

# Trump's strategy

Donald Trump's campaign strategy seems simple: he keeps reminding voters that he is way ahead in the polls. This strategy might be shrewd, or it might be foolish. Plausible arguments could be made to support either notion.

To support the argument that Trump's strategy is clever, one could draw on Psychology research. For example, the Asch Conformity test found that people would often choose an option they knew was wrong just because other people had already chosen the wrong option. In this experiment, subjects were asked to look at a line and then identify which of three other lines was the same length. When actors posed as subjects for the experiment, these actors could influence the actual subjects' answers by purposely choosing the incorrect answer. In their book *Nudge*, Cass Sunstein and Nobel laureate Richard Thaler provide another example of how people's desire to conform can influence decisions. They pointed out that Minnesota was able to get its citizens to more regularly comply with tax laws by advertising that most other people were already complying. There is even an example closer to home. In an effort to reduce drug use among students, the University of Central

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Arkansas posted signs around campus that indicated that a large percentage Bears haven't had marijuana in the last week. The school hopes that by letting students know what is normal, the student's desire to conform will cause them to use less marijuana.

Trump is attempting to get people to believe that most Republican voters will cast their ballots for him. If the examples above provide any guidance for what will happen in the Republican primary, then people's desire to fit in may cause them to vote for Trump even if they like other candidates better.

That was the Trump is a clever argument. But the Trump is foolish theory is equally plausible. This theory draws on my observations of previous elections. Since the 1980s, when I started paying attention, candidates have tried to downplay expectations of how they would perform. If a candidate claimed that he would be happy to receive 20 percent of the vote in New Hampshire's primary and then goes on to win 30 percent of the vote, the candidate could claim

a great victory. In contrast, if a candidate was widely expected to get 65 percent of the vote in the New Hampshire primary but only ended up getting 51 percent of the vote, the media would count the result as a loss for the candidate. The narrative would claim that he did not meet expectations and his campaign is losing momentum.

Donald Trump runs the risk of setting expectations for his performance too high. He may get the most votes in the Iowa caucus and in all of the early primaries, but if he get fewer votes than expected, the news media might paint a narrative that his campaign is falling apart and some other campaign is succeeding. This other campaign can claim that it won the early contests, not by getting the most votes, but by beating expectations. This other campaign could claim that it has momentum, which could carry it to later victories where it actually gets the most votes.

It won't be long before we start seeing the results from the primary elections. After a few of these elections, we should know whether Trump's election strategy was shrewd or foolish.

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