

Trump as a bad Nixon remake, why presidents shouldn't meddle with the EPA and the odd saga of US-Mexico relations: roundup of US academic political blogging for January 21-27th

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USAPP Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best of the week's political blogging from academics and think-tanks. Don't see a blog referenced here that you think we should be reading? [Let us know](#) what we've missed out and we'll try to include it next week.

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President Trump and the Republican Party

On Saturday, *Outside the Beltway* [reviews](#) Donald Trump's inauguration speech from the previous day, referring to it as "the most dreadful inaugural address in history", and characterizes it as more of a stump speech than an inaugural address.

One of Trump's big pledges as a candidate was to reverse President Obama's executive orders. *Monkey Cage* [writes](#) on Monday how presidents in the past have been able to do the same. Overall, the numbers aren't high; Reagan reversed 22 in the first 60 days of his presidency, but most tend to average reversing 6 to 8 for every year of their presidency.

The weekend saw a major stoush between the news media and the Trump administration over the size of the crowd which attended Trump's inauguration. *Duck of Minerva* [says](#) that "Trump's thin-skinned whining" about the media's fact-checking of his claim that the crowd was the biggest ever is more than a case of "crowd-size envy"; it shows that his administration is happy to lie when matters of his popularity are in question. *Monkey Cage*, meanwhile, [asked](#) Trump voters to compare Trump's crowd size to those from previous inaugurations. Fifteen percent of Trump voters thought that there were more people at Trump's inauguration based on a photo from last Friday.

On Saturday, Trump addressed the CIA at their headquarters. *Outside the Beltway* [writes](#) that the speech – which took place in front of a wall which honors the Agency's dead – was a way of politicizing dead spies for his own self-aggrandizement. *Lawyers, Guns & Money* meanwhile [comments](#) that it's hard to determine who was cheering during Trump's CIA visit. It was almost certainly his own supporters who he brought in, but this kind of fogginess is a feature of Trump's propaganda techniques.

On Monday, *FiveThirtyEight* [reports](#) that a mere three days into his presidency, 45 percent of Americans disapprove of Donald Trump's performance, the lowest approval ratings of any new president in more than 70 years. Still smarting from his defeat in the popular vote last year, Trump is now claiming that "millions" of illegal immigrants voted against him, [according to Outside the Beltway](#) – despite the fact that there is absolutely no evidence that that was the case. For *Angry Bear*, Donald Trump is a [miracle worker](#). Why? He's made Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), chair of the Government Oversight Committee act like a statesman, after he stated that there was no evidence of voter fraud outside of the county level.



Official White House photograph of Minority Leader Gerald Ford in meeting with Richard Nixon.
Obtained Ford Presidential Library.

Vox's Polyarchy this week [warns](#) that Donald Trump will not be a conventional Republican – he will be an economic populist for one and his foreign policy of "America First" is add odds with most Congressional Republicans. *The Disorder of Things* this week [writes](#) on what "winning" mean for President Trump – something that he promised would be a hallmark of his presidency during the campaign. They say that Trump just won't be able to win the types of victories abroad which he envisions will "make America great again". *Duck of Minerva* meanwhile [writes](#) that Trump is nothing but a "bad Nixon remake", sharing personality traits such as pettiness, vindictiveness and paranoia with the 37th president.

On Thursday, *Nicholas Kristof* [reports](#) that Trump's "war on women" has begun, with an executive order which would cut off contraception access to a large number of women, particularly in Africa. On Friday, *Immigration Prof Blog* [says](#) "I told you so", having predicted President Trump's latest executive orders which focus on crime-based immigration removals and more immigrant detention.

The Democratic Party

Saturday saw massive Women's Marches all across the country – and the world – in protest against Donald Trump's presidency. *FiveThirtyEight* [says](#) that the marches, which drew more than 3 million people, should encourage Democrats as they could be the start of a movement against President Trump if the Party is able to mobilize them effectively.

The House and Senate

On Monday, *Lawyers, Guns and Money* [argues](#) that we need to dispel the "fiction" that President Trump and Congress are not on the same page; the Senate happily approved Rex Tillerson for Secretary of State and Trump reinstated Ronald Reagan's global gag rule on abortion. On Tuesday, *Monkey Cage* [comments](#) that GOP leaders in Congress want to move quickly. It's risky, they say, because when laws are written quickly, then it can lead to mistakes which make their implementation harder. *Angry Bear* meanwhile [writes](#) that House Speaker Paul Ryan has placed a "couple of sentences into the new House Rules", which would mean that the Congressional Budget Office

would be unable to review the repeal of the Affordable Care Act.

Smart Politics [says](#) this week that with no departures, the last Congress – the 114th – was only the 3rd in history to have zero turnover in the Senate. The other two instances have both been in the last 20 years. Staying in the Senate, *Monkey Cage* is [concerned](#) over legislation introduced by Ted Cruz (R-TX) which would designate the Muslim Brotherhood to be a terrorist organization, which would then put academic researchers who study the group under threat of prosecution for “material support” of terrorism.

Elections and American democracy

On Monday, *Balkinization* [wonders](#) if Donald Trump is a fascist. While some claim that he can’t be one given that he seems to lack a disciplined ideology, his perception of a “singular united people and a unique leader”, combined with his nationalism we get fairly close to a 21st century fascist, they write.

Could one reason for Hillary Clinton’s surprise loss to Donald Trump last year be unconscious sexism on the part of many Americans? Through two new studies, *FiveThirtyEight* [explores](#) how voters’ “implicit bias” against women may have helped to tilt the election in Trump’s favor.

Confused by politics this year? *Mischiefs of Faction* has a helpful [political glossary](#) for 2017, including concepts like plutocracy (government by the wealthy), and kakistocracy (government by the least qualified).

This week many federal agencies came under pressure to halt their communications about the science of climate change. On Wednesday *Princeton Election Consortium* [examines](#) whether or not the freedom of speech of government employees may be restricted. They say that if employees communicate as private citizens – and not as a public employee – then they can speak out. Speaking of constitutionality, *The Volokh Conspiracy* [argues](#) that Trump’s executive order denying funding to so-called sanctuary cities – areas which do not cooperate with federal efforts to deport undocumented immigrants – is unconstitutional because Supreme Court precedent is that the government may not impose conditions on grants to localities unless those conditions are laid down in the law’s text, and that the government may not compel state and local officials to enforce federal law (which would be a violation of the 10th Amendment).

This week *scatterplot* [says](#) that a large-scale investigation into the voter fraud which Donald Trump claims is the reason he lost the popular vote in last year’s election is an opportunity to demonstrate the value of evidence-based inquiry.

The Government, Beltway and the Supreme Court

On Thursday this week, *FiveThirtyEight* [writes](#) that presidents before Trump have tried to meddle with the Environmental Protection Agency – since he was inaugurated Trump has frozen the agency’s grants and contracts – but that it never really goes well due to push back from the public and political opponents.

Almost a year since his death, Justice Antonin Scalia’s seat on the Supreme Court remains open. But how “Scalia-esque” will President Trump’s nominee be? *The Volokh Conspiracy* [profiles](#) a new study which gives Trump’s likely candidates a “Scalia Index Score”. Topping the list is Judge Neil Gorsuch of the US Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit.

Foreign policy, defense and trade



Mexico's relationship with the US was cast into the spotlight once again, as the Trump administration mooted the idea that Trump's now infamous "Wall" could be paid for via a 20 percent import tax on Mexican goods.

FiveThirtyEight reckons that Trump really could mess up their southern neighbor's economy, if he follows through on a promise to halt the flow of remittances from the US to Mexico if the Mexican government refuses to pay the US \$5-10 billion. *Beat the Press* meanwhile says that a Mexico-US trade war is one everyone can win – if Mexico announces that it would no longer enforce US patents or copyrights on its soil. On Thursday, *Two Weeks Notice* tells the odd saga of US-Mexico relations since Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign. On Friday, *Outside the Beltway* has an overview of the "deep significance and importance of NAFTA", a trade agreement which has made close US-Mexico relations the seeming default.

On Sunday, *Duck of Minerva* writes on how the Trump administration is pushing or allowing major changes to the way the US works with the global health agenda. First, HR 193, recently filed by Alabama GOP Congressman Mike Rogers, would end the US' membership of the UN, deny it funding, and also withdraw the US from the World Health Organization. Second, Trump officials are apparently skeptical towards PEPFAR – the world's largest health initiative focused on fighting AIDS.

On Monday, *American Power* talks on what they call Donald Trump's "Jacksonian foreign policy".

OxPol this week writes that whether or not Trump is being blackmailed by Russia, it already has a winner in Donald Trump in that he is already damaging liberal democracy and extant Western alliances and relationships.

Obamacare and health policy

Donald Trump had barely been inaugurated to the presidency before signing an executive order which would push the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to waive or defer parts of the Affordable Care Act which place a fiscal burden on states, individuals and healthcare providers. *FiveThirtyEight* remarks that Trump's executive order does nothing but signals his wider intent to dismantle Obamacare. Along similar lines, *The Volokh Conspiracy* wonders if Trump's executive order can unravel the Affordable Care Act. They comment that it may have some ability to do that, given that the Obama administration asserted its authority to grant waivers, defer burdens and delay implementation outside of the law's legal frameworks.



Credit: NOBama NoMas (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

On Monday, *Balkinization* [suggests](#) that we might be “stumbling into Obamacare federalism”, a system which would allow each state to repeal any component of Obamacare it wished to – but only if it is replaced by something which is just as good. *Lawyers, Guns & Money* on the other hand [suggests](#) that the GOP will never come up with an alternative plan to Obamacare – because it just doesn’t fit with conservative philosophy.

Donald Trump’s pick for Secretary of Health and Human Services is Georgia Representative Tom Price. On Wednesday, *FiveThirtyEight* has a [write up](#) of what we learned about Price at his confirmation hearings, and what we didn’t.

As federal courts weigh against the merger of two huge health insurance companies, Aetna and Humana, *Bradford deLong* this week [wonders](#) if competition in health insurance markets will survive. He says that the answer – for the moment – is “perhaps”.

On Friday, *Monkey Cage* [comments](#) that Trump’s plan to change Medicaid into a block-grant program to be administered by the states, will hurt his own voters the most.

The economy, society and criminal justice

Beat the Press [writes](#) this week that people are choosing to work part time, challenging the narrative that many Americans, who want full-time work, aren’t able to have it. Speaking of work, *Lawyers, Guns & Money* [writes](#) Friday on the “state of the Unions”, commenting that the latest numbers from the Centre for Economic Policy and Research show that union density continues to fall – in some states by up to 2 percent.

Following the weekend’s huge Women’s March, *Outside the Beltway* [wonders](#) what will come next. They comment that the movement is quite analogous to the Tea Party movement on the right, in that it is bound by emotion, and is a reaction to a newly-elected president.

Ahead of Trump’s controversial ban on Muslim immigration, *Monkey Cage* [says](#) that he has actually changed Americans’ views on Islam for the better, likely because during the election, Democratic candidates put forward a strong pro-Muslim counter narrative against Trump’s rhetoric. *FiveThirtyEight* meanwhile [writes](#) this week that Donald Trump’s election victory does not mean that Americans are now more opposed to immigration.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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