Here’s why Trump’s poll numbers are defying the impeachment mess

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**KEY POINTS**

*A very large number of Americans don’t have high levels of trust and respect for the government, and they’re generally OK with Trump being the junkyard dog who digs it all out, writes Jake Novak.*

No matter where you turn, the news is filled with embarrassing stuff about President Trump. The CIA whistleblower complaint about his conduct on a call with Ukraine’s president has turned into a full-court impeachment scandal.

But through all of this, Trump’s approval rating is at its highest level of the year according to the Hill-HarrisX survey, and the other major polls taken since this Ukraine phone call whistleblower story emerged show few changes from the last surveys taken before the news broke.

How is this possible?

Anyone still asking that question simply hasn’t come to terms with why Donald Trump won the 2016 election in the first place. In short, Trump was elected to be the ultimate disruptor and to play that disruptive role as much as possible. “Drain the swamp” wasn’t just a campaign slogan, but a visceral feeling against establishment Washington in every way. Millions of Americans who voted for Trump and still support him chose him precisely because he is nasty, breaks the rules, and shows little respect for the political establishment at every level.

To really be mad at Trump for asking foreign leaders to investigate Joe and Hunter Biden or Hillary Clinton, the voters need to believe that Clinton and the Bidens aren’t inherently corrupt. They must also believe that just about all the rules and established groups within American government, especially the intelligence community, deserve unquestioned respect.

Here’s a newsflash: a very large number of Americans don’t have that trust and respect, and they’re generally OK with Trump being the junkyard dog who digs it all out.

This is Donald Trump’s brand.

Comedian Dennis Miller put it as succinctly as possible with a Facebook post Thursday where he simply wrote: “The simple fact is that if Trump was **vaguely** presidential he wouldn’t be President.”

This goes beyond scandalous or nasty behavior. Even little things like frequent misspellings in his tweets reinforce his brand of being anything but a **polished** politician.

It became clear during the end of the 2016 election, that this is also why Trump’s many exaggerations and outright falsehoods are judged by a different standard. Going back to his days as a casino mogul and reality TV show host, Trump established a brand for bluster or “puffing” that we accept when we see commercials for the “best car ever,” and the “greatest show on earth.” Fact-checking Trump is almost a waste of time as much of the public accepts his bluster in a way no established politician can ever get away with.

Branding is an important guide when it comes to seeing how any given president can weather scandals. We know that from two very different presidents in the past who came out of their own impeachment scandals very differently, thanks largely due to their political and personal branding.

For President Richard Nixon, who was elected in 1968 largely on “law and order” branding, the revelations that he himself had likely broken the law were devastating. Nixon’s approval numbers began to tank as soon as the Watergate accusations and investigations reached regular front page status. Nixon was never impeached, but the House Judiciary Committee did vote in favor of sending articles of impeachment to the full House floor. That helped force his ouster and by the time of his resignation in 1974, his approval rating was at an all-time low of about 22%.

Fast forward about 20 years and President Bill Clinton was actually impeached by the Republican-controlled House. But while the official charge was perjury, Clinton was really mired in an extramarital affair scandal. As embarrassing as the Lewinsky scandal facts were, they were in no way a surprise to most Americans who were already aware of Clinton’s philandering history. In essence, it was part of a brand that made him seem much more real to voters compared to the **stodgi**er George H.W. Bush and Bob Dole.

Clinton was also helped by something that didn’t exist in Nixon’s time: a 24/7 cable news media that provided his supporters ample opportunities to make their cases for him and attack his accusers. Right now, Trump is getting at least some of that support on Fox News and some smaller conservative networks. Also unlike Nixon, Trump has his own Twitter account and many other supporters on social media. Throw in the conservative talk show hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Mark Levin who are defending him daily, and this is yet another reason why the rules are very different than they were in 1973-74.

Branding and different standards aren’t the only reasons why Bill Clinton and Trump fare better than Nixon when it comes to scandal. Nixon was also **straddle**d with high inflation and a generally weak economy during the final years of his presidency while Trump is riding a still strong economy and Clinton enjoyed the same scenario.

None of this means the Ukraine scandal won’t hurt the president in the long run. That’s especially true if it **coax**es another truly non-establishment candidate off the sidelines to challenge him. But those seeking to impeach and remove him don’t seem to understand that this push is just as likely to help Trump, as his generally static poll numbers and improved fundraising since the scandal broke continue to prove.

Donald Trump is different. He plays by different rules and is judged by different rules. As long as his opponents play by the old rules, he’s likely to survive this scandal and the 2020 re-election battle.

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