James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr. *Defying the Odds: The 2016 Elections and American Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017. xiii, 199 pp. ($49.95 cloth, $29.95 paper, $28.50 ebook).

Defying the Odds is possibly the first meaningful "deep dive" into Donald Trump's seemingly inexplicable triumph. It is sophisticated yet accessible and informative while remaining richly entertaining. I suspect it will be of greater utility to political scientists than most forthcoming treatments of the 2016 elections, accounts written with the luxury of more data and lengthier reflection.

The book is the authors' sixth about presidential elections. They use the occasion to compare the 2016 elections with the first in their series, 1992. In some ways this makes sense — both Bill Clinton and Trump ran "outsider" campaigns against establishment types and there are the obvious Clinton and Bush ties to both contests. But I think the comparison is taken too far. If 1992 has a recent analog, it is surely 2008. Both featured young, energetic, and rather ideologically ambidextrous new-generation Democrats who challenged the status quo in their parties and the country. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama made hope a central feature of their campaigns and ran in troubled economic times pledging a brighter future.

The book is tremendously insightful when the focus is 2016, however. The analysis of the election is sound. At various points the authors describe Trump's key constituency, white voters from rural areas and small towns without college educations, and how Clinton's characterization of them as "deplorables" backfired. Concomitantly, they show the Democratic Party base to be increasingly young and non-white. They do this all with keen observation. Ceaser, Busch, and Pitney reveal how the electorate's residual distrust of the Clintons was rekindled and repackaged into "Crooked Hillary". They place appropriate emphasis on Trump's unconventional social media strategy and how his campaign used vehicles like Twitter and Facebook adroitly, an approach that complimented the relentless coverage the candidate enjoyed in the mainstream media and freed him from burdensome fundraising that would have taken from the time and energy necessary for his successful rallies.

There are more specific, but equally astute, observations. Bernie Sanders' remark to Hillary Clinton in the first Democratic debate that voters were "sick and tired of hearing about your damn emails" instilled a complacency that permitted Trump to exploit the issue in the fall. The dynamics of the Republican primary were critical to Trump's nomination, he was initially treated with kid gloves and then, when his opponents were finally prepared to attack, there remained too many of them to direct their energy solely to the New York businessman. Trump's final-weeks surge in the polls was attributable as much to a large and strategic media buy as it was FBI director Jim Comey's revelations. And there are fascinating vignettes, such as those about Chris Christie's hatchet job on Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz's use of Wisconsin's conservative media and Republican infrastructure to win the primary there, and Trump's digital campaign.

The book contains sections that have a great deal of value in their own right. The preface constitutes an illuminating stand-alone essay about the uniqueness of the Trump campaign and the narrowness of its victory. The chapter on the congressional and state elections of 2016 provides a helpful overview of the past twenty years of American politics as well as a trenchant analysis of what happened in those particular contests. The explanation of the

presidential outcome, presented in chapter 6 and the last ten pages of chapter 4, is compelling. The authors' exposition is centered on the result as a mix of fundamentals, which consist of the broad political context and general mood of the electorate, and contingencies or the 2016 candidates and their campaigns. The concluding chapter contains interesting stories of post-election maneuvering that, while not at the level of 2000, was extremely unusual. There were protests, recounts, revelations of voter fraud, and serious efforts to persuade electors to go rogue.

Between them Ceaser, Bush, and Pitney have an encyclopedic knowledge of American politics and its history. There are, I believe, a few minor misinterpretations and omissions. Viscount Bolingbroke, rather than David Hume, should really be credited with the concept of court and country parties. There were a few questions about George H.W. Bush's health in 1992, but it was a rumor that did not really permeate public consciousness. More seriously, I thought the interpretation of the outcome ignored significant Democratic gains in western states, including red Texas and Arizona. Many have suggested the prevalence of Hispanic voters there explains Hillary Clinton's relative success but, as the authors demonstrate, Trump did better among racial and ethnic minorities than Mitt Romney had four years before. It is plausible Trump's authoritarian brand of conservatism, if it is in fact conservatism, did not appeal to the libertarian wing of the Republican Party that is so influential in that region.

Ultimately, Ceaser, Busch, and Pitney argue Trump's success was as much a product of culture as it was politics. Our disdain for "insiders" and experts, American society's general coarsening, a pervasive obsession with the famous, and an emerging postmodernist understanding of the truth all contributed to the remarkable result. In another time Trump would not have been a serious contender for the highest office in the land. But America in 2016 was a place where a "celebrity cult figure, a reality TV star, a narcissist of the first order, a notorious playboy and strip-club owner, a serial fantasist, and a figure with no political experience and no obvious interest in or knowledge of key public policy issues" could win the Presidency (p. 182). You know we will be discussing this election for decades to come.

Andrew J. Taylor
North Carolina State University