

## President Donald Trump's winning streak

by Stephen Collinson

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*(CNN)* — Donald Trump may have never had a better time being President.

Only a re-election party on the night of November 3, 2020, could possibly offer the same vindication for America's most unconventional commander in chief as the 36 hours in which two foundational strands of his political career are combining in a sudden burst of history.

Trump became an undeniably consequential President when Senate [voted Saturday to confirm Brett Kavanaugh](#) to the Supreme Court, consecrating the conservative majority that has long been the impossible dream of the GOP.

On Friday, Trump had celebrated [the best jobs data for 49 years](#) as the unemployment rate dipped to 3.7%, offering more proof of a vibrant economy that the President says has been unshackled by his tax-reduction program and scything cuts to business regulations.

While his 2016 election campaign was most notable for swirling chaos and shattered norms, Trump's vows to nominate conservative judges to the Supreme Court and to fire up the economy were the glue for his winning coalition.

The struggle to confirm Kavanaugh split the country, deepened mistrust festering between rival lawmakers and threatens to further drag the Supreme Court into Washington's poisoned political stew. But Trump stuck with it and ground out a win.

So he has every right to return to voters in the next four weeks ahead of the midterm elections to argue he has done exactly what he said he would do. He now has a strong message to convince grass-roots Republicans that it's well worth showing up at the polls.

### Testing the new message

He got his first chance to road-test his new, improved message at a campaign rally in Topeka, Kansas, on Saturday night.

It's ironic that it was Trump, a late convert to conservatism -- not authentic Republicans like President Ronald Reagan, both Bush presidents and beaten GOP nominees Mitt Romney and John McCain -- who finally delivered the Supreme Court majority.

Kavanaugh is Trump's second nominee to reach the court in less than two years, following Neil Gorsuch.

Of course, the Supreme Court win is the culmination of decades of work by conservative activists and was masterminded by the cunning of Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell. But Presidents get credit when they are in the Oval Office when things go well and Trump, whether it is his fault or not, has taken more than his share of criticism.

On Saturday morning, Trump celebrated the imminent vote, praising pro-Kavanaugh women activists while again jabbing protesters opposed to the judge, many of whom said they had their own stories of assaults. His attitude reflected what critics say is a habit of siding with the accused rather than the alleged victims of assaults.

"Women for Kavanaugh, and many others who support this very good man, are gathering all over Capitol Hill in preparation for a 3-5 P.M. VOTE. It is a beautiful thing to see - and they are not paid professional protesters who are handed expensive signs. Big day for America!" Trump wrote.

The President's remarks came as people gathered outside the US Supreme Court building to protest the vote.

### **A President of consequence**

There is more evidence than the soon-to-be reshaped Supreme Court and the roaring economy to make a case that Trump is building a substantial presidency that in many ways looks like a historic pivot point, despite its extremely controversial nature.

Largely unnoticed in the Washington imbroglio over [sexual assault allegations against Kavanaugh](#), the Trump administration is engineering significant changes at home and abroad that often represent sharp revisions of direction from traditional American positions.

This week, for instance, the White House initiated a potentially [momentous shift in the US approach to China](#), recognizing the Asian giant as a global competitor and a threat to American security, prosperity and interests -- reversing decades of policy designed to manage Beijing's ascent as a major power and eventual partner.

The administration is also [tightening a vise around Iran in a strategy](#) that threatens to escalate into open confrontation with the Islamic Republic. Elsewhere in the Middle East, a bolstered anti-ISIS strategy has blasted the radical group from its strongholds in shattered Syria. And Trump has rejected decades of US orthodoxy in managing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which could have uncertain results.

Trump's bullying approach to trade negotiations has recently yielded remodeled agreements with Canada, Mexico and South Korea. While he exaggerates how much he changed existing deals, he can still boast that his "Art of the Deal" negotiating strategy -- another core component of his appeal to his supporters -- is working.

An announcement of a [deeper slashing of refugee admissions by the United States](#) further cements the "America First" philosophy that has changed global strategic assumptions.

At home, Trump's assault on regulations at agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency is accelerating, in a blitz against what Steve Bannon once called [the administrative state](#) that fulfills another long-dreamed-of goal of the conservative movement.

### **The case against the President**

Many of Trump's perceived achievements are hugely controversial, and his opponents will argue that they stain America's image, reverse a march toward human progress and justice, and will ultimately exert a price the nation will be paying for many years to come.

And Democrats carp that Trump is only building off the far more significant economic work of his predecessor Barack Obama in the wake of the Great Recession and argue that his tax cuts sharply worsened inequality and exploded budget deficits in a way that will haunt the economy for decades.

Trump's critics say his approach to the world threatens to buckle the international system of alliances and a rule-based trading system that made America the richest and most powerful nation in US history and a beacon of democracy.

They say his presidency is in fact most notable for a culture of corruption, falsehood and demagoguery.

There is a case to be made that Trump's constant twisting of truth, invention of false political realities and strategy of tearing at the country's racial, gender and societal divides in order to capture and wield power threaten the eternal values and institutions of the nation itself.

This week, the President stood accused of tax fraud after a [New York Times investigation into his family finances in the 1990s](#). And, though special counsel Robert Mueller has gone quiet in election season, Trump's campaign is under investigation to see whether it conspired with a foreign power to win his election.

### **The voters will choose**

Most credible pollsters have the President at only around 40% approval, a level that is rarely conducive to successful congressional elections. Republicans are in danger of losing the House of Representatives, a scenario that could cripple Trump's White House with relentless committee investigations and even the specter of impeachment.

Often the chaos and discord the President sows distracts from more successful aspects of his presidency, and his raging temperament and insistence on waging perpetual political warfare exhaust many voters.

It will be up to voters in November and in 2020 to decide which of the two interpretations of Trump's presidency -- an era of conservative achievement or a disastrous national distraction -- becomes dominant.

But it already seems that Trump's grand design will be difficult for a future President to quickly reverse.

Less than two weeks ago, foreign diplomats at the United Nations laughed at Trump when he boasted about the historic sweep of his presidency -- and there was no doubt that he was, as usual, exaggerating.

But it's also no longer possible to credibly argue -- despite the distracting blizzard of controversy, busted decorum and staff chaos constantly lashing Washington -- that there is not something significant taking place that is changing the political and economic character of the nation itself.