



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on May 28, 2023

## The HUGE Silver Lining to the Trump-DeSantis Feud

The ongoing rivalry between Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as the two men vie for the Republican nomination for president has been an eye-opening experience and already made for a heated primary season.

There are pros and cons to the competition. Certainly, having options is never a bad thing. It gives voters a broader “palette” of candidates to choose from and keeps even the leading candidates accountable by obliging them to give an ear to the moods and wants of the people.



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On the side of negatives, there is the possibility that a heated primary race might cause division that will damage the party’s chances later on. However, that fear can sometimes be overblown. After all, if a candidate can’t take the heat from the members of his own party, how can he expect to take it from the Democrat in the general election? It’s best to air out all dirty laundry early on, lest a candidate make it through the primary only to have his skeletons let out of the closet as an October surprise.

With all this in mind, there is one silver lining to the current spat between Trump and DeSantis that should give some comfort to anyone who isn’t a zealot for either candidate, but who simply wants what’s best for the constitutionalist, conservative movement.

The silver lining is this: The division between Trump and DeSantis is more a battle of ego and ambition; ideologically their differences are negligible, and the fact that they are the top two voices in the party right now demonstrates that the hard-right, constitutional, traditionalist, paleoconservative, America First wing of the Republican Party is officially the overwhelming majority.

In other words, the Republican Party, speaking at least of the actual voters in the party, has completed its transformation away from liberalism and neoconservatism.

In elections past, GOP primary races have tended to be ideological contests between the liberal, neoconservative wing of the party and the constitutionalist and socially conservative faction. Think Barry Goldwater vs. Nelson Rockefeller in 1964, George H.W. Bush vs. Pat Buchanan in 1992, or Ron Paul in the crowded 2008 field that culminated in neocon John McCain’s nomination.

Sometimes, as with Goldwater in ‘64 or Ronald Reagan in ‘80, the more conservative candidate won out. Other times, the clear establishment favorite claimed the nomination.

But the 2016 race showed that the party base, following the Tea Party movement during the Obama years and the frustration with establishment picks such as McCain and Romney, was moving in a much-more hard-right direction.

The two favorites in 2016 were Trump and Sen. Ted Cruz, both of whom embodied the outsider, non-establishment side of the party. The two men were ideologically not all that different, though Trump’s emphasis on trade, nationalism over globalism, and (of course) immigration gave him the edge and won him the nomination.



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Fast forward to the next contested primary — 2024's, where we now stand. The front-runners are now Trump and DeSantis. It is literally a fight between Trump and Trump 2.0, between Trump and his virtual successor. The chief argument of the Trump side against DeSantis is that he isn't Trump. The chief argument of the DeSantis side against Trump is that DeSantis is more Trump than Trump is, and that Trump has fallen away from his original Trumpism.

This is partly why Trump is likely to come out the victor. In a casino, the House always wins because the House sets the rules and controls the game. In this case, Trump is the House. While he didn't come up with all of the ideas that make up the MAGA, America First movement (voices such as The John Birch Society have been talking about these issues for decades), he brought it all together with his own unique branding and rhetoric to create the movement as it now exists.

As a result, every other Republican, DeSantis included, is playing Trump's game. Trump — his name, his identity — is irrevocably tied to the movement. The movement can't be separated from the person of Trump himself. It would be like trying to replace Buddha in Buddhism. The very thought is laughable, and it won't happen. *Buddha is Buddhism*. In the same way, *Trump is*, for good or ill, the America First movement in its current iteration.

For DeSantis to overcome Trump's hold over the Republican base, he would have to not present himself merely as another Trumpian politician, but do what Trump did in 2016 — that is, usher in something fresh, unique and original, a movement of his own.

Regardless of the infighting between Trump and DeSantis, the important thing for conservatives is that the GOP is freeing itself of its liberal neocon element. Combating illegal immigration, protecting the preborn, stopping LGBT grooming, and other positions that were once considered extreme or reactionary are now the standard among Republican voters.

No matter who wins the nomination, everyday citizens are moving the national discourse in the right direction.



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