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Is Christie's Attack Strategy Sustainable?

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Former Gov. Chris Christie's presidential campaign strategy — belaboring and belittling former president Donald Trump to the exclusion of all else — has succeeded in setting him apart from his competitors for the nomination while attracting a level of outsized media attention for someone in sixth place with barely two percent support.

Is it, however, a sustainable strategy, one strong enough and sufficiently capable of carrying Christie at least onto the Republican National Committee debate stage in August and to the New Hampshire primary seven months off?

When he announced his presidential quest in early June (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?528446-1/chris-christie-announces-presidential-campaign-hampshire-town-hall>), he was clear in his intention – to relentlessly denigrate Trump and deny him the nomination. He's made good on his pledge, showering increasingly personal insults on the former president while making the case that he is the only candidate who can confront Trump on his own belligerent rhetorical terms and come away the winner.

At this early stage, though, the strategy has been well short of a rousing success, failing to move poll numbers in any significant way. Trump has maintained a 30 to 40 point lead over his closest competitor, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, while the remaining eight all remain mired in single digits.

By implication, Christie portrays the others in the race as are either too timid to go toe to toe with Trump or have deliberately muted their criticism out of fear of alienating the former president's dedicated base of party support.

Christie has also been subjected to a dose of political cynicism that he is merely the means to bring down Trump and pave the way for another candidate, that he understands the nomination is out of his reach but that he'll prove invaluable to the eventual victor and be rewarded handsomely by a Republican White House.

Christie, though, maintains there is a lane for him, one that runs through and over Trump and he would not have entered the contest if he felt there existed no plausible chance to win.

For his part, Trump has largely ignored Christie, waving him off as a minor annoyance not worth more than a few seconds of his attention.

Christie may have succeeded in drawing attention from a media eager to use his battering ram style to advance their criticisms of Trump, but at some point, policy issues will emerge and supplant the verbal bomb-throwing.

Christie's eight-year record as governor and his leaving the office with the lowest public approval rating in modern New Jersey history will come under closer scrutiny. More importantly, he'll be called upon to outline his vision for the nation in dealing with inflation, the economy, crime, immigration reform, abortion access, global tensions and relationships.

He's been able to glide over these issues by intensifying his jihad against Trump, but the strategy comes with a shelf life, an expiration date at which point name calling, ridicule and taunts will fade in the harsher light of addressing the deep divisions and polarization afflicting the country.

Trump's flawed presidency and his actions and behavior since he lost the office have dominated the political environment and there is hardly an American who is unaware of at least some of them. Christie's reciting the Trumpian falsehoods, exaggerations, self-absorption, narcissism and boorish conduct is neither new, revealing, insightful or necessary.

Americans need not be reminded of two impeachments, two criminal indictments, a civil liability verdict and at least two ongoing investigations.

Whether Christie and Trump will face off in person at the August 23 debate in Milwaukee is somewhat problematic.

Christie must meet the party imposed criteria to participate while Trump has hinted at dissing the event altogether, arguing as a matter of strategy that he's not interested in drawing a national audience for eight or nine others who will spend an hour and a half attacking him.

If his lead in the polls still holds firm by then, he'll continue to argue that he is already the presumptive nominee and that his competitors' history is clear evidence they'll not make up any ground.

There is little doubt that Christie's continued attacks on Trump will infuriate the former president's dedicated supporters but is willing to gamble that the desire for a Republican president will outweigh any ill will his criticisms have created.

The strategy is founded on a belief that his vision for the country can wait until the casualties are cleared from the party's battle field.

If he's the last candidate standing, his vision will be that much clearer.

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