

After enduring toxic, 600-day presidential race, Americans go to the polls tomorrow

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It's Monday, November 7, 2016. I'm Albert Mohler and this is *The Briefing*, a daily analysis of news and events from a Christian worldview.

AFTER ENDURING TOXIC, 600-DAY PRESIDENTIAL RACE, AMERICANS GO TO THE POLLS TOMORROW

We stand on the threshold of yet another major American national election. We're looking at the election of a President of the United States, and for history's sake the next President of the United States. And at this point, it's abundantly clear that the American electorate is both exasperated and absolutely exhausted. That's easy to understand when you put it in the context of what is now a 600 day campaign. That's an arduous process. It is far too long; it is clearly not healthy for American democracy. The American electorate cannot in a healthy way handle a 600 day campaign. That's too many days, too many debates, too many arguments, too many headlines, and too much opportunity for the electorate to simply become exhausted in terms of the decision. But the decision is going to be made, make no mistake. By the time Americans go to the polls tomorrow, the election will simply be another date in American history, and the monumental nature of this election simply can't be discounted.

One of the things that often leads to a certain cynicism in terms of our public conversation and media reporting is the fact that candidates and commentators declare with regularity every four years that this is the most important election of our lifetimes. And yet this is the point at which we need to free ourselves from that cynicism, because it's actually not just a meme. It's true; it is absolutely the fact that

because of the escalating stakes in American politics, every election cycle becomes even more important than the election cycle before it, and there are plenty of reasons to understand why the presidential election taken by itself in 2016 represents what just might be the most important election of our lifetimes. And we can simply predict that four years later we'll be saying, once again, that that will be the most important election of our lifetimes. In all likelihood it will be true. That's because the stakes continue to grow higher both domestically and internationally in terms of domestic policy and foreign-policy.

The exasperation of the American electorate made the front page of the *New York Times* going into the weekend before the election with the headline,

“Voters Express Disgust Over U.S. Politics.”

As the *Times* declares,

“In a grim preview of the discontent that may cloud at least the outset of the next president's term, Hillary Clinton and Donald J. Trump are seen by a majority of voters as unlikely to bring the country back together after this bitter election season.”

The next paragraph is particularly important.

“With more than eight in 10 voters saying the campaign has left them repulsed rather than excited, the rising toxicity threatens the ultimate victor.”

That's a very important insight, and it should be the concern of the informed voter going into Election Day. Democracy requires a certain set of habits that makes a Democratic system of government possible. Amongst those habits are a basic trust in the legal system, a trust in the courts, a trust in the political system, even trust in the election system. But it also requires a simple and very profound eventual trust in the wisdom of the American voter. Even though voters may disagree with the decision made by the American electorate in terms of the majority of votes, the necessary 270 votes in the Electoral College, in a four-year term most Americans, at least in their own lifetimes, understand that there is something of an ebb and flow to American politics. And yet this does also now point to the fact that we're in a new season, and in this new season of increased polarization, it has become extremely unlikely that the two parties will be able to reach out to the opposing party and its constituency at the end of the election cycle. And this election cycle has been particularly vitriolic,

particularly divisive, or at least what we're seeing is visible and audible evidence of the divisiveness that is simply the product of the polarization of American politics. And as the *New York Times* article says, it's not wrong to use this word "toxicity." There is something toxic in terms of the current American political system.

By now Americans, or at least informed Americans, and that includes to this degree any American that hasn't been living under a rock for the last 600 days, knows a great deal about the major candidates, the Democratic and the Republican nominees, who end up being together the most unpopular two presidential nominees in recent American history. There has never been an election in terms of recorded American history in which the two major party candidates have been simultaneously this unpopular with the American electorate, even with the constituencies of their own parties. We are looking at a polarization that means most Democrats will vote for Hillary Clinton and most Republicans, indeed the overwhelming majority, will vote for Donald Trump. But it's not with the same excitement, it's not with the same enthusiasm that has marked recent American presidential cycles.

By now we know Hillary Clinton quite well, and of course we've known her for basically three decades going back to 1992 at least, when her husband Bill Clinton was elected president of the United States, reelected of course in 1996. That introduction left Hillary Clinton at the end of the Bill Clinton Administration still recognized as one of the most divisive figures in American political life, and now fast-forward to 2016 and she is the standard-bearer for the Democratic Party. And we're looking at a Democratic Party that is significantly more liberal than it was not only in 1992, but even in 2012 with the reelection of Barack Obama as President of the United States.

We're looking at a party that is absolutely and unapologetically committed to an activist government, also absolutely committed to the regulatory state, and to the expansion of the reach of that regulatory state with an expanded bureaucracy. We understand that the Democratic Party is now increasingly committed to a more liberal economic policy and a trajectory that includes having to make peace with an openly socialist wing of that very party. In terms of economic and domestic policy for the most part, Hillary Clinton has run on a platform that means a continuation of the policies of President Barack Obama, but a significant shift to the left even when compared to President Obama himself. We're also looking at the fact that an economic policy, Hillary Clinton has openly called for raising taxes, especially on

those she identifies as the wealthy. She has proposed massive expansions of federal funding, including such things as making community college tuition free and state college and university tuition free for families that earn less than \$125,000. While that may sound good to cash-strapped Americans trying to send their kids to college, it is not a federal funding option that the government will be able to afford, not without massive unprecedented new taxation.

Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party are also avidly behind the Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as ObamaCare. And even as in recent days and weeks leading up to the election, the failures of the Affordable Care Act have become glaringly apparent. The stage is set for an expansion of that program, and now the argument that will come from Democratic leaders that there needs to be a federal option, that is a federal, government tax-supported option for the Affordable Care Act, and eventually what is openly declared by many as their goal in the Democratic Party what is known as a single-payer system, which means national health insurance and total federal government control of the health economy.

We're also looking at the fact that Hillary Clinton, who wrote a book back in the 1990s infamously entitled, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child*, it is Hillary Clinton who holds to a communitarian understanding of society. It's not an understanding of society that upholds the centrality of marriage as the union of a man and a woman and of the natural family at the very center of civilization. Instead, it is based on a more progressive and liberal communitarian understanding. When she made the argument that it takes a village, she meant it. She actually does believe that it takes a village, but when you read her policies closely, we're not talking about a small village, we're talking about the federal government. By now there is every reason to believe that the instinct behind a Hillary Clinton presidency would be to look to the federal government itself, and then in terms of mandates to state governments, the response that government at some level is going to be the answer to the problem. But, of course, the government is often the very cause of the problem.

In terms of Hillary Clinton's worldview, when it comes to foreign policy her experience as Secretary of State of the United States and the entirety of her background makes clear that she is a committed internationalist. Now that's something of a bipartisan role in terms of recent American history, but she reflects a certain stream of internationalism that finds its home quite naturally in the Democratic Party. There have been points at which it was clear that she differed with

the President, Barack Obama, even as Secretary of State. But those were marginal differences and she, like the President, is a cosmopolitan who basically holds to an internationalist worldview.

In terms of domestic issues, perhaps the most important issue of concern to many Christians is deservedly the Supreme Court of the United States. And on that in a break with even the President of previous Democratic presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton has been open in her advocacy for outcome based law. She has openly argued for the actual decisions that she wants from anyone that she would appoint to the federal judiciary, and especially to the Supreme Court of the United States. She has made very clear that she intends to continue the LGBT revolution in support coming from the Supreme Court and any nominee she would name to the Court. And of course at the very center of this, Hillary Clinton in the third debate with Donald Trump made very clear that she would only appoint to the Court justices and judges who would enthusiastically support abortion and most particularly uphold the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973. Now as I said, that's even a break with previous pro-abortion, sometimes labeled pro-choice Democratic presidential nominees who had believed that they at least had to say that they were not advocates of outcome based law. Secretary Clinton openly declared her absolute insistence that anyone she would appoint to the Court would share her pro-abortion sentiments and would translate that into judicial decisions. And on the issue of abortion, that is her personal position on abortion, Hillary Clinton also broke with precedent, even the precedent of the most pro-abortion presidential candidate in American history before Secretary Clinton, that is the incumbent President Barack Obama, she openly declared her support for late-term abortion, including what is rightly called partial-birth abortions. This is one of those situations that should send moral shocks to the American electorate. We've now reached the point that a presidential nominee of the Democratic Party outwardly, straightforwardly, unreservedly has supported partial-birth abortion. And we should also note that Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party's platform not only enthusiastically support abortion rights under almost any conceivable circumstance, they also go so far as now to demand a repeal of the Hyde Amendment, thus requiring the American taxpayer to be coerced into paying for abortions through Medicaid.

But at least when it comes to the 2016 Democratic Party standard-bearer, the presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, we have to admit we saw this coming. Just about any informed American understood that Hillary Clinton would be the front

runner for the 2016 Democratic nomination. There was the sense that her eventual nomination was inevitable—of course the surprise was, it almost wasn't. The surprising insurgent candidacy of an openly avowed Democratic socialist, that is Independent Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, was itself the great surprise on the left in the 2016 campaign. But true to form and bolstered by the policies including the super delegates to the Democratic National Convention, Hillary Clinton's nomination was pretty much exactly what we expected.

Contrast that with the nomination of Donald Trump as the 2016 Republican nominee. This was very unexpected. If you rewind history just a matter of a few hundred days, there were rumors that Donald Trump might run in the Republican Party's nomination process, but it was not taken seriously that he even intended to be a serious candidate. But that of course he was, and it's clear that Donald Trump, having won a plurality of Republican voters in the primaries and caucuses, is not only the nominee, but he is something of a symbol of a rising populist movement that is larger than Donald Trump, but for which at present he is clearly the standard-bearer. Having never previously held any elective office and being only anecdotally and sporadically involved in questions of major American political consequence, Donald Trump is a great question mark in terms of many policies, whereas Hillary Clinton is clearly an internationalist in foreign-policy, it's also abundantly clear that Donald Trump is a nationalist, at least his instincts are nationalist rather than internationalist. This is reflected in both domestic and foreign policy under the moniker of his campaign, which has been of course, "Make America Great Again."

You're also looking at the fact that Donald Trump in terms of foreign-policy has represented by signaling at least that he would intend a closer relationship with Vladimir Putin and the nation of Russia, and he would also be an interventionist in terms of the Middle East. That's true to some extent, of course, when it comes to Hillary Clinton, but Donald Trump's uniqueness has been his willingness to identify the enemy in the Middle East as an insurgent Islamic terrorism. And he's made very clear that he would intend to bring this to an end without a good many specifics that would explain how he would bring that about.

In terms of domestic policy and in particular economic policy, Donald Trump has made statements that do not amount to a comprehensive economic policy plan. But what is clear is that he at least has promised to return to American manufacturing and when it comes to trade policy, also an increasingly determined nationalism.

Exactly what that would mean, however, isn't clear. One of the reasons for this, we have to admit, is that any candidate who had never previously held office, much less federal office, might not be armed with a comprehensive set of policies and platform proposals on all these questions. But what was expected was that the nominee would at least surround himself with those perhaps stalwarts in the Republican Party who, having the experience, would flesh out this kind of plan. But Donald Trump has not been consistent in terms of what he is advocating. He has been consistent in his themes. His themes have been nationalism, a resurgent American economy, a cut in taxes, and—this is a very crucial point—a form of activist government that, though different than Hillary Clinton, is also in stark contrast with the non-activist understanding of government that represented the Republican Party, at least until now. And that's in recent presidential election cycles certainly going back to 1980 in the election of President Ronald Reagan.

Donald Trump believes in an activist government; his policies about that have been very, very clear. But what's also clear is that it would be an activist government that would be, to state the matter as clearly as we can, activist in a different way than the activist ideals of Hillary Clinton. Donald Trump has been clear about his avowed opposition to the Affordable Care Act. And he has made very clear that a top priority of his administration would be the repeal and reversal of Obamacare. What isn't abundantly clear is what Donald Trump and his administration if elected would put into place as a replacement for Obamacare.

When it comes to the question of abortion, there is a dramatic contrast with the Democratic nominee. Donald Trump, though pro-choice on the abortion question even in fairly recent years, has run consistently in the 2016 campaign as a pro-life candidate. And when it came to that third debate, Donald Trump was also very, very clear that he would appoint to the Supreme Court those he identified as judges who would rule by the Constitution, by that he meant the text of the Constitution. That argument that federal judges and justices should decide cases on the basis of the text of the Constitution and the intention of those who established it, that's called strict constructionism or originalism. Going back to President Ronald Reagan, that was a major argument of Republican presidential nominees, and it's been a major distinction between the Republican and Democratic parties. That distinction continues under the nomination of Donald Trump, who has gone so far as to pledge that he will appoint only strict constructionists to the Court and then actually

provided a list of potential nominees, every one of them clearly a strict constructionist.

All of this points to the fact that there are deep policy divides between the Republican and Democratic parties. That's not new. But the divisiveness in this campaign has gone even deeper, and the divide is actually far wider even than back in 2012 when President Barack Obama was running for reelection against the Republican nominee, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. At the root of this divisiveness is not only the worldview polarization between the two parties—we've been seeing that growing in recent years—we're also looking at the fact that this election uniquely presents the American people with two unattractive and unappealing candidates, the two least popular major party candidates in American history. And at the root of that is the question of character.

Both of these nominees Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have a set of character disqualifications that would have absolutely eliminated the possibility of either rising to become the nominee of either the Democratic or the Republican Party in any previous election cycle. There is something happening in America in 2016 reflected in the nomination of Hillary Clinton as the Democratic Party standard-bearer and Donald Trump as the standard-bearer for the Republican Party.

When we look at Hillary Clinton, we're looking at someone who has been dogged by political scandal mostly, if not entirely, of her own making, along with her husband Bill Clinton, going all the way back to the time when Bill Clinton was the Governor of Arkansas. There has been scandal after scandal, headline after headline. Most recently, the Director of the FBI, James Comey, announced that there was the discovery in terms of an unrelated criminal investigation of hundreds of thousands of emails that had not yet been disclosed in the biggest scandal of Hillary Clinton's career. Now yesterday that same director informed Congress and the American people that nothing had been found that would change the decision reflected months ago that there was no ground for a criminal indictment against the former Secretary of State. But just consider that language. We're talking about someone who just on the Sunday prior to the national election has been referenced by the head of the FBI in terms of a criminal indictment that isn't going to happen. Nothing like that's happened in American presidential history to date.

And then when we turn the tables and look at the Republican nominee, Donald Trump, we're looking at someone who made his career, made his national reputation, established his brand, by running casinos, being involved in sexually explicit businesses, making a basic brand of his personal egotism and arrogance, a man who has injected the most grotesque vulgarity into the 2016 presidential election process, and a man of course now notoriously who was revealed on tapes from several years ago speaking in a way that sounded more like a sexual predator than anything else.

All of this has put American evangelicals in a most excruciating position. We find ourselves in a unique and very unhappy political moment and predicament. We're looking at the fact that there is no easy option for evangelical Christians and those who are seeking to be faithful from a biblical worldview. There are both policy and character disqualifications in the eyes of most evangelicals clearly of Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party. The question of abortion and the future of the Supreme Court stand as sufficient criteria to make that point clear. But when it comes to the Republican nominee, the questions of character are massive and also open questions even concerning policy. But on the matter of abortion and the Supreme Court, the Republican nominee has been clear about his intentions and his pledge. The question for evangelical Christians is how to factor in the issues of policy and character in terms of an electoral decision with forced options.

There will be evangelical Christians who will vote for Donald Trump, and they will do so in good conscience simply because they feel that they must vote in a way that would prevent Hillary Clinton from being elected President of the United States. There will be other evangelicals who will simply, on the basis of the character-disqualifying factors alone, be unable to vote for Donald Trump. In either case, at the very least American evangelical Christians must be respectful and humble and intensely prayerful. We must seek to think through all of these issues as best and most faithfully we can from a Christian biblical worldview, and then we must pray for this election and we must pray for our nation, and we must also, without hesitation, pray for each other.

Thanks for listening to *The Briefing*. For more information, go to my website at AlbertMohler.com. You can follow me on Twitter by going to twitter.com/albertmohler. For information on The Southern Baptist Theological

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I'm speaking to you from Asheville, North Carolina, and I'll meet you again tomorrow for *The Briefing*.