else. Now, there's always churn after an election. Some will go the other way. But that is extremely odd for that many.

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In Arizona, more than 10,000 Republicans have said we can't take this anymore and have changed their registration. Just since the 6th of January. As I said, there's always churn, and you'll find some going the other way, but not to the extent that we've seen, so no, it's just the scale of which just doesn't work.

Ben Domenech:

Just to interject one thing, I just want to -- I would not put Jeff Flake in the category of the establishment, in part because I remember when Joe Biden about a decade ago called him a terrorist when he was part of the Tea Party group, forcing the debate over the budget amendment. So no -- I would not, I would not put him with the anti-establishment.

John Donvan:

I stand corrected as the moderator. Kimberley, please come in.

Kimberley A. Strassel:

So I also remember I was just pointing out I remember that Jeff Flake that back when republicans lost their house majority pointed out it was because they had lost their way. We weren't responding to the wills of the voters. And I think this gets to an important point about what Jeff just said, he said, Well, you know, if Marco Rubio had won, or if Jeb Bush had won.

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This is Ben's point. They probably wouldn't have because Donald Trump, whether you like him or hate him, managed to address a number of issues that many conservative voters felt had not been addressed over the years by their party, and re-energized them and brought them back in with a coalition. And then, you know, I'm also not entirely certain that you would have had some of those politicians taking the very aggressive steps that Donald Trump did on a number of issues, like for instance, withdrawing from the Paris Climate accord, because, again, one of the things that have frustrated conservative voters so long over the years is watching politicians come in and then be browbeaten into certain acceptable positions as defined by the Beltway media. And Democrats, you know, in particular, on issues like the environment, they love the fact that Donald Trump was willing to make Anwar happen, that hadn't happened in 30 years. And so I'm not quite sure I accept the premise that all of this would have taken place with another politician.

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John Donovan:

Kimberley, but do you see the party now as presenting a cohesive message about what it is and about who leads it? You know, with the challenges to Liz Cheney in the House, the number three republican, with senators like Ben Sasse being denounced by his own state party, and it's happening to other senators and House members who are speaking up about the kinds of things we hear from Carlos, saying the same kinds of things that Carlos is saying and are being denounced and condemned by their own party organizations. Does that -- is that sort of, you know, parties are always going to have disagreements kind of thing or is that more profoundly an indication of a lack of true coherence for the future?

Kimberley A. Strassel:

Well, no party has a defined leader right after they have lost The White House.

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And that's just simply the case whenever it happens, and it was always going to be the case that I think the post-Donald Trump moment was going to be a little bit uglier for the GOP than perhaps in times in the past. Look, I don't necessarily agree with these senator motions at all. But at the same time, I think it goes to a fundamental point here. You know, we've been listening to Jeff and Carlos talk about how you know, we're watching this impeachment trial, and it's simply so clear that the entire party has lost its way. Donald Trump incited people to insurrection. The reality was 95 percent of their House colleagues when they did that impeachment vote did not agree with that. They might have disagreed in various forums with Donald Trump's rejection of the election results. They disagree with what they see as a partisan impeachment. And that is the word the majority of the party is at that moment, and I would also point out, this is -- just one finished thought -- this is also a party that in the end, did not remove Liz Cheney from her position because they understood the importance of continuing that big tent. And that is the party we see now.

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Carlos Curbelo:

John, if I could just get in real quick because we've kind of demonstrated here through your question that this has nothing to do with policy. Senators like Ben Sasse, the members of the House like Liz Cheney, they have supported the Trump agenda at almost every turn. With few exceptions. They have been some of the most reliable supporters of quote-unquote Trump policies, yet, they are being censored, not by some guy on the street, by their party committees, the leaders of the Republican Party in their states, because they dared to speak the truth, because they dared to say, Donald Trump incited the riot that resulted in an assault of the capital, and in an attempt to disrupt the democratic order, the rules of the game in the United States. So that's very revelatory. The fact that these people are perfect on policy, yet they're being censored by party officials. Why? Because they spoke the truth.

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Ben Domenech:

I can't agree that they're perfect on policy. I think Liz Cheney is viewed as very out of step with the Trump agenda when it comes to foreign policy. In particular, I also think that that whole thing might have played out a little bit differently. If she also hadn't placed bets against fellow members of her house conference in their primaries and failed, including fundraising for opponents, which is very much frowned upon as a member of leadership, and if she hadn't been such a terrible fundraiser. She ranked near the bottom of the House Conference despite being on the Armed Services Committee and in leadership. I think that she has unpopularity issues within her own conference. But one thing that I would add to this that I think we need to talk about is, there's another elephant in the room which is that there's a lot of moderate or what I would describe as centrist members of the Republican Conference in both the House and the Senate who are clearly not down for this impeachment. Are they just all scared? Are they all cowards under your frame? Is it just that, you know, there to cowed by a former president, or what his supporters would do, what does that say about them I mean I had one member of Congress --

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John Donvan:

I want to stop you right there when you say what does that say about them because that's a really well-phrased question, and I'd like to take it to Jeff Flake.

Jeff Flake:

[laughs] Well, obviously I would if I were in the Senate. I would vote to convict, and I hope that my colleagues do. I think that it's pretty plain what the President intended for that mob, maybe he didn't know that the violence would occur, but he wouldn't accept an election. And so he incited the mob. And just remember, a week before, he was calling the Georgia Secretary of State to try to get him to find votes. I mean, that so yeah, I hope my Republican colleagues will, and there is a lot of fear, I can tell you, there is a lot of fear among those who are still in the Republican caucus about us getting out of step with the Presidents base, not so much the President anymore, but his base. That is a real concern. And I hope that they'll move beyond that because I frankly

think the President will lose influence the longer he's out of office. But right now, there's a real fear.

00:38:27

John Donovan:

I want to go to audience questions in just a moment, but before we do, I want to take up one other point that Kimberley made in her opening statement, which is that they were -- if we're going to propose the notion that the republican party has lost its way it's a suggestion that they've lost their way there in their inability to return to power at the White House and in the Senate, et cetera. Look, the Senate is only 50-50, as was pointed out, Joe Biden in terms of actual votes and actual states it's tens of 1,000s of votes that set him up under our current I know in terms of the popular vote he won by millions and millions but in terms of our system. It would suggest he isn't that the party isn't that far away from a returned path to victory if they can flip a few 10,000 votes here and there in the right places. So, I want Carlos for you to take on that notion that the, if we're going to define 'lost its way' at all in terms of, it's becoming irrelevant politically due to, as you might argue, I think your argument's for the moral reasons. Well, no, they're not that far away from being able to win again and didn't lose by all of that much, so can you take that on?

00:39:36

Carlos Curbelo:

Well, that's certainly a fair point, John, but we have to remember that every election in this country is a binary choice and that a lot of Americans assumed that Joe Biden was going to win the presidency as he did because a lot of the polling indicated that, and a lot of people chose to balance out their tickets and not put the democrats in an overly dominant position as the electorate did in 2008. So, for a long time in this country, by the way, not just the Republican Party, the Democratic Party has a number of big issues and challenges as well. But for some time in this country, political parties haven't been winning elections due to their merits. But instead due to the demerits or the flaws of the other party. So I think we should be smart about how much we read into this and what we should look at is where younger generations in this country are headed, and for younger people in this country, there's not a whole lot of tolerance for lies, for deceit, for politicians who will do anything to try to remain in power, including cancel out legitimate election results.

00:40:46

So we have to take the long view here, and if we take the long view, we'll understand that this party has a lot of big challenges has for the time being lost its way, and for the good of our democracy, the good of the party but more broadly for the good of our democracy. We need to rescue this party so that it can be that robust conservative alternative for the average American.

John Donovan:

Please come in, Kimberley, yeah.

Kimberley A. Strassel:

Can I? Yeah, I'd like to just add a little bit to some of that data and information about where the GOP stood the day after the election. You know, overall, the party has added 10 million members to its ranks over the last four years. And if you look at a recent analysis that was done by Trump's own pollsters that explained very clearly why he lost. You can look, and of the 10 major battleground states, you've seen more people identifying as Republicans by anywhere from four to six points over the last four years, whereas Democrats have lost to that share.

00:41:46

You saw Donald Trump increase his vote with Hispanic voters. He got almost 50 percent of them in Florida, 41 percent in Texas. One exit poll had him getting 19 percent of black male voters. Okay, and then you can also look and see huge new strength, even among urban voters who are tired of violence and other issues in their states. And so you saw these massive inroads going into the party, and it's because of this wider and more diverse coalition that's out there. I do not say -- I do not see how you could possibly say a party that is growing to that extent can be claimed to have lost its way.

John Donovan:

I want to move on to audience questions now, and in fact, what you just said, Kimberley is, wonderful transition to the first question I'm going to go to. It comes from Benjamin Fleck [spelled phonetically]. And Benjamin asks how does the GOP realign itself in the future without splitting the party in two? Can a pro-trade business-friendly party coexist with an anti-immigration anti-trade party?

00:42:49

Ben, you've done the most theorizing about the future here, so I'd like you to step in on that. And I'd also like to get a sense from you as to who's going to lead this party? You know, is it Donald Trump, somebody else? But can the party not split into two is the core question.

Ben Domenech:

I think that I'll just say that right now, good money would be going on, Florida man. Many options are coming out of Florida who could potentially lead the party in the future. I think that's more likely to be people who look like Governor DeSantis, perhaps, but Marco Rubio is also someone who I know could bring a whole coalition together when it comes to the Senate leadership, and we don't know how long Mitch McConnell will have that job in the future. In terms of the question about bringing people together around policies. I think all of that is something that you have to figure out on balance. I mentioned Senator Rubio. Certainly, one of the things he's learned from the last four years is to be a lot tougher in his China rhetoric than he has in the past.

00:43:52

When it came to both trade-related policies, and you know, bringing it up as a recurring issue on Hong Kong on the Uighur Muslims, et cetera. And that's something that I think can allow for some negotiation on the trade side of things on immigration. I think people have been very clear

they want a border that we can control that is not porous and, unfortunately, I think that early Biden Administration policies will make this an issue that comes to the fore again. It's going to have to be balanced, but I think one of the big things that we will see is a lot of these corporate dollars are not going to flow to the GOP anymore, they will have to replace them. And you can see in the early NRSC numbers this is their Senatorial Committee, from this first month under another Florida man Rick Scott, they had an enormous success when it came to small-dollar donations, and they were using people like even Josh Hawley is controversial as he is to do that kind of fundraising. That's what the small dollars flow to, and they replaced the corporate PAC money that's going to go out and probably going to go the democratic side.

00:44:55

John Donovan:

Jeff, let me take the same question to you. The part of it about the party splitting in two. Do you see such a split as plausible? Likely? Avoidable?

Jeff Flake:

It's avoidable, but it's going to be difficult to avoid. I mean, we have a number of issues as Republicans. Millennials have been walking away from the party, I think, for a while, and now they're in a dead sprint, and women, college-educated voters. We're losing a lot there, we have made inroads in some other areas, but I would say as well, Donald Trump did well among Hispanics in Texas. So did George W. Bush and around the country. I think he had 40-some percent around the country. So it's not just Donald Trump that can get these votes.

00:45:46

But the fact that if the NRSC is simply going to double down on, you know, the anti impeachment to Josh Hawley money that can come in, that I think just suggests that we're in deeper trouble than we think. If we think that we're going to grow as a party and going to be able to win some of these purple states, both with Senate races and the presidential race by doubling down on Donald Trump, or these kinds of politics, I think that's just the wrong direction to go. There are a number of people around the country, I think, who, in terms of presidential candidates. I think it's going to get somebody out of the Donald Trump mold, maybe the Charlie Baker or Larry Hogan, or somebody else that can pick up some of these purple states, but it's going to be difficult to avoid a schism that is certainly taking place right now.

John Donovan:

Kimberley, what happens if Donald Trump, as expected, survives the process in the Senate, and runs again? What does that do to the party?

00:46:51

Kimberley A. Strassel:

Well, look, this is why we have primaries. This is why we have elections, and I think that there are a lot of Republicans out there right now who are very resentful of the notion that some people are so nakedly, and I think that can only be addressed are actually trying to use this process,

because they want to exile him from being able to take part in that process, again, and that's the kind of thing that really would engender a split in the party. Look, one of the things that I think is fascinating is that if you look at the Republican Party, they learned something from Donald Trump over the last couple of years which is that you do have to address these issues. All right, it doesn't mean that you have to throw over the notion of trade. You don't have to throw over the notion of getting some sort of changes in immigration policy that are for good, but that you have to address those huge voter concerns that are out there. Look, if you look at there was a Gallup poll in 2020, May 2020, so just less than a year ago. And if you look, almost 64 percent of Americans felt that immigration should stay the same or decrease the numbers.

00:48:00

Okay, I'm not in that camp. I'm a pro-immigration person, but you can't as a politician expect to go on and not pay attention to an issue that 64 percent of the country, on both sides of the aisle, feel is important, so there's going to be a new generation of Republican leaders, they've learned a lot from Trump about --

John Donovan:

I'm sorry to break in, but can I come back to the question if Trump is still around with his base and his connection to the base. Let me put it a different way would if you were sitting in the Senate now would you vote to convict him if you felt that that would be a successful vote? Would you want to get him out of the picture?

Kimberley A. Strassel:

I wouldn't do it because I know for a fact what it would do to the party. It really would alienate a number of people. The natural progression here needs to be for everyone to have a debate about what comes next. And I think that you know, while you do have a certain percentage of people who are diehard Trump fixtures, a lot of them simply liked the way he governed, and you're going to see a whole raft of politicians. You see it now trying to get some of that populist vibe and augment they'll offer an alternative, and the party will have that debate.

00:49:08

John Donovan:

And Jeff, same question to you. If you were still sitting in the Senate right now, is this impeachment process is brought to you?

Jeff Flake:

You know, I'd vote to convict. One, because it's the right thing to do. It's an appropriate punishment for his actions. But I frankly think in terms of what it will do to the party. You got to put that aside and do the right thing. Having said that, I don't think, one, the President will be convicted in the Senate. But I don't think that he'll run again either. I think that he'll try to exercise influence, but I think if these impeachment hearings are doing anything. I hope that it's showing republicans we've got to move beyond this man. And we, you know it's there's simply nothing good for the party or for the country by continuing to follow him. It's just -- this ought to be telling us that, if nothing else. This impeachment hearing, if we didn't know it all ready.

00:50:07

John Donovan:

Ben, we have a question from Steve Sherman [spelled phonetically], who asks, I'm not sure I agree fully with the premise of the question, but it is this: Has the Republican Party abandoned the concept of compromise that has been a guiding principle for our nation since inception? I'm not sure we've always had that principle since inception.

Carlos Curbelo:

Well, I think it's fair to say both parties have abandoned that, and that's one of the reasons why Americans are so frustrated. But again, go back to the same point what many Republicans have done is abandoned the truths. What many Republicans have done is refused to express simple truths, many Republicans have excused, for example, racist organizations and conduct, proud boys, stand down. Some Republicans have excused the President's inciting violence. Right, that dramatic scene on the 6th of January.

00:51:02

So that, the truth, is even more important than compromise and compromise is necessary for our democracy, our founders created a government that requires compromise in order to act. But if you don't agree on truth and facts, it's very difficult to negotiate and compromise.

Ben Domenech:

Can I disagree with that for a moment?

John Donovan:

Please do. It's a debate, so please do.

Ben Domenech:

D.C. is perfectly willing to compromise when it comes to the issues that D.C. elites agree about, and that's generally global-minded policies that are favored by the elites, and that includes a number of different steps that they're willing to take along those lines. And that also tends to shut aside the different things that a lot of voters prioritize themselves. You know I spoke to Republican voters all across the country, who couldn't understand why Paul Ryan under -- with Donald Trump and with you know, Republicans in the Senate couldn't defund Planned Parenthood, something virtually every Republican ran on. And that's because it's not a priority of K Street and all of these other folks who actually have influence.

00:52:07

When it comes to spending money or giving corporations and Wall Street what they want, compromise is absolutely still alive and well. We only find gridlock when it comes to a lot of these other issues that aren't as big of a priority for the people who actually hire the money.

Carlos Curbelo:

Let me just add to that that Donald Trump signed numerous spending bills that funded Planned Parenthood.

Ben Domenech:
Absolutely.

Carlos Curbelo:
Okay.

John Donovan:
Want to go to another question. This one comes from Ari Ethoreson [spelled phonetically]. It's for Kimberley. Trump has been attempting to overthrow and change the election results. How do you reconcile that with your support of smaller government reach?

Kimberley A. Strassel:
Reconcile with small? Oh, well, first of all, I don't agree with Trump's moves to refuse to accept the election results. I did agree that there was good cause for him to engage in some litigation and to question some because we had an unprecedented election in which a lot of rules have been changed before then.

00:53:05

One of the things that I have continued to be a little boggled by over the past four years is these definitions of Trump as an autocrat, as a budding dictator. I would actually argue in terms of that question. The fact that we have a smaller government explains why that should not necessarily have been a concern, know budding autocrats are not people who cut the size of the federal government. You know budding autocrats are not people who allow people to keep more of their money, giving them more power away from the federal government, and we had a lot of hyperventilating over the last couple of years about how Trump was breaking the Constitution, and et cetera. Now, in the end, there is this last issue where he did not accept the election results, which I thought was bad behavior and a bad decision. The Senate has an institution and the House in which they are going through this process.

00:54:06

Again, I would point out that most of Mr. Flake's and Mr. Curbelo's colleagues do not agree with them on the notion of how far this rises and whether it rises to the questions of impeachment. That's not because they're craven. It's not because they're scared. It's because they truly don't believe it. And that's a debate for those parties to have, but, you know, the notion that somehow we turned over the government to a dictator for the past four years is belied by the fact that he's currently sitting at Mar a Lago.

John Donovan:
Ben, another question, the imagery that came out of places like Charlottesville the swastikas and the torches, are they compatible with a party that is also trying -- I mean the fact that the party

carried a record number of voters, but had those images tells us what about the electorate that voted for the Republican Party?

Ben Domenech:

I think it tells us that that portion of the electorate doesn't see that as indicative of what the republican party has been giving them.

00:55:09

I think it indicates that they're they've looked to their pocketbook issues, they've looked to a lot of other priorities in their life and that they haven't bought the association between Charlottesville and the GOP in the way that a lot of folks made it. And I think that that actually extends to a lot of different areas. In the same way that you don't necessarily think of your friend who's a Democrat in your neighborhood as being someone who would go to a riot and burn down a small business over something, you don't think of the Republican in your neighborhood as being someone who's, you know into deep, you know, dark web internet theories and the like. And for most people, those are the republicans and the democrats that they know in many ways we're talking here about a fringe. The difference is that, from my perspective, at least republicans are asked by a lot of media to apologize for their fringe, while democrats are allowed to get away with ignoring them and just kind of sweeping it aside.

John Donovan:

A question for Jeff and, I'm sorry. Did someone want to step in? Go ahead, Jeff.

00:56:08

Jeff Flake:

Just on that point. What would be nice if we had leadership as we used to when we were approached by those kinds of questions when David Duke was the Republican nominee in Louisiana in the early 90s for governor. You had George H.W. Bush and several senators at that time. Several senators actually traveled to Louisiana. And George W. Bush endorsed his opponent, the Democrat, saying that this would be horrible for the party if this man were to represent the party and I'd like to see that kind of leadership, and unfortunately too many people on the other side of it associate the entire republican party with that element because the leadership won't sufficiently distance themselves.

Ben Domenech:

But Jeff, we're talking in the context of --

Kimberley A. Strassel:

It just happened. It just happened. So you just had every major Republican leader condemn Marjorie Taylor Greene for her QAnon theories and made it very clear that that does not stand for the Republican Party, so that would seem to me to be the leadership to which you're addressing.

00:57:12

Ben Domenech:

I would contrast the response to Marjorie Taylor Greene to the response to Ilhan Omar when they watered down the condemnation of her remarks that had been clearly anti-semitic because they didn't want to offend the supporters of the squad. I think this is something that happens on both sides, but that Republicans are frequently in a position where the most extreme person is hung around their neck, and democrats are frequently allowed to just skate on it by the media.

John Donovan:

So Jeff, you got some pushback on that point from your two opponents just now. I mean, they cited examples, particularly in response to Congresswoman Greene, in which they said actually the party did stand up and speak out.

Jeff Flake:

I think we're misreading what happened last week. Republicans didn't deal with that issue. They didn't strip her of her committee, which they should have done. That was done with Steve King as it should have been. Republicans should've handled this and not relied on the democrats to do it.

00:58:07

I think the Republicans knew that the democrats would do it, and so they were able to hold off. But we should've handled this within our party. And that's the problem. And that's why too many people see the republican party as being too tolerant of this kind of attitude. Because when we were faced with it, we didn't deal with it.

John Donovan:

Carlos, I want to bring to you a point that your opponents made earlier in the debate. And that is that the party in the last election in 2020, even in the votes for Donald Trump, did better than expected and then and in the recent past, with some portions of the black community, black men and also with some portions of the Latino community, which goes against the narrative that the party is seen as racist and threatening to their interests and that the Democratic Party is their natural home. So what does that tell you?

Carlos Curbelo:

John, what it tells you is that a party that has lost its way can still succeed at the ballot box because the other party might be making other mistakes, and you should probably have a show about whether or not the Democratic Party has lost its way.

00:59:14

Because I'm sure there are some Democrats who would say it has, but let me tell you, there have been many --

John Donovan:

I just want to point out that many that we have debated that in the past couple of cycles, and so I commend our viewers to take a look at those debates, and they're online. But go ahead, sorry.

Carlos Curbelo:

But real quick. There are a lot of popular political parties throughout the world that, you know, just because you're popular doesn't mean that you're good or that you're on the right track. If you're popular for the wrong reasons, if you're popular because you are lying and cheating people and they believe your lies, that's a problem. And our friend said earlier, well, you know Marjorie Taylor Greene was condemned by Republican leaders. She was also endorsed by President Trump, who happens to be the most popular person in the Republican Party right now, that is indicative of the degree of intoxication inside the party.

01:00:14

Someone who knows, like Marjorie Taylor Greene, who should clearly be sanctioned all she has to do is go and embrace Donald Trump. And then she's safe. That is a party that has lost its way. That is a party that is going to have trouble being trusted by people once the lies get revealed.

John Donovan:

Okay. Well, that concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where the resolution is the GOP has lost its way. And now we move on to the third round. And the third round is comprised of closing remarks by all four debaters. In turn, those will be just two minutes each. It's their last chance to try to persuade you to vote with their side in our second vote, so let's move on to closing statements. Our first closing statement on the resolution the GOP has lost its way here is Carlos Curbelo.

Carlos Curbelo:

John, my family came from Cuba some 60 years ago. All of them came to the United States naturalized, became patriotic Americans, and registered in the Republican Party.

01:01:16

Why? Because they knew that it was the party that was best equipped to fight the lies of communism and tyranny. My dad used to tell me when I was growing up, son, remember the Americans do things differently, they don't do things the way we have done things in our countries, they don't lie they don't cheat, they're respectful, even when they disagree. The republican party that my dad so passionately believed in has changed, and at the current time has lost its way because it has lost its authority to fight lies because it has embraced lies. A leader who is afraid, who does not express simple truths, cannot be an effective leader. And what we need for our party, but more importantly for our country, is a healthy republican party where people look into the camera and tell the American public the facts and the truth, and then ask them for their support, based on their policy agenda, but you cannot lie and offer an attractive policy agenda as a substitute.

01:02:26

So that's why it's so important for everyone to recognize the simple truth that the republican party has lost its way. Please cast your vote so that we can get on with the business of fixing this party and renewing our democracy.

John Donovan:

Thank you very much, Carlos. Our next closing statement is against the resolution. It comes from Ben Domenech. Ben, your closing, please.

Ben Domenech:

Thank you, John. Parties are not one man. They're made up of an ideological coalition of people of shared minds and shared values. In 1981, Ronald Reagan said, "trust the people. This is the one irrefutable lesson of the entire post-war period," end quote. The GOP of 40 years ago chose Reaganism as the answer to the challenges of the time, but time inevitably creates new challenges that Reaganism alone can't answer. No Leaders Program should be blindly followed for generations, as Reagan himself would agree.

01:03:23

In the decades since the GOP oversaw the hollowing out of the American middle class, the wasting of American prestige on nation-building wars, China pillaging our economy, recurring violence on porous borders and explosive opioid epidemic, and all while aiding the rise of a global corporate elite who, quite honestly hate the beliefs of so many ordinary GOP voters. But when you step back, that period looks like an aberration inconsistent with the GOP's approach as a whole. That's because the GOP hasn't lost its way it's found it. Bertolt Brecht wrote in his famous poem "The Solution" about the people who have forfeited the confidence of their government that would it not be easier in that case, it'd be simpler for the government to dissolve the people and elect another.

01:04:15

In countries like China, you can dissolve the people, but that's not what we do here in America. Instead, parties must seek to listen to their constituents, to hear their concerns, and to harmonize their aims with their priorities. That's what today's GOP is doing as a party, and that's why you should vote against the motion.

John Donovan:

Thanks very much, Ben. Our next debater will be speaking in support of the motion. It's Jeff Flake. Jeff, your closing, please.

Jeff Flake:

Thank you, John. I would just ask those who are about to vote. Here, look where we are today. And we're in the middle of an impeachment hearing, an impeachment trial to determine whether or not a president is barred from public office in the future for trying to hold on to an election that he did not win, to try to overturn using any means at his disposal to put aside the hallmark of our democracy: fair, peaceful transfer of power.

01:05:19

That's where we are today as a party, and too many in our party are defending that man, are ready to go down with that ship. If that's not a party that has lost its way, I don't know what is. Now, as Carlos said, we desperately need to reclaim the mantle that has animated the party for years, limited government, economic freedom, individual responsibility, strong American leadership across the globe. These are principles that can propel us into the future if we can debate them. But we can't debate them if we completely will not accept the truth. The truth is, we lost this last election. We need to go forward, finding better arguments to bring people to our side at the table. I believe we can do that. I believe that this is a center-right country, and it will move toward republicans again if we can offer the policies that they like without going against the truth and trying to spout lies. So the party has definitely lost its way.

01:06:25

I hope you'll vote that way and send a signal that the republican party needs to be back. We need to be back. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Jeff, and finally getting the last word in this debate speaking against the resolution that the GOP has lost its way, Kimberley Strassel. Kimberley, your closing.

Kimberley A. Strassel:

One of my great frustrations with Donald Trump's failure to accept the election results and concede is that I think he lost an opportunity to define his actual purpose and role in 21st-century politics. And that was a role very much like ones he played in his career prior to politics of the great disrupter. You know, love Trump or hate Trump, what he showed both parties was that they needed to reconnect with so many voters out there who have felt overlooked by Washington and by that elite. Perhaps the biggest tribute to Donald Trump from the Democratic Party, perhaps the only one was, in fact, trying to mimic his strategy of success, you know, remember the great debate in the Democratic Party over where to hold their nomination convention last year.

01:07:35

And it was not Miami that won. Trump's time on the center stage is likely done. But he showed a lot of politicians the way here, and what you have now is an entire group of upcoming Republican leaders that intend to build on that, to harness the energy that you've seen growing out there, which is undeniable. Given the election results and what we saw with inroads in terms of minority voters, Latino voters, urban voters, who are tired of violence and the failure to educate their kids, rural and working-class voters who are tired of being governed by faraway bureaucrats. They are all ready to stand up and take that mantle. It's a party that I think Ben, so eloquently put it, has found its way. And just remember again, you cannot define a party as having lost its way that just had such an amazing policy run that just had such a great Election Day it simply doesn't comport with facts or evidence, and we have to define it somehow that's the best way. So I ask you to please vote against the motion.

01:08:44

John Donovan:

Thank you, Kim, and thank you to all of our debaters as that concludes the final round of this Intelligence Squared debate. So, I want to say this, we set out back in 2006 to raise the level of public discourse by showing that it is possible for people who disagree and disagree viscerally on some important things to conduct a conversation and an argument frankly civilly and passionately and in a way that sheds light and I think all four of you brought that spirit to this and I want to congratulate you for that. And I want to thank you for the way that you conducted this conversation with us, so thank you very much to all of you. It's very much in the spirit of what our chairman and founder Robert Rosenkranz had in mind when he started Intelligence Squared, and we want to bring Robert on now to say a few words. Robert?

Robert Rosenkranz:

When I think about politics and try to observe what's going on in political life, I try to make a distinction in my own mind between the soundtrack and what's going on the screen.

01:09:48

What's the emotional content, and what's actually happening. And when I think about the last four years of Donald Trump, I would say this soundtrack is about as bad as I can remember in my lifetime of observing politics. It was so bad that I think it's driven many people to decide that they no longer want to self identify as Republicans, and what's happened on the screen in one sense, is a major defeat for the Republican Party. Four years ago the Republican Party controlled the White House and the Senate and the House of Representatives, and now controls none of the above. On the other hand, not all of the results are so bad. There were some substantial achievements, I would say, during the Trump era. I would list among them very strong federal judicial appointments.

01:10:50

I think the deregulation and the corporate tax cut together fueled a very strong economic performance pre-COVID. And what actually happened in the election was very, very close. The Republicans have to try to think about what is their future look like in terms of policy, but also in terms of personality and, most importantly, how do they establish a winning coalition. I want to thank the panelists. I think they did an extraordinary job of dealing with what I think is a very vexing and very important issue and at a time when it's very difficult for people to listen to anything dealing with politics and anything particularly dealing with Donald Trump with an open mind, and so I applaud them and I applaud our audience for being a part of this and bringing that spirit of free inquiry and critical thinking to the debate. So thank you all very, very much indeed.

01:11:58

John Donovan:

Thank you very much, Robert, and while we are still calculating the results as Robert was speaking, there was just a tiny snippet of conversation here in which because we're there's a vote going on. Jeff was wondering if there would be an opportunity to contest the votes. And we all had a laugh about that the answer is going to be no on that. But Kimberley, you were also starting to say something to the rest of the group, so I just wanted to let you go ahead with that.

Kimberley A. Strassel:

Yeah, I just actually wanted to thank all of you. I think moments like this are just so important, and it's a reminder that it's absolutely possible for people who don't agree on everything to sit and have civilized debates, and so I thank you for this experience.

John Donovan:

Well, we thank you, as I said before, yeah, thank you for the way that you conducted yourself during this. Here's how it works the resolution the GOP has lost its way before the debate in polling our live audience, 69 percent of you agreed with the resolution, 17 percent were against, and 14 percent were undecided.

01:13:00

Let's look at the second result. Again, the team arguing for the motion their first result was 69 percent, their second vote was 72 percent, they picked up three percentage points, that three is the number to beat the team against the resolution their first vote was 17 percent their second vote was 22 percent, so they picked up 5 percent. The against side picked up more points than the for side, so that means the team arguing against the resolution by a squeaker has won the debate, defeating the notion that the GOP has lost its way. Our congratulations to that team but frankly, our congratulations to all four debaters for being here for bringing their arguments and for doing so in such a civil and positive manner. For me, John Donovan and Intelligence Squared, we'll see you next time.

[music playing]

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This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.