

Substantial Disruption



Reaping Chaos

By Mike Tully

I accept chaos, I'm not sure whether it accepts me.
- Bob Dylan

Jeb Bush, a hapless presidential wannabe, enjoyed a [rare moment of prescience](#) when he labeled Donald Trump a “chaos candidate (who) would be a chaos president.” Nobody else has explained the Trump phenomenon so precisely. Trump is of, by, and for chaos. His candidacy was born in chaos, he personally embodies chaos, and chaos will eventually destroy his presidency – if his political opposition is able to use political [tai chi](#) to turn his strength, chaos, against him.

Much of human existence is occupied with attempting to make order out of chaos, fueled by the irrational belief that order can always be imposed. But the order we impose, whether based on politics, religion, or alchemy, is like the cooling crust over a lava flow. It looks like solid land, as durable and firm as granite, but collapses like a cracker in soup under sufficient weight. Sometimes you can walk on it. Sometimes you collapse into the lava and die. Life’s uncertainty is chaos.

Humans hate chaos. “Normally, we tend to flee from disorder and chaos,” [writes Jonathan Marshall](#) in the *Canberra Jung Society Newsletter*, “identifying chaos with evil and destruction.” “We do our best to tidy it up and repress it,” he adds. Political chaos is the petri dish that gave rise to the life form known as the Trump presidency. Jonathan Rauch, noting Bush’s “chaos president” comment in an [article for The Atlantic](#), wrote, “Unfortunately for Bush, Trump’s supporters didn’t mind. They liked that about him.” Rauch added that Trump “didn’t cause the chaos. The chaos caused Trump. What we are seeing is not a temporary spasm of chaos but a chaos *syndrome*.”

Lee Drutman, [writing in Vox](#), argues that both major political parties, “using endorsements and controlling money flows to select their preferred candidates,” inadvertently fed the chaos. “Republican leaders in particular ignored the economic concerns of a growing majority of their actual voters, even as the economy worsened for many of those voters,” he wrote. “Instead, they pandered to their rich donors to fund their increasingly expensive campaigns, and then used the money they raised to redirect their voters’ anxieties into anti-government identity politics, particularly through vitriolic anti-Obama, anti-Democrat messaging.” The result? “This toxic mix of fomented anger and continued disregard for voters’ worsening economic circumstances created a tremendous opening for a Trump-like candidate, particularly after the 2008-’09 recession.”

It's human nature to fight chaos with order, and Trump's voters saw him as a life-preserver. But Trump is a con man, peddling the illusion that he could bring order to American politics. That is not his nature; he cannot bring order to chaos. Trump is the [scorpion that stings the frog](#), an incarnation of the archetype "Trickster." "Tricksters are among the most entertaining characters in world mythology," states the [Myths Encyclopedia](#). "Usually male, they delight in breaking rules, boasting, and playing tricks on both humans and gods." A [Wikipedia article](#) on fictional Tricksters says they can be "a personification of the chaos that the world needs to function." A personification of chaos who delights in breaking rules? Welcome to the Trump presidency.

The problem with fighting chaos with chaos is it results in more chaos, while order recedes and the voters' thirst for calm remains unquenched. Trump foments chaos because he does not know how to govern. His vision of governance is a Twitter account salted with pre-dawn outbursts, frequently inspired by [senseless and perplexing personal feuds](#) that serve no purpose other than to drain his spleen. You can't build a marquee with flash bulbs and you can't govern a nation with 140-word spit-balls. His administration will never impose order on chaos.

Democratic consultant Joe Trippi, media strategist for Doug Jones' winning campaign in the Alabama senate race, pointed to Trumpian chaos as a potentially decisive factor in the victory. "The sense of chaos, the constant fight, fight, fight and alarm bells going off all the time" worried Alabama voters, Trippi [told the Los Angeles Times](#). "There's this sense of being on edge." Trippi said voters frequently mentioned the chaos, adding, "That's what they don't want anymore."

If that's what voters don't want, it's exactly what Democrats do want – at least between now and the November election. The Democratic Party's chances of winning back Congress will hinge on how well candidates can use chaos to their advantage. Their best ally is Trump himself, Trump being Trump, spitting out senseless tweets, engaging in bizarre feuds, participating in rambling, stream-of-consciousness interviews, and insulting everybody from Congressional Democrats to his own cabinet members. The more Trump generates chaos the more voters will yearn for order and only Democrats can promise order. The Trump-enabling GOP does not have that advantage; the elephant can't shed the albatross. The Democrats can sell order and already have successful examples in [Kirsten Gillibrand](#) and Jones. The path is clear.

So, follow the path, Donkey, but tread carefully. It's not really granite.