

The 2016 U.S. Election: A Possible Repeat of the 1964 Election?

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Region: [USA](#)

This incisive article by Prof Rodrigue Tremblay first published in June 2016, has predicted with foresight the unfolding crisis surrounding the US presidential campaign opposing Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton...

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I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. Barry Goldwater (1909-1998) US Senator (R-Arizona) and 1964 Republican Presidential candidate, (in his Acceptance speech as the 1964 Republican Presidential candidate, in San Francisco, July 16, 1964)

Sometimes, I think this country would be better off if we could just saw off the Eastern Seaboard and let it float out to sea. Barry Goldwater (1909-1998) US Senator (R-Arizona) and 1964 Republican Presidential candidate, (in a December 1961 news conference)

We're going to hit them and we're going to hit them hard. I'm talking about a surgical strike on these ISIS stronghold cities using Trident [nuclear] missiles. Donald Trump (1946-), Republican presidential candidate, (in an interview with 'Meet the Press', NBC News, August 9, 2015)

...They asked me the question [about torture], 'What do you think of waterboarding?' —Absolutely fine. But we should go much stronger than waterboarding. Donald Trump (1946-), Republican presidential candidate, (in a statement during a campaign event at a retirement community, in Bluffton, S. C., Feb. 17, 2016)

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The way this 2016 American presidential election is unfolding, there is a good chance that it could be a repeat of the 1964 U.S. election. In both instances, a Democratic presidential candidate is facing a flawed and frightening Republican presidential candidate who multiplies provocative and reckless statements and off-hand comments.

Politicians sometimes forget that, once elected, they are expected to serve all the people, not their narrow base of fanatical partisans. In that regard, their public statements are very important because they give a clue about what type of public servant a candidate would be. A candidate can easily self-destruct if he or she forgets that, when talking to partisans, the entire electorate is listening. Strong statements, good or bad, remain in people's consciousness when time comes to vote.



Let us look back 52 years to the 1964 U.S. election. Seeking election in his own right was sitting Democratic President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#) (1908-1973), who had taken office in 1963 following President John F. Kennedy's assassination, and who was about to escalate the [Vietnam War](#), which ended up costing the lives of 58,000 Americans and the lives of more than a million Vietnamese. His Republican opponent was Senator [Barry Goldwater](#) (1909-1998) of Arizona, who had fought against the party establishment and succeeded in winning the Republican nomination over New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller.

In 1964, Republican candidate Barry Goldwater (right) soon developed an image as an extremist on many issues with a series of reckless and ill-thought out statements. For instance, in foreign policy, he advocated using 'low-yield' nuclear weapons in Vietnam and in Europe. Domestically, he wanted to make Social Security voluntary. He even suggested that the United States would be better off if the entire East Coast of the country were cut off and sent out to sea!

Goldwater was never able to shake off his image as an extremist on many issues, and he was never in a position to unmask the Democratic candidate's war plans. This was a key factor in his crushing defeat in November 1964: Lyndon B. Johnson (image left below) won about 61 percent of the vote to Goldwater's 39 percent, and took all but six states.



Therefore after the election, President Johnson had a free hand in escalating the Vietnam War, especially considering that the U.S. Congress had already adopted the infamous [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution](#), on August 7, 1964. The disastrous war would last ten more years, until 1975.

There is a good chance that history might repeat itself next November.

Indeed, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has been acting as if he doesn't really care whether he wins the election or not, drawing attention to himself with outlandish statements and reckless comments, presumably designed to shock and create free "publicity" for his candidacy.

One day candidate Trump wants to adopt torture as a public policy. The next day, he wants to prevent Muslims from entering the United States and build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico to stop illegal Mexican immigration. Later on, he advocates using nuclear missiles against Islamist terrorists in the Middle East, and—throwing away any humanitarian principle—even kill their families.

Domestically, he wants to abolish Obamacare, but so far, he has not spelled out any replacement. Etc. etc. etc!




Moreover, he doesn't mind contradicting himself. Sometimes, he rebuts the pro-Israel lobby, professing not to need its money. But then, he lets his Middle East advisor state that a Trump administration would give the Israeli government a free hand in expropriating the Palestinians.

Since Mr. Trump has no government experience of any kind, one would think that he would consult about policy issues he knows little about, before issuing a statement. This does not seem to be the case. He even [jokes](#): "*my primary consultant is myself.*" That is a sobering thought. The candidate does not seem to have an overall plan; everything seems to be left to improvisation.

This indicates a lack of discipline. Indeed, candidate Trump seems to be his own worst enemy. As a businessman, Mr. Trump may have great qualities. As a politician, he seems to be lacking in political instincts, self-control and restraint.

As a result of his flippancy and inconsistencies, Mr. Trump's [poll numbers](#) are slipping badly, not because people necessarily like the alternative Democratic choice, but mainly because they become increasingly disillusioned by the lack of seriousness on candidate Trump's part. They sense that he is unstable and unpredictable, that he has no plan and no program.

 All this is a free gift to Democratic presidential [Hillary Clinton](#) who has to defend 40 years of political involvement. Unless an unexpected event occurs, and unless Mr. Trump changes profoundly his approach, the choice in the U.S. next November will be between two main candidates with net negative approval ratings, and the candidate with the lowest net negative rating will win, by default.

One would think that the American electorate deserves better.

Prof. Rodrigue Tremblay is the author of the book ["The Code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles"](#), and of ["The New American Empire"](#).

Please visit the book site at:

<http://www.thecodeforglobalethics.com/>

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