

# Charlie Cook on the unique challenges facing President Trump

**May 30, 2017**

**Producer:** Presentation Center team

**Director:** Alistair Taylor

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# Roadmap

## **Challenges facing President Trump:**

1. Learning the government process
2. Getting up to speed on policy
3. Adapting to the Commander-in-Chief temperament
4. Moral authority challenge

## **Charlie Cook's conclusion**

# President Trump faces a steep learning curve in terms of practical application of the governing process

## Challenge 1: learning the government process

Trump is the first president in American history who never:

- Worked in government at the local, state or federal level
- Has been elected or appointed to a government position
- Held a civilian or military post in the U.S. government

What this means:

Trump began his term with no real insight into what a president does every day:

- He has had no real exposure to how the **legislative process** works
- He has had no real exposure to the federal or governmental **budget process**
- He has had no exposure to the **national security decision-making process**



In his own words:

“ *I never realized how big it was. Every decision is much harder than you’d normally think.*”

- In an [interview](#) with the Associated Press, 4/21/17

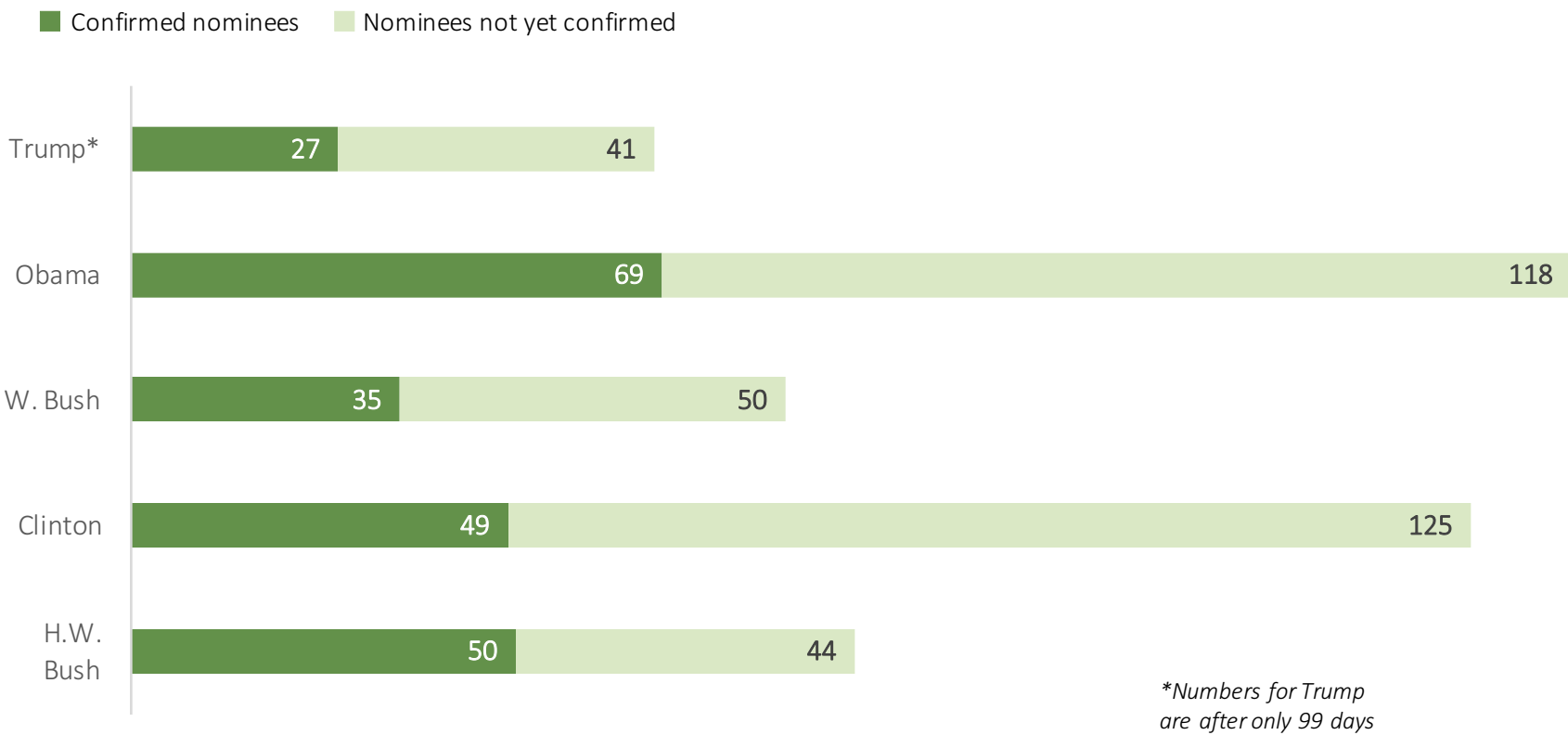
“ *This is more work than in my previous life, I thought it would be easier.*”

- In an [interview](#) with Reuters, 4/28/17

# President Trump’s administration is behind previous administrations in filling key positions

## Number of administration officials nominated and confirmed

After the first 100 days in office

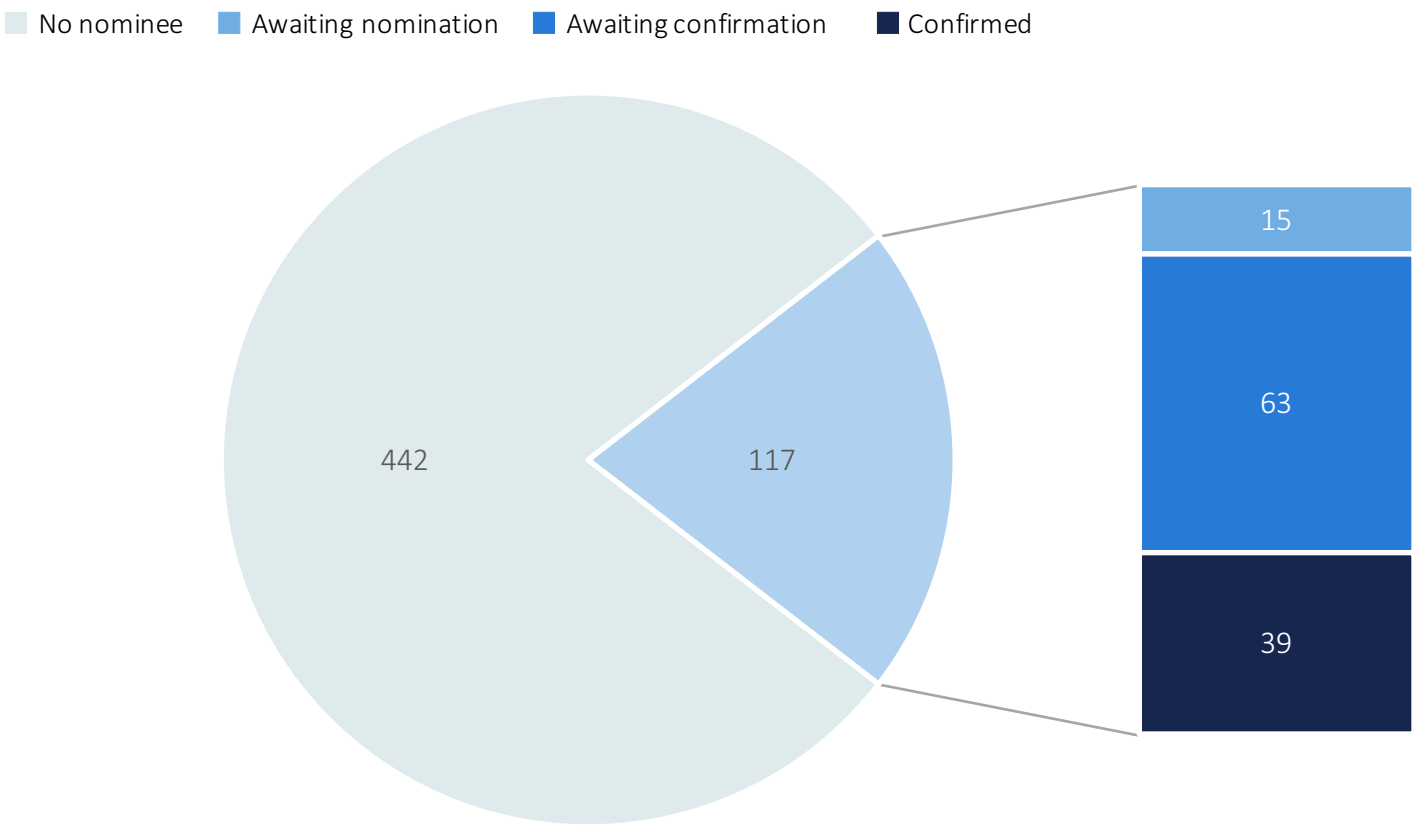


Sources: Partnership for the Public Service, 2017; Axios AM daily newsletter, April 6, 2017.

# With 442 sub-cabinet positions left vacant, there are fewer people to make sure the government runs smoothly

## Trump does not have a full team on the field

*Status of sub-cabinet nominations requiring Senate confirmation, as of May 30, 2017*



Source: "Tracking how many key positions Trump has filled so far," Washington Post, April 15, 2017.

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# President Trump has never been particularly familiar with many of these policy issues on a granular level

## Challenge 2: getting up to speed on policy

*President Trump has made many policy reversals as he learns on the job*

NATO: March 2016

**Donald J. Trump**  
@realDonaldTrump

My statement on NATO being obsolete and disproportionately too expensive (and unfair) for the U.S. are now, finally, receiving plaudits!


RETWEETS 6,450 LIKES 18,436

7:23 AM - 27 Mar 2016

“ I said [NATO] was obsolete. It is no longer obsolete.”

- President Trump reversing his position on NATO and commending its fight against terrorism after a joint appearance with NATO’s secretary general on Wednesday, 4/12/17

Syria: September 2013

**Donald J. Trump**  
@realDonaldTrump

We should stop talking, stay out of Syria and other countries that hate us, rebuild our own country and make it strong and great again-USA!

RETWEETS 3,256 LIKES 2,345

10:29 PM - 12 Sep 2013

“ I now have responsibility.”

- President Trump signaling his willingness to intervene in Syria in response to President Assad’s use of chemical weapons, 4/6/17

Russia: December 2016

**Donald J. Trump**  
@realDonaldTrump

Great move on delay (by V. Putin) - I always knew he was very smart!


RETWEETS 34,120 LIKES 96,908

11:41 AM - 30 Dec 2016

“ Right now we’re not getting along with Russia at all.”

- President Trump seemingly reconsidering his support for Putin after Assad’s use of chemical weapons in Syria, 4/12/17

China: January 2017

**Donald J. Trump**  
@realDonaldTrump

China has been taking out massive amounts of money & wealth from the U.S. in totally one-sided trade, but won't help with North Korea. Nice!

RETWEETS 17,730 LIKES 65,320

3:47 PM - 2 Jan 2017

“ They are not currency manipulators.”

- President Trump walking back his accusations that China manipulates the value of its currency and suggesting the Chinese want to help contain North Korea in a WSJ interview, 4/12/17

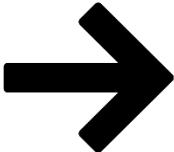
Sources: Melanie Zanona, “What Democrats want in Trump’s infrastructure bill,” The Hill, April 9, 2017; National Journal research, 2017.

# President Trump had to learn more in less time than any previous president because he started out further behind

## Trump's other policy U-turns

1

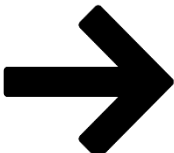
**Health care**  
"Together we're going to deliver real change that once again puts Americans first. That begins with immediately repealing and replacing the disaster known as Obamacare...You're going to have such great health care, at a tiny fraction of the cost—and it's going to be so easy."  
  
- President Trump at a rally in Florida  
10/24/2016



"Now, I have to tell you, it's an unbelievably complex subject. Nobody knew health care could be so complicated."  
  
- President Trump delivering remarks on  
2/27/2017

2


**Export-Import Bank**  
"I don't like it because I don't think it's necessary. It's a one way street also. It's sort of featherbedding for politicians and others, and a few companies...And when you think about free enterprise it's really not free enterprise. I'd be against it."  
  
- President Trump speaking to Bloomberg  
on 8/4/2015



"When other countries give it we lose a tremendous amount of business...But actually, it's a very good thing. And it actually makes money, it could make a lot of money."  
  
- President Trump speaking to the Wall  
Street Journal 4/12/2017

3

**Federal Reserve Chairwoman Yellen**  
"She's keeping rates artificially low to get Obama retired. Watch what is going to happen afterwards. It is a very serious problem and I think it is very political...I think she should be ashamed of herself because it is not supposed to be that way"  
  
- President Trump speaking to CNBC on  
9/12/2016



"I do like a low-interest rate policy, I must be honest with you... No, not toast. I like her, I respect her."  
  
- President Trump speaking to the Wall  
Street Journal 4/12/2017

Sources: NPR, "Trump, then and now: what his shifting positions say about what he believes," April 14, 2017; Wall Street Journal, "Trump says dollar getting too strong, won't label China as a currency manipulator," April 13, 2017; National Journal research, 2017.



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## Challenge 3: adapting to the temperament required of Commander-in-Chief

**President Trump has had very limited experience working with others in a collective way:**



Since taking over his family business in 1971 and since his father died in 1999, Trump has been unilaterally making professional decisions



For many years Trump has not been accountable to or answered to a boss, board of directors, management committee, shareholders, or external investors



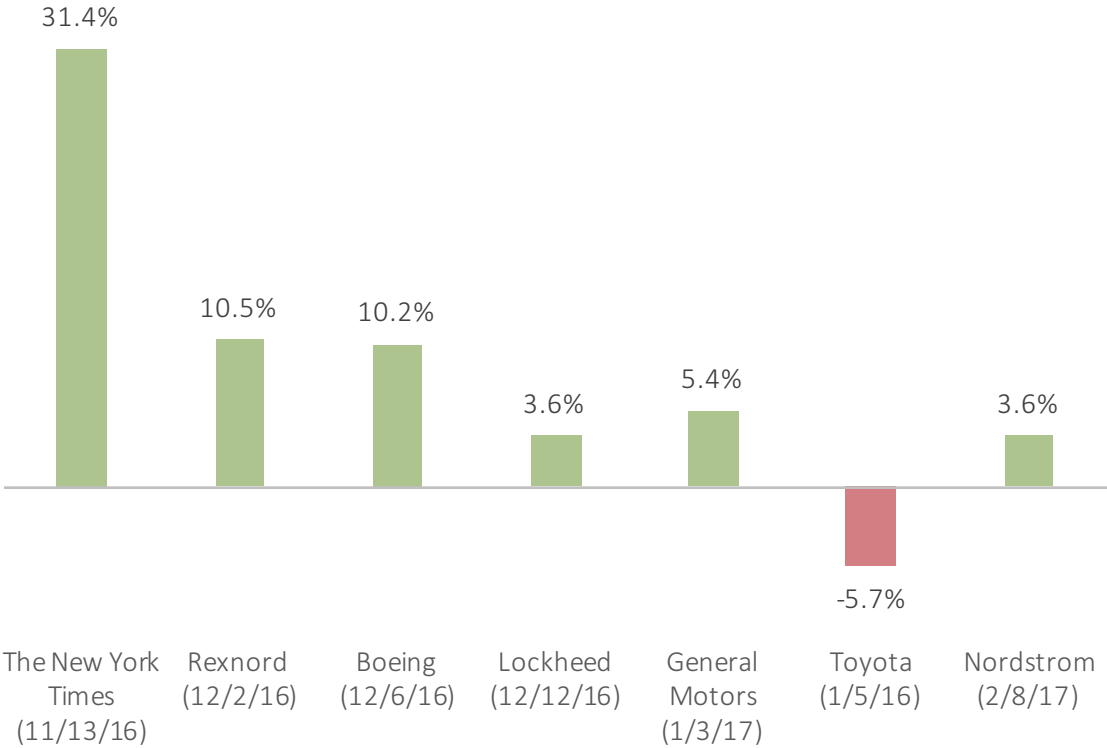
He has never worked in or with a state legislature or Congress, or with other constitutional officeholders in a state or Cabinet

Trump’s temperament thus far	Temperament required of a Commander-in-Chief
Tactical thinking	Strategic thinking
Decision-making with instinct and emotion	Decision-making with data and gathered intelligence
Campaign mentality	Governing mentality
Impulsive, lacking discipline and focus	Deliberate and focused

Sources: Melanie Zanona, “What Democrats want in Trump’s infrastructure bill,” The Hill, April 9, 2017; National Journal research, 2017.

# Trump has been known to circumvent the tediousness of policy making through his candid Twitter presence

Value of companies' shares one month after Trump tweets about them



**Analysis**

- Since the campaign Trump has continued to use Twitter as a way to exert unilateral influence
- At the start of his presidency, many economists were concerned about the impact that Trump’s tweets would have on the stock market
- While the stocks are ultimately up now, shares in five of these companies were down after the first 30 minutes of post-tweet trading
- Although Toyota’s shares have fallen post-tweet, many financial analysts note that they have been on a downward trend for a while now

Sources: Melanie Zanona, “What Democrats want in Trump’s infrastructure bill,” The Hill, April 9, 2017; National Journal research, 2017.

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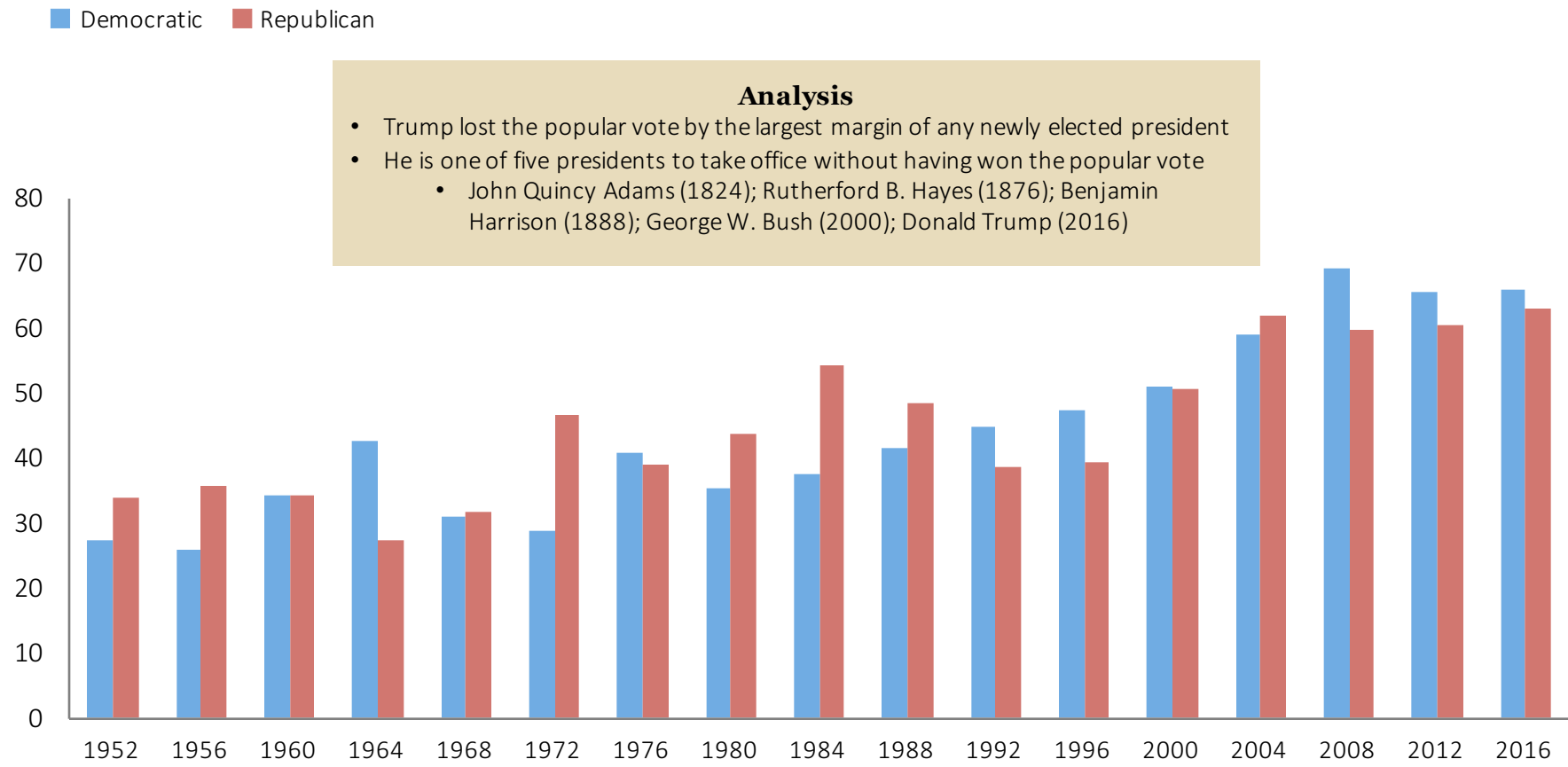
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# President Trump lost the popular vote by 2.8 million votes, 2.1 percentage points

## Challenge 4: the moral authority challenge

Popular vote totals from 1952-2016, reported as of January 1, 2017

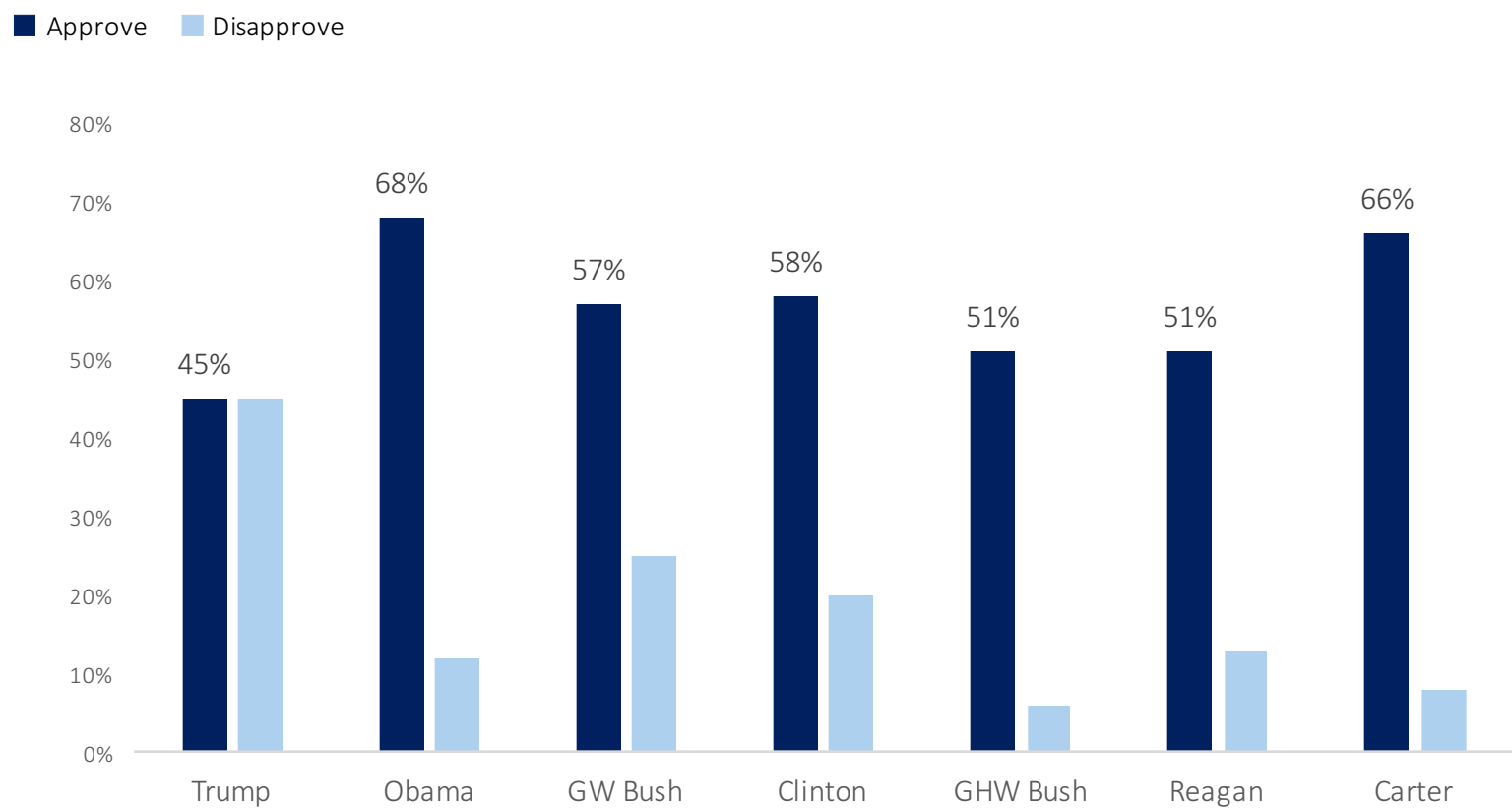


Sources: RealClearPolitics, "Electoral College Map," 2016; National Journal research, 2017.

# President Trump entered office with the lowest approval ratings of any incoming president

## Approval ratings of incoming presidents

*Gallup poll of public opinion taken over the span of 3-5 days before each president's inauguration*

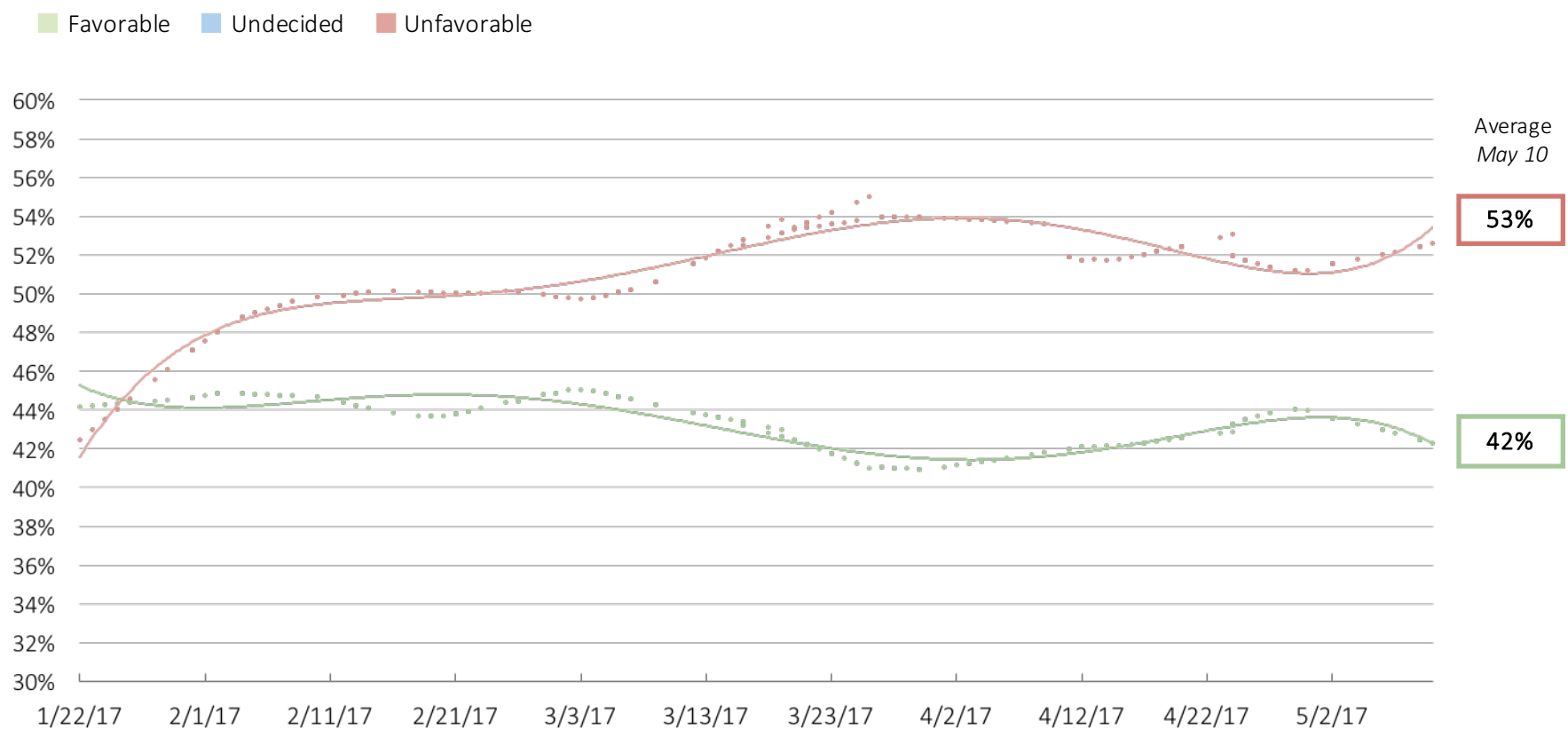


Sources: Cook Political Report research, 2017.

# President Trump has had difficulty building support beyond his voter base since his inauguration

## Donald Trump approval ratings since inauguration

HuffPost Pollster

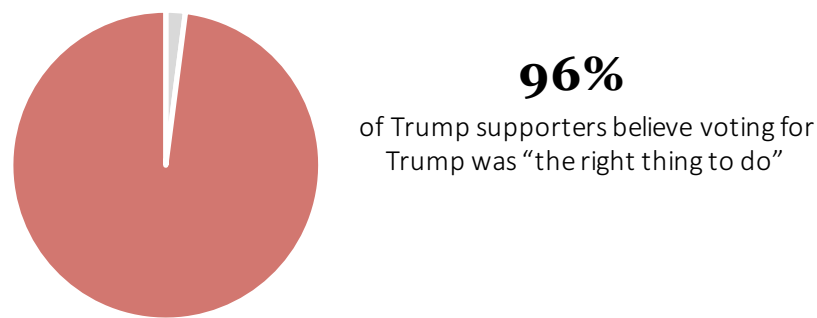
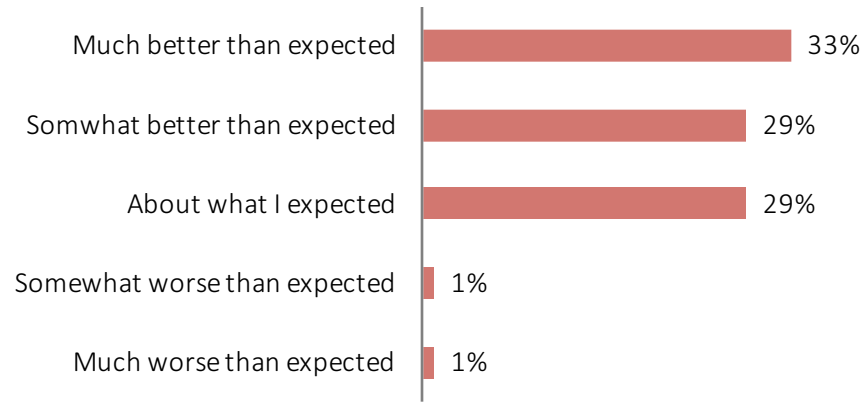


Sources: HuffPost Pollster, "Poll Chart: Donald Trump Approval Rating," 2017; National Journal research, 2017.

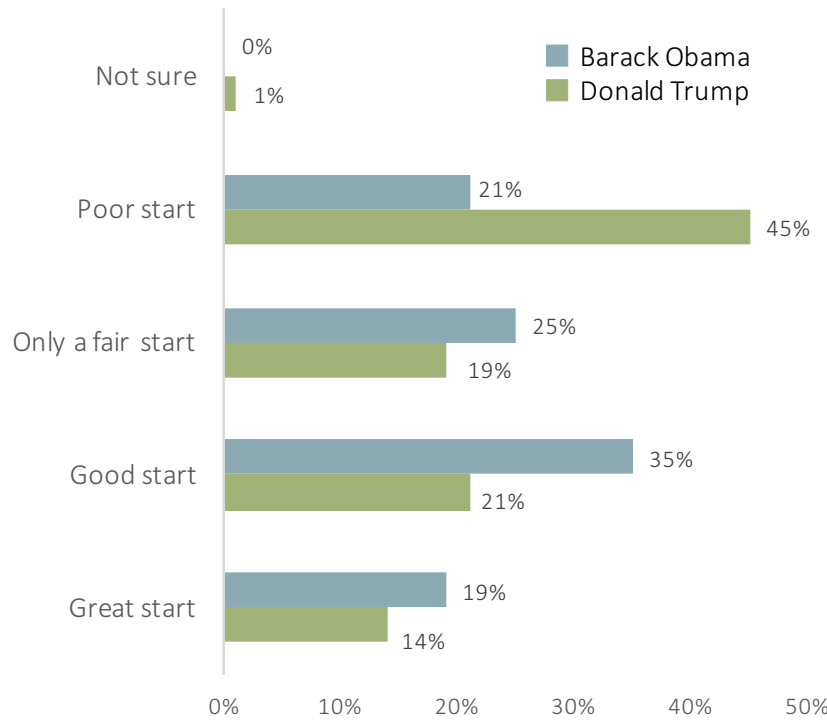
# Though Trump’s general approval ratings are low, his voter base is extremely loyal

## Public opinion on the Trump presidency

Among Trump voters, Trump is doing...  
ABC/Washington Post poll, April 17 – 20



Opinion on the first 100 days of the Trump presidency and the Obama presidency  
NBC/WSJ poll, April 17 – 20



Sources: Aaron Blake “Trump voters don’t have buyer’s remorse. But some Hillary Clinton voters do.” Washington Post, April 23, 2017; National Journal research, 2017.



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# These challenges do not mean Trump won't or can't succeed, only that it's likely to be a steep learning curve

**Conclusion: President Trump did a remarkable thing**



## Who he is:

- A billionaire and son of a millionaire
- Penn graduate
- Someone who has lived at least 65 of his 70 years in New York City
  - Went to military school in the NYC suburbs
  - Spent two years in Philadelphia
- Lives in a \$100 million, three-story penthouse neighboring the flagships of Tiffany and Co., Harry Winston and Louis Vuitton



## What he accomplished:

- Donald Trump managed to peer down into small town rural America
- Into the lives of blue collar/working class and middle class white voters
- Particularly resonate with the Rust Belt, Heartland and the South
- Understand and give voice to their fears, frustrations and resentments
- Tap into the emotions of a group of people who are remarkably different from him

“

*Only 45 people have been elected president of the United States. For anyone to reach office is a remarkable accomplishment, but these circumstances are especially remarkable.”*

- Charlie Cook, *The Cook Political Report*