From Disjunction to Reconstruction

A Comparative Analysis of Trump and Biden
in Skowronek's Presidential Regimes

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Introduction

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." In 1937, Roosevelt famously declared his visions and ideals as the President of the United States during his second inaugural address (Roosevelt 1937), manifesting his determination to secure a place on the list of US Presidents. The resulting New Deal regime was an enduring expression of FDR's presidential ambition.

As Stephen Skowronek suggested, every President is ambitious to make himself understood in history as an effective and charismatic leader. Throughout the timeline of the United States, there have been 46 presidencies with idiosyncratic sets of ideologies, political coalitions, institutional compositions, and policies pertaining to a specific period of time. Such traits, combined across successive presidencies, constitute presidential regimes that shape a President's historical position to a certain extent. A regime is therefore a governing order that can outlast any single administration. What is more enchanting is that different politics are by-products of the disruptive momentum every President exerts on the political landscape to initiate transformation. As each new President will inevitably exercise his authority under the institutional circumstances left by his predecessor, he acts like a "battering ram" that claims a place in history and asserts his agenda by acting upon the legacy inherited, whether to affirm or repudiate it. In this perspective, the presidency becomes a fundamentally disruptive institution that creates by destroying. In light of such tendencies of the executive office, we can potentially discern paradigmatic leadership politics to understand the presidency as a powerful institution better.

In 2021, in response to the plummet in employment (and economic activity) and a spike in the number of deaths from COVID, a new President promised the country a fresh start with slogans such as unity, hope, and healing. In this paper, I will assign President Biden a political time in which he leads the United States, drawing on the four types of authority introduced in Skowronek's *The Politics Presidents Make*.

According to Skowronek, these four political times perpetuating US history are Reconstruction, Articulation, Preemption, and Disjunction, parametrized by the regime's relative resilience and the President's association with its established commitments.

An affiliated President confronting resilient commitments practices articulation; an affiliated President confronting vulnerable commitments faces disjunction. An opposition President within a resilient regime practices preemption, while an opposition President confronting a vulnerable regime

has an opening for reconstruction (Skowronek 1997, chaps. 2-3). In applying these categories, I will examine the President's relationship to inherited commitments, the capacity of those commitments to organize governing authority, and the emergence of an alternative that can endure. Electoral victory, policy failure, and the size of government spending are relevant evidence, but none is sufficient by itself to locate a presidency in political time.

The latest commonly recognized regime is the Reagan Revolution commencing in 1980, which replaced the regime established by FDR. Under a period of economic crisis, government failures, and ideological hostility, Reagan promised to "put the Nation on a fundamentally different course" (Skowronek 1997, chap. 8). As a third-generation opposition leader, Reagan was about to dismantle not only the legacy of Jimmy Carter but the entire New Deal regime, which he criticized for excessive government spending, taxation, and regulations (Reagan 1981). For these reasons, the Reagan regime was surrounded by an atmosphere of relatively small government, fewer business regulations, and conservative values centered around evangelical Protestants. Examining subsequent Presidents' political times necessitates considering them in relation to the backbone of the Reagan regime. Skowronek's model relies on the two dimensions of affiliation with established commitments and regime resilience. The former concerns affiliation with the Reagan regime's commitments, not merely membership in the Republican Party, while the latter remains complicated to discern.

My hypothesis places Biden as a potential reconstructive president and Trump as a disjunctive one, based on the evidence available in December 2022. To locate the context for a reconstructive leader, we ought to investigate where his predecessor (Donald Trump) would fall under the four categories. Thus, I will identify the political regime into which President Trump falls, analyze his authority, and investigate President Biden's agenda and accomplishments so far vis-a-vis Trump and the regime to identify Biden's leadership.

Donald Trump: The Disjunctive President

"Make America Great Again" was Donald Trump's campaign slogan during the 2016 election, an apparent homage to Reagan's "Let's Make America Great Again" in the 1980s. However, unlike Reagan's success in hammering out a novel coalition and hence a new regime, Trump relied on important parts of the same regime coalition while confronting issues engendered during the Reagan Reconstruction. In Skowronek's words, a President of Disjunction is "a president affiliated with a set of established commitments that have in the course of events been called into question as failed or irrelevant responses to the problems of the day," and he "can neither affirm the integrity of governmental commitments nor forthrightly repudiate them…" (Skowronek 1997, chap. 3). Donald Trump can be examined as an example of a Disjunctive President.

His coalition drew heavily on populist voters, including voters without college degrees and evangelical Christians. These populist voters were also an important part of the Reagan Coalition, yet Trump's appeal brought him into conflict with the Republican Party's establishment (Kreitner 2020). Despite the digression from the contemporaneous Republican establishment, Trump has effectively garnered support from Republican voters within and beyond, convincing the party to rally around him. Although Trump might be an aberration under the context of modern conservatism, important parts of his platform appeal directly to the core coalition of the Reagan Regime that embraces small

government and minimal regulations. The Affordable Clean Energy Rule was a prototypical, ferocious attack on Obama's Clean Power Plan, signifying his determination to fight against business regulations denounced by the Reagan Regime (Environmental Protection Agency 2019). Several tax cuts during the Trump Administration also exhibit a certain degree of similarity to trickle-down economics, at least purportedly. Nonetheless, what has brought Trump to the presidency also presents the acute problems that he had to tackle: the perceived abatement of traditional values among some evangelical Protestants as the nation becomes more diverse, the feeling of abandonment by the middle class and poorer Americans, the rise of polarization and racist sentiments among the American society, etc. Trump's solutions to these glaring issues often invoked a simple and concise promise: to return to the Reagan Era by rescinding the accomplishments of his predecessor, a preemptive Democrat.

While attractive to the populist voters and evangelical Protestants, Trump's offerings encountered problems that a return to familiar commitments could not readily resolve. After all, he inherited a drastically different America from what Reagan took over: the political time was simply different, which refers to the "various relationships incumbents project between previously established commitments of ideology and interest and their own actions in the moment at hand" (Skowronek 1997, chap. 2). To put it in another way, Trump's order-shattering efforts did not consistently harmonize with the order-affirming or order-creating aspects of his leadership. Typically, the disruptive nature of the presidency should enable the President to utilize the battering ram to repudiate his predecessor in a simultaneous attempt to consolidate his authority by affirming the order that has been usurped, such as democratic norms and integrity. However, as Trump attempted to solve the problems of immigration, declining social mobility, growing income inequality, and racial injustices, he approached them in a way that significantly undermined the Constitution of the United States (and these acts have been perceived as misdeeds as well).

According to Ilya Shapiro's commentary for the Cato Institute, Trump posed a systematic threat to America's constitutional democracy by circumventing the Senate during officer appointments, imposing steel tariffs, and repurposing military budgets for the border wall without congressional approval (Shapiro 2021). Under the broader context of dismantling Obama's agenda and fulfilling his campaign promises, these acts raised concerns about the separation of powers and corruption within the federal government. Furthermore, Trump failed to render his potentially unconstitutional agenda as the remedy of the system (thereby weaving the order-shattering, order-affirming and creating into a unitary thread) like what FDR was able to accomplish (Skowronek 1997, chap. 7). Turning back to the actual problems, several of the problems Trump promised to solve remained acute at the end of his presidency. A list published by FactCheck.org in 2021 provides a review of some of the most relevant numbers that reflect Trump's policy priorities:

1. The economy lost 2.9 million jobs. The unemployment rate increased by 1.6 percentage points to 6.3%;
2. The number of people lacking health insurance rose by 3 million;
3. Apprehensions at the Southwest border rose 14.7% compared with 2016;
4. The murder rate in 2020 rose to the highest level since 1997 (Kiely et al. 2021).

These numbers indicate the distance between Trump's promise of "making America great again" and the conditions at the end of his presidency, as several problems that he was poised to combat became ever more pressing. One of Trump's paramount concerns was jobs, yet the aggregate employment figures offered little support for a claim of sustained improvement at the end of his four years. The border wall, Trump's signature project, did not prevent unauthorized crossings of the US border. Despite the fact that Trump was able to exploit such issues to win the election as the one who boasted true American values, he left the US with several of those problems still unresolved. These end-of-term figures must also be read in the context of the pandemic; they do not by themselves establish how much of the deterioration resulted from Trump's policies. The disjunctive claim rests on how his response exposed the limits of the regime's governing commitments.

As the COVID pandemic hit in 2020, the Trump Administration displayed serious failures of coordination by deliberately downplaying the virus and failing to coordinate sufficient action to control the spread of a "flu-like" epidemic. As Parker and Stern demonstrate, "the Trump administration's policy reaction to the pandemic suggest[s] a tragic failure to proactively mount a focused, whole-of-government and whole-of-society response to indications of a rapidly intensifying public health threat" (Parker and Stern 2022). Such unresponsive measures undertaken by the federal government exposed the limits of small-government rhetoric when a public emergency like COVID-19 demanded coordinated action. This conflict between inherited commitments and the demands of governing supports the disjunctive interpretation; a policy failure alone would not establish it. His tenuous relationship with the Republican Party and his emphatic stance to drain the Washington swamp also made him an unorthodox innovator only in the hope of rehabilitation, which, to the contrary, exposed more critical weaknesses of the current regime and precipitated a national crisis of legitimacy amid COVID. As a result, the Republican Party and Trump faced a stronger challenge to the authority of their governing commitments. This challenge also reflects changes in the problems that those commitments must address as America becomes more diverse and governance becomes more complicated and nuanced in an era of globalization.

Another reason could be the rise of presidentialism in the context of secular times, according to Skowronek. As Presidents nowadays become more independent political actors with fewer restraints from the other two branches of the government, the executive office has simultaneously made itself more vulnerable to prospective risks, which expands the possibilities of mismanagement from magnified power (or resources subject to the President) that in turn diminishes his authority (whether allocating such resources strategically can be justified).

The January 6 United States Capitol Attack deepened the crisis of legitimacy surrounding Trump's presidency and his efforts to overturn the election result. It intensified the conflict between his claim to restore the country and the constitutional order he was supposed to affirm. Yet an attack on democratic authority does not by itself demonstrate that the Reagan regime's institutions and coalition have ceased to function.

For Donald Trump, the disjunctive interpretation turns on the problems and the limits of the inherited solutions offered to solve them. As a result, the Republican establishment struggled to control the party and the future progression of the Reagan Regime, which provided a singular opportunity for Donald Trump to step in as an outsider that nonetheless inherited the blood of the

Reaganian dynasty. As a late regime affiliate, Donald Trump possesses the political impact to make changes through the innovative usage of social media and populist rhetoric, but his presidency has disclosed serious weaknesses in the regime's capacity for repair, especially after the failures of COVID policy and the attempt to overturn the election result. As a Republican, Trump's association with his party is not as strong as a typical president of articulation would be. Anti-Trump sentiments have always existed within the Republican establishment, while Trump's direct communication with his constituents has helped him bypass party intermediaries.

Another perspective might put Trump as a reconstructionist as he aims to launch a direct attack on the Washingtonians and the so-called deep state. Yet, it is crucial to remember that reconstructionist presidents do not only propose policy-wide changes—they build new majorities, coalitions, ideologies, and interests that galvanize different political actors into a single force that dismantles old institutions. Abraham Lincoln's reconstructive leadership helped bring about the abolition of slavery, an institution protected by the constitutional order that had shaped the country's political, economic, cultural, geographical, racial, and social landscapes. FDR's New Deal de facto reshaped America as we know it today, displacing inherited arrangements by creating new institutions that also gave rise to the modern presidency. For these reasons, I read Trump primarily as a disjunctive President who exposed the vulnerability of a regime, rather than as the founder of a demonstrably durable alternative.

The strongest objection is that Trump's tax cuts, deregulation, and influence on the judiciary also reaffirm conservative commitments. His ability to hold the Republican Party behind him suggests a capacity to adapt the regime, even as he unsettles its establishment (Kreitner 2020). This evidence prevents a simple equation of disjunction with collapse. My interpretation gives greater weight to the conflict between the promise of restoration and the governing failures described above, while recognizing that a vulnerable regime can retain considerable institutional power.

Joe Biden: The Potential Reconstructionist

Upon assuming the Presidency, Joe Biden was eager to redecorate the Oval Office to manifest his resolve as a new leader who would restore faith and repair the scars left by his predecessor. Above the Oval Office fireplace hangs the giant portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a reflection of the new President's ambition to meet a crisis with the scope associated with FDR's leadership (Katkov 2021). The portrait signals an aspiration; whether Biden occupies a comparable political time must be established through his governing position. As Biden underscored during the 2020 Presidential election, it was a "Battle for the Soul of the Nation", illustrating the urgency of this country's state of affairs. As unemployment remained high, COVID continued to seize lives, and a more polarized American society gave rise to hatred and discrimination, an opportunity for reconstruction appeared to be approaching.

In the words of Skowronek, during the politics of reconstruction, "the president heralds from the opposition to the previously established regime, and pre-established commitments of ideology and interest have, in the course of events, become vulnerable to direct repudiation as failed or irrelevant responses to the problems of the day" (Skowronek 1997, chap. 3). The case for reconstruction depends on whether Trump's responses to COVID, immigration, and the job market exposed

inadequacies of the Reagan Regime beyond the failures of one President. In his inaugural address, Ronald Reagan boldly posited that "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" (Reagan 1981). Indeed, Reagan was, in part, targeting Jimmy Carter's calamitous responses to the ongoing economic crisis that haunted the country, undercutting the New Deal Regime's institutional and ideological support (Skowronek 1997, chap. 8). This motto also helped define the new regime's attitude towards governmental interference through its anti-government rhetoric.

However, the unexpected COVID pandemic cast a sense of doubt on Reagan's wisdom as the United States seemed utterly unprepared to combat the virus, with the existing knowledge of the epidemic under the Trump Administration. When it comes to COVID vaccines, while individual drug companies are developing them, "their efforts are being funded in large part by more than $3 billion allocated by the US government to make such research a reality" (Lazarus 2020). Such incidents challenge the premise that shrinking the size of government can resolve every problem. Yet the funding of vaccine research under Trump also shows that substantial government intervention can occur within the existing regime. Spending alone cannot establish a break with that regime. Besides, a border wall cannot by itself resolve the conflicts surrounding immigration, just as tax cuts do not by themselves establish that the income inequality gap will close. The perennial issues within the United States have culminated in economic decline and political instability as COVID hit, indicators of potential repudiation, which pave the way for reconstruction. The question lingers whether President Biden is attacking Donald Trump only or interrogating the legitimacy of the Reagan Regime as a whole.

In his inaugural speech, Biden emphasizes "unity" and characterizes the time as critical to the survival of this democracy:

> And now, a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat.
> To overcome these challenges – to restore the soul and to secure the future of America – requires more than words.
> It requires that most elusive of things in a democracy:
> Unity.
> Unity.
> …
> Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this:
> Bringing America together.
> Uniting our people.
> And uniting our nation. (Biden 2021b)

Here, Biden is suggesting that the United States is plagued by challenges that will shape its future, and he proposes to confront them with unity as a centripetal ideal that will restore this democracy. Unity can support a reconstructive project, but it can also promise restoration of the pre-Trump order; the rhetoric alone does not decide between them. As the President, Biden would unite the country under the subtle cue of the leadership lodged onto the federal government, signaling that the government is not the problem but the problem solver, challenging an important premise on which the Reagan Regime is based. The $1.9 trillion pandemic fund once again declares Biden's resolve to

utilize the government to address problems that Trump's approach had not resolved— "We have to prove democracy still works, that our government still works and can deliver for our people" (Pace 2021).

Comparing Biden with his Democratic predecessors, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, would provide a more lucid picture of Biden's reconstructionist mindset. As a preemptive President, Clinton displayed a sense of metooism by accommodating parts of the dominant regime's commitments. In the 1996 State of the Union, Clinton stated that "the era of big government is over", an attempt to blur his partisan identity and affirm part of the dominant party's ideology, even as he rejected abandoning citizens to fend for themselves (Clinton 1996). This is a prototypical behavior of a first-generation opposition leader. In his 2011 speech in Osawatomie, Obama acknowledged that "our healthy skepticism of too much government…is in America's DNA." However, his statement that "[i]f we just cut more regulations and cut more taxes --especially for the wealthy -- our economy will grow stronger" described an argument he explicitly rejected, rather than affirmed (Obama 2011). As the third-generation opposition leader, Biden therefore cannot be distinguished from Obama or Clinton simply by whether he recognizes the merits of the Reaganian philosophy. The question is whether his repudiation can yield more durable changes in institutions and coalitions.

While Biden often indicts Trump, he points to the core problems engendered during the regime's entirety: governmental roles, economic philosophies, the definition of mainstream culture, immigration, etc. It is important to realize that these problems did not suddenly arise during Trump's presidency–they reflect conflicts that have developed over the course of the Reagan Regime. The conservative defense of an exclusively evangelical, Protestant, and so-called American way of life is in tension with the emergence of other cultures within American society. In the past few decades, the US has become much more diverse. Nevertheless, some voters with the conservative Republican view would be reluctant to welcome the influx of numerous ethnic and racial groups that stir up the still water, therefore blaming the "aliens" for ruining their America, escalating racist sentiments. In this regard, President Biden also responded with institutional initiatives exemplified by the Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (Biden 2021a). For these reasons, Biden's ideological agenda contains a reconstructive possibility, although its institutional durability remains to be demonstrated.

Another crucial lens to examine Biden's reconstructive potential is the organization of institutions, namely the federal government. Precisely, Biden's cabinet pick reflects the diversity of modern American society to a certain extent. More broadly, 45% of Biden's initial Cabinet nominees were women, and 55% were nonwhite, compared with 18% for both categories under the Trump Administration (Wise 2021). Dissecting more closely, we also observe Pete Buttigieg, the Secretary of Transportation, as the first openly gay Senate-confirmed Cabinet member and Katherine Tai as the first Asian-American US Trade Representative. These changes in the demographic composition of the highest government of the US mark an important shift in representation within Washington. Yet, what is more important is that the doctrine that the federal government should reflect the makeup of the country has become a salient and political notion, a significant development in both the political and secular times in US history. A more representative Cabinet can give these commitments a visible place within the executive branch. Its composition alone, however, does not show that the institutions

or terms of political competition have been reconstructed. That claim depends on the governing changes these appointments help sustain.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Senate's passage of the Respect for Marriage Act support the case for his reconstructive potential by giving concrete form to commitments about public investment and equal recognition. Their moral significance, especially that of the Respect for Marriage Act, may help mobilize support; it does not by itself establish regime change. The test is whether these commitments endure beyond Biden's presidency and reshape the terms on which his successors govern; legislative achievements alone cannot settle that question.

Like FDR, Biden may find a reconstructionist opportunity in conflict with the Supreme Court, though the analogy with FDR requires qualification. In June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned the historic *Roe v. Wade* decision that was set almost 50 years ago, marking a significant digression of the judicial branch. Although this decision might appear frustrating to the Democrats, it nonetheless offers a silver lining to President Biden to magnify his reconstructionist potential. The Court decision in May 1935 invalidated the industrial codes under FDR's National Industrial Recovery Act, de facto killing the masterpiece of the New Deal, which counterintuitively elevated Roosevelt's authority by turning "the embarrassments Roosevelt had encountered in trying to deliver a new dispensation into a clear case of the intransigence of the old dispensation" (Skowronek 1997, chap. 7). That is, the court's action allowed FDR to portray the old regime as an obstacle to recovery, thereby providing more warrants for FDR's political action and, thus, authority.

Analogously, though *Roe v. Wade* is not Biden's centerpiece to his administration's priorities, it epitomizes the values and ideals that many Americans hold dear and sound. The overturn of such a decision allows Biden to challenge the conservative regime's commitments concerning women's rights, with ramifications for gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and a series of politically salient topics that swiftly undulate American society. Consequently, Biden and the Democrats can appeal to opponents of the decision for an aggrandized justification for change. Whether that appeal weakens the regime's legitimacy beyond their existing supporters remains a political question. The passage of the landmark Respect for Marriage Act in the Senate is in part a response to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, proposing federal and interstate recognition of same-sex and interracial marriages in the event of the overturn of cases such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* (U.S. Congress 2022). This would protect recognition of valid marriages, rather than require every state to issue marriage licenses.

The analogy has limits: Roe predated the Reagan regime, and the Court's ability to overturn it also demonstrates the continuing institutional strength of conservative commitments. Biden must turn opposition to the decision into a durable coalition before this conflict can become reconstructive.

A further interesting phenomenon in recent elections is the emergence of young Americans as the backbone of a newly precipitating coalition that might become the new norm for the Democratic Party. According to early estimates, the 2018 and 2022 midterm elections saw the two highest voter turnouts among voters under 30 in the past three decades, a possible basis for a shift of partisan coalition in the future (Lopez 2022). Since Donald Trump, young voters have begun to amplify their political voices concerning the old and obsolete regime. Many of their values correspond to what the Democratic Party boasts: reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, racial equity, and other monumental stances that the Republican Party exhibits a certain degree of hostility toward. If Biden is able to

transform this participation into sustained support for a governing program, he may help consolidate a fresh and powerful coalition. High turnout in two midterm elections, however, does not establish a permanent realignment, nor does opposition to Trump necessarily entail agreement on a new regime.

The incidents of *Roe v. Wade* and COVID-19 responses are all examples of the potential employment of the battering ram to make history by "saving by destroying," a basic logic for reconstructive programs (Skowronek 1997, chap. 7). As Skowronek points out, presidents achieve their goals by repudiating the legacy of their predecessor, and successful reconstructionist presidents like FDR do so by uniting order-shattering, order-affirming, and order-creating natures of presidential actions, which are seemingly paradoxical to each other (Skowronek 1997, chap. 2). A call for codifying the rights associated with *Roe v. Wade* or protecting same-sex marriage can be order-shattering insofar as it advances a governing commitment challenging the Reagan Regime's ideologies and interests. Likewise, repudiation of Donald Trump's COVID management can challenge the legitimacy of the Republican regime while also putting Biden in a position to challenge prevailing limits on the role of government through COVID relief packages and other controversial programs.

These actions are contemporaneously order-affirming in that Biden has framed his efforts as a defense of democratic values and the Constitution. From this perspective, the rights recognized in *Roe v. Wade* should not be usurped, and the President ought to execute his power to affirm and protect the status of the Constitution; establishing comprehensive COVID-related programs and mandates is to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Finally, Biden's moves can become order-creating if rights and public responsibilities are secured through institutions and commitments that successors must take into account. The lessons of COVID may justify a more proactive federal government, but that justification must acquire durable political support. Therefore, it is theoretically possible that Biden could become a reconstructionist president who buries the Reagan Regime despite his comparatively moderate position. As Skowronek speculates, "[i]n some ways, having a moderate with a reconstructive movement or coalition at his back is exactly where you want to be" (Kreitner 2020).

Limits of the Reconstructive Interpretation

Due to the uncertainties of the political landscape in recent years and the relatively short period in office for President Biden, it would be difficult to classify him as a particular kind of the four types of presidents, considering the breadth and depth of institutional, economic, and societal changes recently. One objection is that the changes Biden initiated are not substantive compared with past presidents of reconstruction. However, Skowronek notes that "[i]n the case of the most recent leader in this mold, Ronald Reagan, reconstruction was, relatively speaking, more rhetorical than institutional" (Skowronek 1997, chap. 2). If examined from a rhetorical perspective, it would be plausible to see Biden as a potential reconstructionist president as his inaugural speech and other forms of communication have indicated that a revamp of the political ecosystem inherited from the Reagan Administration may be necessary to the survival of our democracy. However, a reconstructive rhetoric must identify failures of the governing order and establish an alternative,

rather than only condemn the preceding incumbent. Biden has actively engaged in decoupling from Donald Trump, but his break with the broader Republican regime remains less settled.

The competing interpretation is that Biden is a preemptive President within a conservative regime that remains resilient. The Court's ability to overturn Roe provides evidence for that resilience, while Biden's executive initiatives and legislative achievements can still be understood as opposition policies operating within the existing institutional order. His appeal to unity may restore confidence in that order without replacing its central commitments. For reconstruction to be the stronger interpretation, Biden must connect his agenda to a coalition capable of sustaining changes in how government acts and what it is expected to provide. The scale of the crisis and his response make that possibility credible, but the evidence so far cannot establish its durability.

Conclusion

Following this logic, Biden has an opportunity to become a President of Reconstruction, but even if Trump is classified as disjunctive, that outcome is not inevitable in Skowronek's framework. After the crisis catalyzed by Donald Trump, Biden may be well-positioned to initiate repudiation that engenders novel ideologies, interests, institutions, and coalitions. Some initiatives point in this direction, even though a new regime has not been established. Ideologically, President Biden is committed to setting this country on a different course from the Reagan Regime through his determination to unite the country and fight for equity for all Americans. Biden has sought to claim a place in history by rendering the four years of Trump as irresponsible and divisive. If Biden can shape the political discourse, he is well-positioned to combine the order-shattering, order-affirming, and order-creating actions and take advantage of such. The analysis above supports this opportunity through the challenge to inherited governing commitments, while the conservative Court and the uncertain durability of Biden's coalition limit the claim. The distinction between an opening for reconstruction and its accomplishment is therefore essential to my conclusion.

After careful analysis of the Trump and Biden presidencies and the performances of their relevant predecessors, I have concluded that the evidence available in December 2022 supports interpreting Trump as a disjunctive president and Biden as a potential reconstruction leader. Although Biden has yet to complete his first term, the seed of reconstruction appears to have been planted. Whether it sprouts depends on his ability to transform repudiation into governing commitments and a coalition that endure beyond his own presidency.

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