However this election comes out, conservatives face a major problem. As the ascendancy of Donald Trump shows, a substantial share of the GOP base – probably a majority — doesn't care much about core conservative principles. Notably, Trump's strongest allies, Rudy Giuliani and Chris Christie, do not have histories as staunch conservatives. This situation leaves the Paul Ryan part of the GOP, and the conservative intelligentsia, in a quandary.

Many Republican voters seem perfectly happy to support a candidate who is indifferent to traditional tenets such as free trade, balanced budgets, colorblindness, and cutting entitlements. They seemingly care more about jobs and economic security, along with resentment of immigrants, minorities and elites. For traditional conservatives to join this group, they would have to surrender many traditional beliefs. They would also be tying themselves to a political strategy with very uncertain long-term prospects, since it involves alienating growing parts of the electorate (younger voters, college graduates, and minorities). It is also a strategy that strains the long-term ties between the Republican Party and big business, which may begin to see Democrats as providing a more stable economic environment. After the election, we should get a sense where the Ryan Republicans will go; no doubt the answer depends in part on the election results.

It will be particularly interesting to see what happens with "reform" conservatives – a mostly younger group of conservatives who believe the movement needs rethinking. Among other things, they call for a rethinking of conservative views of climate change. Their general approach is exemplified by David Brooks comment that conservatism, "[s]hrouded in obsolete ideas from the Reagan years" erred "because it didn't believe in using government as a tool for social good." Environmental law is all about using government as a tool for social good. Some like-minded commentators argue for taking science seriously, and they are open to considering solutions like a carbon tax. If the GOP goes down in flames on November 8, this will give them an opening to argue for a reorientation of conservative politics. But if Trump prevails, they will be cut loose within the GOP and will either have to try to form a kind of party-in-exile or look outside the GOP for a home. They will not be alone – business interests and traditional GOP suburban and college-educated voters will also have to reorient themselves.

It's not clear how the political world will rearrange after November 8, and much will depend on how the GOP slate fares that day. But there does seem to be some possibility for breaking up the traditional alignment between anti-environmental groups and conservatives, thus freeing some conservatives to take more

environment-friendly positions.