

Only 3 of the 20 Presidential Candidates Carry a Message

One of the most powerful – if not THE most powerful – political themes in American politics is “send *them* a message.” Yet, in an election year when the “them” in Washington are the target of voter wrath from both Left and Right, only three of the 20+ candidates running for President are “message carriers.” The three message carriers; Democrat Bernie Sanders and Republicans Donald Trump and Ted Cruz have different messages, but they have one thing in common – voting for them is a clear rejection of the status quo in their parties, and in the conduct of the federal government. While their opponents may occasionally attempt to image themselves as the candidates of change, none at this point in the campaign claims to stand for a radical change in how Washington’s ruling elite conduct the affairs of government. Indeed, Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush, the leading Democrat and Republican candidates, routinely claim to be “the adults in the room,” suggesting that those who demand radical reform are at best adolescent and at worst throwing childish tantrums. But when the message carriers start to move poll numbers or win primaries the Establishment candidates are forced to listen and react, and as much as they want to convince voters to reject the demand for radical change Cruz, Trump and Sanders are carrying, Bush and Clinton are being forced to listen and respond. Sanders has been pushing Clinton steadily leftward as he turns out thousands of energized far-Left voters for rallies that should scare the dickens out of Hillary’s Wall Street and Silicon Valley funders as she embraces and surpasses his radical income redistribution rhetoric. As soon as Senator Sanders’ progressive campaign began to get traction in Iowa and New Hampshire, Hillary Clinton made a major economic policy speech at The New School in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village, a bastion of liberal

education and social thought. "I believe we have to build a growth and fairness economy. You can't have one without the other," she said in a speech that would have done 1930's leftwing populist demagogue Huey "Kingfish" Long proud. Donald Trump has likewise tapped into a populist demand for radical change similar to the one that powered Ross Perot's 1992 run for President, and that some believe deprived George H.W. Bush of a second term and led to the election of Bill Clinton and the creation of Hillary Clinton as a national political figure. When the Chairman of the Republican National Committee calls Donald Trump, allegedly to tell him to "tone it down" regarding his controversial comments on illegal immigration, Trump's message is being received loud and clear. Likewise when establishment neo-con Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina complains Trump has "hijacked" the agenda and establishment Republicans should "push back," Trump's message is getting through. So far only Jeb Bush has accepted Graham's advice, the rest of the Republican field has either agreed with Trump or kept silent, as they looked with envy at the thousands of rally participants Trump has turned out and wondered how they can tap into Trump's message without drawing the ire of the establishment media. And Trump's populist message that Obama and the establishment politicians of both parties are terrible negotiators may get new life as the media cycle turns to the Iran deal and foreign policy. In contrast to the (so far) narrow focus of the Trump message, Ted Cruz has a much broader and coherent message; the worldview of America's country class and limited government constitutional conservatives. Cruz's message of getting government back within strict constitutional limits is a sharp contrast to the status quo worldview of the progressive Big Government establishment of both political parties. And in contrast to their reaction to Trump, nearly all of Republican presidential candidates have been forced to respond and frame at least part of their campaign rhetoric in constitutional terms – even Jeb Bush. Prior to Ted Cruz's entry into the Republican race you would have been hard pressed to find a mention of the

Constitution in a Jeb Bush speech – despite the fact that Bush once served as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Constitution Center. Indeed, his “Right to Rise” allied Super PAC announcement carried nary a mention of putting the federal government back inside strict constitutional limits – it was all about using the government to manipulate the economy to achieve a Republican version of Bernie Sanders’ economic fairness. After the Cruz announcement practically every Republican has been forced to talk about the Constitution, even Bush, who made it a point prior to the Supreme Court’s decision mandating same-sex “marriage” in all states to say he did not believe there was a constitutional right to such “marriages.” Likewise, Scott Walker devoted part of the closing of his announcement to constitutional conservative themes – themes that were pretty much the exclusive territory of Ted Cruz until he started rising in the polls wherever he appeared and talked about them. Of course being a message carrier doesn’t mean the candidate will automatically win their Party’s nomination or be elected President: William Jennings Bryan carried the populist message in the Democratic Party in the 1896, 1900 and 1908 elections and never achieved the presidency and Ronald Reagan was the conservative message carrier in two elections before he was elected President in 1980. And a message isn’t always necessary to win an election; as we saw with the campaigns of Jerry Ford, Bob Dole, John McCain and Mitt Romney a content-free campaign was enough to at least win the nomination, if not the general election. “Send them a message” may be the most powerful theme in American politics, and right now the messages of Sanders, Trump and Cruz are resonating and driving the debate, but they still have to translate the message voters are sending through them into a technically proficient campaign to win and become President.