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## COMMENT: Ted Cruz, not Donald Trump, is the scariest candidate standing

[Randall J Stephens](#), Reader in History (American Studies) at Northumbria, writes about Ted Cruz for *The Conversation*.

The 2016 Republican primary is now essentially a two-man race. Donald Trump has [tallied](#) an astonishing 678 delegates, while Ted Cruz, the dogmatic, far-right Texas Republican, who apparently gets along with no one in his own party, has garnered 423. Even though John Kasich, former governor and the last great hope for moderates, [won his home state of Ohio](#), his candidacy is [mathematically dead in the water](#); his only hope is to pull

some remarkable trick at a [contested convention](#).

For Cruz as well, it's still an uphill battle. But depending on the outcomes of subsequent primaries, [other Republican leaders](#) may yet rally to his side. As [CBS News](#) put it: "Cruz may be the only candidate who can beat Trump in the delegate count before the convention."

This is the mainstream party's worst nightmare. [Comedy Central's Daily Show](#) compared the choice between Trump and Cruz to picking between getting a blood clot or bone cancer, and to listen to the party's establishment, the clot has so far been getting the most attention. As a Los Angeles Times headline put it, "[Cruz is Scary, Trump Is Dangerous](#)". Jeb Bush memorably called Trump the "chaos candidate". George W. Bush's former press secretary, Ari Fleischer, describes Trump as a "[wrecking ball](#)".

South Carolina senator and former GOP candidate Lindsey Graham has decided to back Cruz in a desperate effort to stop the chaos candidate, but even he once compared the decision to choosing between being poisoned or shot by a firing squad. The cyanide capsule seems to have cracked between Graham's teeth.

Cruz is the most rock-ribbed, deep-right candidate ever to have a strong national showing in a modern US presidential race. By many measures, he's a far more frightening candidate than unpredictable, truth-averse, race-baiting vulgarian Donald Trump. At a campaign event last year, he told a three-year-old girl: "Your world is on fire!", winning him the nickname "the Fireman" – a fitting moniker considering both his apocalyptic outlook and his ideological pyromania.

And even as party figures who openly despise Cruz are resorting to [endorsing him over Trump](#), alarms are being sounded across the political spectrum at Cruz's zealous anti-government ideology. Former secretary of labour and political analyst [Robert Reich cautioned](#) that "Both men would be disasters for America, but Ted Cruz would be the larger disaster".

## **Ted the destroyer**

Since he became a senator in 2013, Cruz has left behind a trail of devastation. He led the federal [government shutdown crusade](#) in a quixotic fight against Obamacare and government spending. He's now running on a platform so right-wing he makes Ronald Reagan look like Dwight

Eisenhower.

Back in December, he bluntly [told National Public Radio](#) that “the scientific evidence doesn’t support global warming”. He’s spoken forcefully of [abolishing](#) the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Education, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and the Energy Department, to name but a few. With his best preacher voice he condemns same-sex marriage and calls the nation back to its sacred “[Judeo-Christian](#)” roots.



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

When it comes to foreign policy, the Cruz camp looks to the Christian extreme right, too. [Trump claims](#) only to consult himself on foreign policy. As he recently put it, “I’m speaking with myself, number one, because I have a very good brain, and I’ve said a lot of things.” Cruz looks outward, seeking counsel from former Reagan administration official Frank Gaffney, whom the Southern Poverty Law Center calls one of [America’s foremost islamophobes](#).

As Cruz gleefully courts “[values voters](#)” and Bible beltters, he whispers “[Islam](#)” as if he was saying the word “plague”. Cruz’s father even claims that his son only ran for president after his wife Heidi received the [go-ahead from God Almighty](#).

Whether sincere or not, this explicitly religious positioning seems to be working. With evangelical favorites Ben Carson, Mike Huckabee, and Rick Santorum out of the race, some hardline religious voters now see Cruz as their last and best hope for 2016. And among them is a Christian Right

political operative who more than confirms the LA Times' "Cruz is scary" theory.

## God's country

Christian nationalist David Barton is head of the Cruz fundraising super PAC, [Keep the Promise](#). Barton is a fixture of the far right, appearing at GOP conventions, press events, and megachurches with his trademark cowboy hat and American-flag shirt. In 2005, Time magazine dubbed him [one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals](#), but few outside the evangelical fold are aware of him.

Barton has been described as a [theocratic guru](#), a [pseudo-historian](#), and a God-and-country huckster of the highest (or lowest) order. His views about the US as God's chosen nation and his anti-government rhetoric are a perfect fit for the Cruz camp. Barton looks to the Bible for wisdom on tax policy, marriage and family, science, diplomacy, and the laws of the land. In his view, the constitution is a holy document, and the founding fathers made the country a Christian nation.

God, says the wiry Barton with a distinct southern twang, punishes nations that fail to follow a divine plan. Along with conservative media icon and prophet of doom Glenn Beck, he has forecast dire consequences for the US if Cruz is thwarted and doesn't win the presidency.



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

Barton's own plans have been thwarted many a time. He repeatedly has

landed himself in hot water for using spurious quotes from America's founders; one of his books, the bestselling *The Jefferson Lies*, was even [pulled off the shelves](#) by its publisher and pulped after the weight of evidence against it proved too damning. More moderate evangelicals call Barton duplicitous, but like Cruz, he apparently sees no harm in [stretching the truth](#) for the greater good.

Cruz and his super PAC leader are united in their extreme anti-government dogmatism, and Barton is even more controversial than Cruz himself. That's probably why he's been kept in a behind-the-scenes role, focused on raising Texas-sized bales of cash via the Cruz-aligned [Keep the Promise super-PAC](#).

The political agenda of these men would be disastrous for America. Their ascendancy may make possible what Grover Norquist, the GOP's premier anti-tax free marketeer, always wanted: to shrink the federal government "[down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub](#)". But the theocratic plans of Cruz and company could herald far worse things still.

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