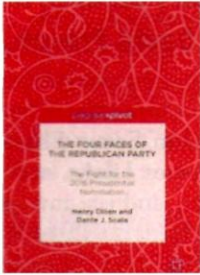


# A Very Big Tent

MATTHEW CONTINETTI



*The Four Faces of the Republican Party: The Fight for the 2016 Presidential Nomination*, by Henry Olsen and Dante J. Scala (Palgrave Macmillan, 160 pp., \$67.50)

**B**ACK in 1980, Republican John Connally was a favorite to win the GOP presidential nomination. The former governor of Texas, a Democrat who had switched parties to serve under President Nixon, Connally raised an enormous sum of money at the outset of the campaign. The press lavished him with publicity. Conventional wisdom assumed that Connally would beat Ronald Reagan easily. But conventional wisdom was wrong: Connally ended up with a single delegate. His career was over.

Political analysts Henry Olsen and Dante J. Scala say Connally's fate shouldn't have been a surprise: All of his money and fame couldn't win him the support of any one of the party's major factions. By 1980, Reagan had become the undisputed leader of the conservative movement and the tribune of Evangelical voters. "Connally was no man's moderate," they write, "so any hope he had was to corner the somewhat-conservative vote and use it as his base." Unfortunately for Connally, somewhat-conservative voters favored George H. W. Bush. And with no base, he had no chance. He was doomed.

Olsen has been arguing for years that Republican primary campaigns are misunderstood. His argument, made in articles in *National Affairs* and *The National Interest* and now expanded into this lucid

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and fascinating monograph, is that it's wrong to see primaries as fights between conservatives and the establishment. The GOP is more complicated than that. Not two but four factions—somewhat conservatives, liberals and moderates, very conservative Evangelicals, and very conservative seculars—compete for dominance. "The winner is the person with the best message who appeals to at least two, and usually three, of the GOP's factions."

**1.** The somewhat conservatives are the silent plurality of the Republican party. They're the voters to watch. "The candidate who garners their favor has won each of the last four open races," note Olsen and Scala. Somewhat conservatives want experienced candidates who aren't revolutionaries. They don't want cultural warriors but optimistic leaders. Former House speaker John Boehner is their ideal. "They are conservative in both senses of the word; they prefer the ideals of American conservatism while displaying the cautious disposition of the Burkean." They might not have read Edmund Burke, but they would vote for him if he showed up in Florida.

**2.** Then there are the moderate and liberal Republicans. There are more of them than you'd expect from reading the news. They are the second-largest category of GOP voters. Strong in such places as New Hampshire and Michigan, they are also present in the South. "The moderate or liberal voter," write the authors, "seems motivated by a candidate's secularism above all else." A majority of these voters are pro-choice.

**3.** The power of the very conservative Evangelical vote is greater than its actual numbers. Very conservative Evangelicals are concentrated in the South and in caucus states such as Iowa, where they tend to determine the winner. They find the moral condition of the United States abhorrent and desire a restoration of traditional values. They want to outlaw abortion entirely, and they are more open to government intervention in the market and society than are other Republican voting blocs. They are vocal, passionate, and committed. And they turn other Republicans off.

**4.** Very conservative voters split along religious lines. The secular ones are overrepresented along the Acela corridor between Washington, D.C., and Boston but are the smallest Republican group. "This small but influential bloc likes urbane, fiscally oriented men," write Olsen and

Scala. Jack Kemp was the candidate of the very conservative seculars, and so is Kemp's protégé, House speaker Paul Ryan. You watch the very conservative seculars to find out what elites are thinking. But the candidate they prefer at the beginning of the process never wins. "They invariably see their preferred candidate knocked out early, and they then invariably back whoever is supported by the somewhat-conservative bloc."

This is a book for political junkies, and for readers who aren't afraid of regression analyses. Olsen and Scala draw their findings from a close study of election returns, exit polling, and other surveys. "Exit and entrance polls of Republican primaries and caucuses going back to 2000," they write, "show that the Republican presidential electorate is remarkably stable." They discuss the 2000, 2008, and 2012 primaries in detail because, without an incumbent president or vice president, races become more open, fluid, and hence revealing. They find, unsurprisingly, that the importance of money is overrated in politics, but they also conclude that the idea of momentum is exaggerated. Early-state wins are important not because of abstractions such as "momentum" but because they sort candidates by group and determine the heralds of each of the four factions.

What does all this mean for the 2016 election? Iowa behaved as it normally does, voting for the candidate of very conservative Evangelicals (that would be Ted Cruz). But close behind him was Donald Trump, who split the somewhat-conservative and moderate vote with third-place finisher Marco Rubio. In New Hampshire, Trump won a blowout victory. He won the very conservative, the somewhat-conservative, and the moderate vote. John Kasich came in a distant second based on support from moderates and liberals.

As the race goes on, look to see where the somewhat-conservative voters go. The size of the Republican field has split their vote among several candidates, including Trump, Kasich, and Rubio. The man who consolidates their support is likely to be the nominee, with Ted Cruz challenging him as the leader of very conservative Evangelicals. Will the somewhat-conservative voters back a New York real-estate mogul who has never held political office? On this question the fate of the Republican primary campaign depends. **NR**