

[Transcript] The Realignment / 358 | Henry Olsen: Trump vs. DeSantis and the Fight for the New Republican Party

Marshall here. Welcome back to The Re-alignment.

Hey everyone, welcome back to the show.

Quick reminder, tomorrow, Sagar and my latest Supercast exclusive episode, where we discuss the issues of the day and answer listener, subscriber questions, will be coming out first in the morning.

So if you've not subscribed already, go to realignment.supercast.com.

There you will get access to the Q&A, exclusive content, and be able to submit your own questions and all those other great things.

On to today's episode.

One of the big stories this week was the indictment hearing for Donald Trump in New York City. So I decided to take a step back and bring on a great guest who I've read and really learned from for a long time

to discuss the current 2024 Republican primary and what it means for the broader future of the conservative movement and the Republican Party.

Henry Olsen is a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a columnist at the Washington Post,

where he focuses on politics, populism, and the broader American conservative movement.

Obviously, Henry has a point of view on the 2024 primary,

but I think what he does a great job of this episode is he takes a step back from his personal perspectives

and provides analysis of how the different factions of the right are coalescing or not coalescing in favor of one candidate or the other.

If you're looking for an episode, they're really set at the table.

For how we should understand basically the next year of our politics, this conversation is the perfect starting point.

All that said, hope you all enjoy the conversation and look forward to hearing what you all think.

Henry Olsen, welcome to the realignment.

Thanks for having me, Marshall.

Of course, no, I think a lot of your writing, especially going back to your book from, I believe, 2018, which is about Ronald Reagan and kind of a different kind of history of his presidency and the whole working class debate about the Republican Party has been really helpful in setting my foundational thinking.

So I think this is a great time to check in with you, considering that we're a little more than a year out from the 2024 election.

Let's start at the most basic level.

How would you define the new, quote, unquote, Republican Party that we have in this post-2016 moment?

It's difficult to describe because it's still going through its birthing pains.

It's still trying to define itself.

It's one that is highly patriotic and very fearful, fearful of domestic challenges and fearful of foreign challenges, especially that posed by China.

It's one that wants somebody who understands that fear and will at least fight back.

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I say at least because in some cases, many of the voters seem to value fighting as opposed to winning,

but they want somebody who understands that they are afraid of the change that is happening and they want somebody who represents.

It's not old economic values because there's certainly a lot of division in the new Republican Party about economic policy, old cultural values.

In America, that's dedicated to equality of under the law, equality of opportunity, not equity of outcome as is often pushed.

In America, that honors its past, doesn't tear it down.

These are the sorts of things that unite today's Republican Party.

I know that the center-left listeners of the show will be screaming at me to ask the following follow-up question, though.

Where does...

I don't want to sound like a cliché here, but where does January 6th fit into the patriotism discourse?

I think where does Marjorie Taylor Greene invoking the national divorce fit in the discourse?

That's just kind of interesting to me because you sort of seen in response to those two incidents specifically,

a lot of Democrats start to say, well, actually we're the patriotic ones because of this, this and that reason.

So can you just talk about where patriotism as a category fits in the 2023 moment in a way that would have been different,

let's say, if it was 2003 and we're fighting about freedom fries?

Well, you know, 2003, the Republican...

And when I speak at the party, I try and speak about the mass of the voters as opposed to its leaders or its donors

or its intellectuals or its media personalities because ultimately a party is what its voters support and it may take leaders and so forth a little while to follow around and follow their voters, but they eventually do.

And so patriotism today compared to 2003 is, again, around the idea of fear that we are losing.

What made us great and made us a distinction.

2003 was the opposite.

There was confidence that you had in America that either was about to or had taken down Saddam Hussein,

depending on what I forget exactly when we entered Baghdad in 2003.

One that had fought back after 9-11, one that was unchallenged around the globe.

And one in which a lot of the cultural changes that we've seen in the last 20 years were only beginning to become really serious.

This is a year before California voters approved the Defense of Marriage Act, a Proposition 8 that would have outlawed same-sex marriage.

So the amount of cultural change we've seen in the last 20 years is mind-boggling.

And so today's patriotism is more defensive in its crouch than it would have been 20 years ago.

With respect to January 6, and this is something where I part company with most Republicans.

I'm extremely angry about January 6.

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I can't support Donald Trump as a result of January 6.

He tried to undermine our democratic transfer of power, something that Ronald Reagan allotted in his first inaugural as a bedrock of our country.

Most Republicans don't see it that way.

It's not that they agree necessarily that it was right, but rather that they don't see it as an insurrection and they don't see it as something that is a serious break with the nation's past.

If I take a look at where Republicans stand on the question of voter fraud in 2020, and you'd see probably two-thirds of Republican voters think that the election was stolen, but only about half of that or a quarter of that prioritized that.

They're soft fraud adherence, not hard fraud adherence.

That's something that media often misses, that there's a very wide range of views within the Republican Party, much as there is within the Democratic Party.

I don't see a whole lot of resonance for Marjorie Taylor Greene's desire for a national divorce, but it does represent some, more than a couple of people in the Republican Party.

The way they would phrase it, I think, is, if they don't want to live with us, we don't want to be in the same country as them.

What I'm trying to understand here is a very helpful sentence you gave earlier, which is that a party is what its voters support.

That, to me, is a little difficult, because on the one hand, you could say to yourself, yes, that's true, right?

Republicans, a party is people at the end of the day and their cumulative viewpoint they have is what the party produces.

I think that gets at what we've always been interested in, which is this gap between the GOP's national policy output and the actual voters.

So, for example, think of the Bush administration after Bush's re-election, the focus on social security privatization.

Obviously, the entitlement spending debate.

Donald Trump's continued battle over social security entitlement cuts that you kind of see coming into the 2024 campaign.

So, I guess within those examples, what is the Republican Party's position on, let's say, social security?

There isn't one.

And that's because there's division within the Republican Party, that you have a large number of Republicans who would fade the traditional Bush-Ryan approach to social security, which is we should be more concerned about its costs than the security of its benefit division.

But an equal number of Republicans, and according to a poll I took in 2021 of Trump voters, a larger number of Trump general election voters disagree with that.

But it's far from unanimous that you have, the question I posed was, what do you care more about even if neither one is exactly in line with your views?

Is it more important to keep social security benefits even if payroll taxes rise or is it more important to keep taxes level even if benefits have to be cut?

And about 63% of the Trump voters picked the first option, but that still leaves 37% or so who picked the second.

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And the margin was larger among the former Obama voters, those working class voters who are now the new recruits into the Republican Party.

They favored it by a larger margin, the old guard Republicans who are likely to vote in party primaries.

It was closer to 50-50 or a little bit in favor of the Orthodox position.

So this is a battle that's being fought in the Republican Party right now.

What I'd say is that 20 years ago, I think there was much more of a consensus in favor of the old position, the favorite worry more about the costs.

But of course, then this is the problem that Republicans have had for as I'm like, when you deviate from the Reagan consensus that a safety net is as important as economic growth and start to say we value economic growth and the risks that brings and it's along with the opportunity more than we value the security and the social safety net, which was what Bush's some Rosa message of 2005 was, you get out of connection with those independence and soft Democrats who are willing to vote for you.

And the fact is the Republican Party has been the number two party in a party identification since 1932.

Now, when you're the number two party, you have to get people who aren't on your side to join you. And when you take the positions that alienate the people who you need to join you, you might want to rethink those positions.

I'd love to hear, given your point about the Republicans being the number two party is, how do you then reconcile the the Reagan years with that fact, right?

So the landslide victories obviously culminating in the 49 States, George HW Bush's victory.

You then have a three way race in 1992 that in many ways you could argue that Ross Perot helped swing to Bill Clinton and then you have I'm sure you remember all these books the 2005 era.

Oh my gosh, Carl Roe was building a permanent conservative majority in this country.

It's kind of like the flip that the doomerism flips between either side of the aisle in different periods. And that same doomerism that many people on the right feel I think was felt by progressives in the wake of the Bush reelection.

So explain why the right has been so dominant during certain periods, but at the same time hasn't been able to be a successful party.

Yeah.

Well, it depends on what you define as the right as well is that if you were to go and ask people on the right, they would say the last 30 years has been a victory squandered by countless leaders that we could have taught government more that government people want that. And so if you were on the right, they would view that period between 1994 and 2016 or even today as one where a majority was squandered.

And I think the truth is that, first of all, what Ronald Reagan did has never been fully appreciate.

And research for my book, you take a look at where the Republican Party was in 1980 and only about 22% of Republican people said they were Republicans.

44% said they were Democrats.

By 1985, that gap shrinks to single digits.

But it stayed there roughly since then.

And so Republicans continually are able to win victories, but victories of a certain sort, victories of a

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negative sort where when Obamacare goes too far against the new Reagan consensus that had a better balance between growth and safety nets.

The old Reagan majority comes up and says, no, we don't want that. But then when Republicans say, well, okay, well, let's push in the other direction and try and break the Reagan balance in favor of more economic growth and less security, the voters push back and say, well, we don't want that either.

So what you've got is, in my view, is the inability of Republicans to understand what the Reagan legacy was and consequently squandering it when they have that opportunity.

And a Democratic base that is remains unreconciled to the Reagan consensus and pushes its own party when they are in power to its own set of extremes. And I think that's one of the reasons why you see this growing frustration, this growing anger, this growing independence.

People may lean toward one party or another, but they yearn for something different. And they're not getting it. And I think what they yearn for is the updating of the Reagan message.

And I guess the obvious question then would be, what do you think an updated Reagan message would be in the context of 2023 or 2024.

Yeah, I think so Ronald Reagan's, I'm sorry, but I know it's an allergies, the itching story. The Ronald Reagan's message is often tied up with freedom. And certainly that was essential to Ronald Reagan's political beliefs and political success.

But more than that, Ronald Reagan believed in the dignity of the people.

He would say things throughout his career that libertarians or anti-new deal conservatives often didn't pick up. And I'm sure his Democratic converts did.

Things like talking in the creative society speech about how which he gave in 1966 about how we should ensure that we're not just giving people enough money to to live my to give them a few luxuries that they have a life worth living.

Where in the speech where he talks about made some famous endorsing Barry Gold or he says no, we conservatives, we agree that no one should be denied medical care because of lack of funds.

And that's which is why in his presidency he could support an expansion of Medicare, because for him, that was not inconsistent with what the dignity of the human person required.

And so an updated Reaganism would put that at its central core. It would say that what we need to do is maintain American culture and embrace the expansion of the American promise to people who had been socially or legally excluded from it.

But that's what we've been doing for 200 years is expanding and renewing and updating the American promise to remove its imperfections, not rejecting it.

Ronald Reagan's policy informed policy was peace through strength he believed in alliances but he also did not believe in taking risks with American lives overseas, which would mean, I think he would be very supportive of what we're doing in Ukraine and he would also be very leery of the bilateral American intervention to say stop Iran from getting a nuclear bomb that he rarely if ever wanted American power to be used in domestic policy.

I think Reagan would love to cut updated Reaganism would be one that focused on what Reagan focused on which was taking benefits and tax breaks from people who don't need it.

Reagan was happy to raise taxes or apply taxes to Social Security benefits on people making above average incomes because as he wrote in one letter, I don't mind taxing it because they shouldn't be getting it in the first place.

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So a Republican philosophy that focuses on an active government for people in need, but a stingy government for people who are not in need and believing we spent trillions of dollars over a 10 year period hundreds of billions a year on people and institutions that do not need government subsidy. I think that would be something that would capture the American middle and make the Republican Party the new number one party.

Okay, so then the obvious other follow up question here then is, is this your version of a DeSantis endorsement, because various phrases and articulation you and I'm not saying you were doing this but I think it's very straightforward to take the story you were telling and say to yourself oh like and Ron DeSantis is the embodiment of that story.

So I want to hear Ron DeSantis saying the thing is that when Ron DeSantis talks and Ron DeSantis emphasizes he still seems to be emphasizing the sort of issues that resonate with the fearful base. And I think when he does eventually declare he should have an optimistic message one that speaks not only towards the fear, but one that speaks towards the hope, and I think he has a lot of policies in Florida that would suggest that that's where he's going.

So when he makes his national pronouncements, it tends to gravitate back towards those base concerns and I think that's what even as he's now nationally known, according to most people have an opinion of him now and that will only grow over the next couple of months.

But he does not do much better than Donald Trump in matchups with Joe Biden and somebody who embraces this philosophy and makes that that part of their credo, I think should be running well ahead of Trump because they will be attractive to the sort of person who doesn't like the Democratic parties move to the left, things that Biden is too old but is fearful of Maga Republicans.

The interesting question to ask though then is the optimism dynamic I think one of the most revelatory things I read in retrospect is Peter Teal's comments to George Packer in 2013 and George Packer's book *The Unwinding* and Peter Teal's point was that he thought that the Romney optimism 2012 perspective was actually out of step with the electorate and there's actually a sizable part of the electorate who wanted to hear something darker, less optimistic. And that very much not at a popular vote level but at a you know how the rules are played

level resonated with Donald Trump in 2015 going to that American car carnage inaugural address.

So what I'd love to hear from you then is how would you advise a GOP candidates navigate a primary where very clearly there's a huge portion of the Republican

party's base who wants to hear the non optimistic message if you have a party where two thirds of people think there's voter fraud. If let me put it this way if I thought that there was voter fraud I would not be optimistic on most questions facing American life right now.

So how do you how would you balance that unoptimistic primary with the fact that there's a general election electorate you need to actually went over.

You know I think what you need to do is what Reagan did you know Ray there was a lot of anger and fear when Reagan became a popular figure in the 1960s you know, think about what was happening you had the Civil Rights Revolution you had a massive

government you had the first cultural challenges abortion drugs the student counterculture had Frank Sinatra could still chart in 1966 because the dominance rock music when not yet set in you know was still a competition.

There was a lot of fear but what Reagan did was acknowledge the fear and channel it towards home. What Donald Trump does is channel the fear and recognize the fear and channels it towards anger,

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which is unproductive, you know to use a term that is modern pop culture.

And he gives into anger and moves people to the dark side. And I think what you need to do is recognize what Romney never did, which was that there's anger and fear out there, but channel that in a way to say I hear this and here's my solution for you and this is how we can restore you and the American dream Romney thought the election was in bag and never understood the suffering that a lot of people was going through. I think somebody who acknowledges the suffering is not highly an ish somebody who does not simply try to apply ideology, which is

something Ronald Reagan bitterly criticized in his 1977 speech to CPAC, where he said that conservatism is principled, but ideology is its enemy. Now, how often do we hear an ideological argument from Republicans that this is the ideal and all the

facts have to be lopped off in order to fit it. That's not conservatism. It's also not winning. And so DeSantis, if he were to embrace that would be somebody who would acknowledge the fear and channel it towards hope, recognizing that running against somebody

like Trump with his own brand and his own thing, you're not going to get in the primary, the diodes. You're just not for what you have to be as acceptable for them in the general election and build your own coalition. And one way to look at the hope that

DeSantis could draw on is what happened in Georgia. You know, Donald Trump comes in there in the epicenter of a voter fraud conspiracy. He endorses a slate of candidates. He goes all in and not only do his candidates lose, but at the top of the ticket, they get annihilated.

I mean, former Senator David Perdue loses by 50 points. And by much more, and this is the important point, much more than the polls that's against it. Why? It's because lots of people who were not habitual Republican primary voters came in because of the hope that they saw and the willingness to say,

I need to get in and defeat this fear. DeSantis could very well be the recipient of a similar influx of people who are disaffected from Trumpism and disaffected from the Democratic Party who say, I want to vote in a Republican primary, maybe for the first time, maybe

for the first time since 2012. And because this person gives me hope again. And so I would not necessarily go with these polls because at this point, because we don't know what the primary electorate is going to be.

Trump expanded it in 2016. DeSantis could expand it in 2020.

You know, it's interesting when you're talking about Republican errors in 2012, I just read a good book by Jonathan Alter on the 2012 election, and the way that he articulated the issue and that actually syncs with previous comments you've made about the

2012 midterms is that during the, especially the Obama Biden era, Republicans have thought that elections are referendums. So if it's 2012, the referendum is, okay, Obama said that the economy and the unemployment was going to be X.

It's not X. America's comeback team. Mitt Romney, Paul Ryan, if it's a referendum, they're going to vote down and we're going to win the presidency.

That strategy doesn't work because actually the Obama campaign was successful at transforming it from a referendum election into a choice election. Who do you like better, Mitt Romney or Barack Obama, people obviously choose Barack Obama.

Same thing in many respects happens in the 2022 midterms. You think there's going to be this huge red wave because it's a referendum election. Is Joe Biden doing well? Is he not doing well?

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Actually, it turns out it's a mix of a referendum obviously, but also a very discreet choice. How do you advise Republicans think through this decades long dilemma dynamic?

First of all, what happened in 2022 was unbelievably historic. That midterm elections do tend to be referendum elections. Presidential elections usually tend to be choice elections. The 2012 error was thinking that you could win a presidential election without presenting an alternative choice that recognized the suffering of the voters that you needed.

I was the only Republican who publicly predicted Obama's victory in national review in 2012 precisely because of that. You look like a young man, so you may not remember.

I'm 31 years old, so I look much younger than I actually am. I was very active to remember 2020-2012.

Republicans, like Michael Barone said, Rami was going to win by five points and sweep all the swing states. Recall Rogue was saying the same thing. Literally every Republican was sitting there thinking this is a coronation party.

And then it's not even close. It's not even close. I only missed one state. My career got turbocharged with that.

Which state did you miss, by the way?

Florida, the closest state.

But so 2012 was a discrete thing. 2022, though, you take a look, this has never happened in the last century, that an unpopular president and a significantly unpopular president lost single-digit seats and gained seats in the Senate.

And that's because he turned it into a choice election.

So I think what you first need to do is recognize that if an unpopular incumbent can make a midterm into a choice election for the first time in a century,

that the nature of the choice that he presented, which is rampant, unrepentant Trumpism, is a death knell. You have to present a different choice.

So what's the path forward? Well, the path forward, obviously, is to not nominate Trump. But then you have the problem, which is that the majority of Republican voters want to see that fighter who takes on the defense of American values to cross the board and is not an idiot.

There's a way to phrase that for Republican electorate, and there's a way to phrase it for both the Republican electorate and the general election.

So far, I'm seeing DeSantis phrase it more for the Republican electorate. And I don't think you can run. But like you did 50 years ago, one part campaign and a primary and a second campaign in general.

Can you explain the theory there? Because to make it clear how people thought about it.

The theory used to be that you could run to the party base and the primary and tactic center in general. And that would work when you didn't have the sort of media attention that you get in the primary.

What we see today was not what was the case in the 60s and 70s and the 50s. We don't get the full on media coverage from Iowa through whenever until the 1980s.

Even when Reagan runs in 84, the Iowa caucus is an afterthought. The reason it becomes not an afterthought is because George W. Bush upsets Ronald Reagan there.

There's no media traipsing through the snow in December with George H. W. Bush in 1979.

Ronald Reagan doesn't get into the race until the first week of November of 1970.

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So at that point, when your primary campaign is often not even a primary campaign, it's behind the scenes, it's talking to activists, you could run to the right and then run to the center.

You can't do that now. I mean, every word of these people is broadcast. You know, Ron DeSantis steps out of Florida and he's got cameras trailing him.

You cannot, you only have one chance to make a first impression and that first impression has to be one that resonates both with the swing voters you need and the base swing voters that you need. In other words, what I call the Magalite voters, the voters who are willing to look beyond Trump, but want somebody who strikes Trumpian themes and the swing voters who may not want strong degrees of Trumpian themes but are also dissatisfied with a lot of things in modern day America. DeSantis can't get that right. He can win a primary, but he'll have a much harder general election. And this seems to be, and I really appreciate how you're helping us kind of get into the strategic mindset here. It seems as if a lot of the DeSantis decisions, especially as demonstrated by his, I mean, it's unclear what his position on Ukraine is now.

But like what's, let's say with the initial leaning towards that Trump part of the base Ukraine position. This also brings in the more superficial stuff like his hand gestures in general affect his strategy now seems to be, if I make myself as much like

Trump as I can. She's obviously not going to take it too far but he thinks that there's he seems to think there's some like happy medium space, which he can then achieve. It seems to me that you're articulating the danger of that strategy.

Is it a like it's unclear where that would actually work and the polls are not indicating that that's working, even in the primary, but that would also leave you in a general election vulnerability point with a lot of those suburban.

I mean, what do you really think about this that the number one take where I had from 2022 is just that and the and the Biden primary when in 2020 is that the least sexy quadrant of American politics, these like center adjacent suburban voters are just the center of literally right now and it seems like those are really the voters that Joe Biden was made in a factory or a lab to almost like attract and least have to choose to decide like to what degree do you think Republicans should be thinking about that category.

Republicans have to be thinking about a number of categories.

That's the thing is it's the but what Republicans need to do. They need to think of putting together a four or five part coalition a few years ago I described it.

I tried to be memorable catchy so I invented animals and a zoo that you need to have elephants rhinos tigers and rams that what does that mean that means you need to have all factions of the Republican party.

And that means you need to be able to go from the hard mega it's to the old guard who are the sort of person who they like Trump because he governed like a conservative they don't.

They don't want to restrict free trade they like immigration they want tax cuts these are the sort of people who like Nikki Haley or so you need all of them in your case.

Then you need the rhinos which is the suburbanites who are moderate who are willing to back Republicans under certain circumstances but are not concerned.

You need to have a large number of them and that's your suburban constituency that you need to decide.

You need to have tigers Trump is great Republicans that was my you know attempt to be cute and

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naming the blue collar whites who are now part and parcel of the Republican Party but you have to keep

them you know is that suddenly you turn back and say you know hey I want to privatize your social security you create a wedge issue with these people because they don't.

So you need those three and then you need Rams recently arrived Mike so that's my catchy phrase for the working class Asian and Latino voters that you began to see Trump attract and you can you know for all of the non movement in

2022 basically what happened was the Trump gain in 2020 was stabilized and in some cases slightly added to so you didn't get a big move of Hispanics over to the right but you didn't get to move back to the Democrat

majorities either that Republicans in 2022 maintained the inroads they made in 2020.

It's very if your focus is solely on your primary you're going to be forgetting about rhinos you're going to be forgetting about Rams you're going to be focusing on tigers and the other forms of elephant.

And that means you will not have a message that appeals to those other groups.

You will have a message that hits that balance running in the primary and I think you can I think that's what the sweet spot is between the marriage between the old guard and the maga light the maga adjacent crowd.

The Santas needs to an overwhelming majority is a both of those to defeat Trump.

He's not winning overwhelming majorities of the old guard because they're still interested in Haley or Pence or Pompeo and he's losing ground among the maga adjacent as Trump is catching up his campaign.

If you focus exclusively on a primary what are you going to say to the moderate suburbanite who is perfectly happy to vote for moderate sounding Democrat if they're afraid of the Republican but doesn't want to vote for liberal Democrat.

What are you going to say to them in Florida.

The Santas had a good message for them.

But so far it's not clear that he's sending that message in the general election.

The same thing is true of recently arrived migrants and one of the great messages of Florida in 2022.

And it has been the massive movement of Latinos of all categories Cubans Puerto Ricans and non Cuban or Puerto Rican Latinos largely from Central and South America who have locked the Santas's Republican Party.

What's he going to say to the Mexicans in the Rio Grande Valley or the Phoenix metropolitan area or the Nevada metropolitan area.

If he runs a primary campaign that doesn't talk to them he shouldn't expect them to come home in the general.

You know, here's what I really wonder here.

I wonder where you think individual political talent comes down and all this because Reagan is an interesting president to study from your perspective because he combines obviously the charisma and talent of a literal movie star.

With the vision and broad perspective thing that you think is very important here.

It just seems to me the easy reason why I just see Trump winning the nomination, despite everything

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you're describing.

Or not in the sense that you're not saying the Trump can't win but saying that the reason why I see this all just lead into a Trump win is that you both don't have the vision dynamics you're discussing. Also just at a political talent level.

Rhonda Santas is not charismatic. He can't compete on stage with talent at the level of Trump. I think Nikki Haley is an entity in that context. I think Tim Scott is charismatic. I've seen him in person.

I still think he comes off as like the nice high school football coach, not the actual president compared to Donald Trump in a Republican primary base.

So to what degree do you think the generational issue we have here is just that maybe when we write the history of this decade we'll just say to ourselves like yeah, you know what.

If you know the stars lined in a different way or you gave a Republican, Bill Clinton's, if you gave a Republican, Bill Clinton at his peak's genes.

Someone could have pulled it off but this isn't what we actually have here. So Talbot, what do you think about that?

I think that there is a strategic and a charismatic quality of presidential leadership and all the indications are that DeSantis is charisma shy. That's going to be a real problem.

The question is, in any situation, how do you make up for that? Certainly we have seen races before where non-charismatic candidates can come out of a primary.

I don't think anyone's ever going to say Michael DeCoccas lights up a room when he enters into it but yet he defeated six other Democrats to become the nominee in 1988.

There is a calculator of strategic elements that is often lacking in people who run for president that they don't understand the challenge that they are facing.

But there is the simple political talent, the charisma question, and you can't fake charisma. You've got it or you don't.

I think for the last big questions here, we have not discussed a specific quadrant of the Republican Party, which are the Never Trumpers. You've written that they're the 10% of the Republican Party who just refused to support Trump.

Here's what I just don't understand. Why can't Never Trumpers just endorse Joe Biden? It's actually just at a pure analytical level, deeply frustrating to me.

There are Republicans who just went for LBJ. They wouldn't go for Goldwater. There are plenty of Ronald Reagan Democrats. Why cannot the Never Trumpers just give it up?

I genuinely just as a political professional, it's just intellectually frustrating to me.

I think a lot of them just are in the kind of position to go back. A lot of Republican leaders did endorse LBJ. A lot of them did. They grumbled.

I think the sort of person who endorsed LBJ is the sort of person who did endorse Joe Biden. The Jeff Plague, the Cindy McCain, the John Kasich, those sort of person, they're gone.

I think Liz Cheney is now in that book. She is effectively the most right-wing Democrat in America, since she does not seem to have changed her views unlike many media people whose views have evolved as their partisan affiliation have evolved.

I think they want to be part of a party and they are still uncomfortable with the Democratic Party that they know they would largely be a minority and a powerless minority.

So if Trump were to get the nomination again, I think you might see more of that because this will be

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post-January 6th, unlike 2020, which obviously was pre-January 6th. I think you will see more of those people say this is fundamental and we can't do this.

But as long as there's a chance of regaining control of their party, they will hold that fire.

So the last big question here, I love this framing. So you said that before 2015, the central debate that you could look at all Republican conservative debates, there was this debate of to what extent is the GOP,

to what degree should the GOP be the vehicle for the conservative movement? That's why you're talking about Republicans in name only, you're kind of pushing moderates out of the party, that very, very pre-2015 context.

Obviously, because Donald Trump in many ways was not a traditional conservative in 2015, he kind of shot in the through the middle of that debate.

Also calling himself a conservative, he didn't call himself a moderate. So he kind of like took the third way in that entire dynamic. You say, though, that the new question that really undergirds Republican politics is to what degree should the Republican party be a personal vehicle for Donald Trump?

Is that a debate that is settled in the Republican primary or is that a debate that has to be settled in 2025, 2026? So like, even if, so for example, let's say Trump loses the primary, hard to imagine Trump not finding some way to re-inject himself into the space, into those dynamics. How do you think about how that debate would ever be resolved in the way that the vehicle for the conservative movement debate was resolved?

Yeah, you know, I think it will be significantly molded by the primary. You know, let's not forget Donald Trump's age, that Donald Trump will be 78 years old. If he were to win the presidency, he'd be 78 years old when he was inaugurated.

So let's say, if he loses in 2024, that means he's 82. Donald Trump is not running for president at 82. This is his last shot. So the question of personal vehicle gets decided in 2024.

But there's the broader question, which is the Trumpist legacy. And there's an element of the Republican party between the old guard and the never Trumpers, a third to 40%, that basically don't want any Trumpist legacy.

They don't want the angry fighter. They don't want the policy changes. They want the party. They want to go back to 2014, where the battle is between Mitch McConnell and Teckers.

And then you've got the people who are debating to what extent, you know, what is Trumpism? Is it something that's policy focused? Is it a never ending anger grievance parade?

And that's where you get the difference between, say, a JD Vance and a Ron DeSantis and a Josh Hawley who have policy focuses, and to some extent, Tom Cotton and Marco Rubio, and people like MTG and Kerry Lake and Mike Gates, who are a never ending grievance person.

We don't know the answer to that. And I don't think that battle will be settled in 2024. And the last Ron DeSantis surprises, I suspect both of us and comes out with this perfectly calibrated, glowing message that unites Republicans of all stripes and

attracts these swing voters and wins a 10 point victory and has the great, you know, nirvana that Republicans ought to be hoping for. You know, if that happens, then, well, DeSantis has remade the party.

But barring that, I think this is a battle that will go on beyond Trump's personality. But of course, if Trump does win in 2024, the nomination, that makes it likelier that a Trump heir in 2028 would be

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the nominee.

And if Trump is the president, then it's quite clear that the 2028 Republican nominee will be Trumpist in that way, not Trumpist in policy.

That is an excellent place to leave a conversation. Henry, thank you so much for joining me on the realignment.

Thank you for having me.

Thank you.