

## **TRUMP IS A DANGEROUS ANOMALY**

**by Herman Greene**

Donald Trump is an anomaly in that he presents a unique danger that would not be presented except for his highly unlikely election as President of the United States and his conduct in that office.

Consider these questions:

- What were the odds that Trump would run against 17 Republican contenders and win nomination by receiving 20-30% in most of the Republican primary votes?
- (While not an anomaly, why is it that the US system allows the Republican Party, which represents 21% of registered voters, to pick one of two main presidential nominees and the Democratic Party, which represents 31% of registered voters, to pick the other? If Trump won 20% of the Republican vote in the early primaries and Republicans were 20% of the registered voters in the states that held the primaries, then 4% of registered voters were choosing the next president because 20% of 20% is 4%.)
- What were the odds that the Russians would help Trump's campaign or that FBI Director Comey would speak out in the way and time that he did on his department's investigation of Hillary Clinton's emails?
- What were the odds that Trump would run against what turned out to be a weak Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, who was a nearly ideal candidate for his populist rhetoric?
- What were the odds that Trump's unorthodox and untested approach to campaigning using new channels of communication would win a majority of the Electoral College?
- What were the odds that a person who lost the popular vote by 2% (approximately the winning percentage in recent US presidential elections) would win the presidency?

I know Hitler comparisons are questionable, but I find myself making some. The unlikelihood of Trump coming to power has similarities with Hitler's rise. If you consider all the unlikely coincidences that had to occur for Hitler to come to power, you will see he, like Trump, had a highly unusual, almost preposterous route. Both pursued a populist path and gave dark warnings about the future that required radical change.

Keep in mind that political power does not depend on consensus, it depends on working within the political system that exists to gain power. Even in democratic systems this can happen with minority support and power can be sustained through minority support.

Trump is distinctly different from all the other 2016 Republican presidential contenders and all the Republican leaders in Congress, notwithstanding that to a large extent Republican leaders are circling the wagons around Trump.

What's unusual is that he has departed from neoliberalism. Moving away from free trade to economic nationalism is one way he has departed. Consider the words of Pat Buchanan, as quoted in Marc Fisher's *Washington Post* article, ["The Political Lexicon of a Billionaire Populist"](#):

"Bannon and Trump's message of economic nationalism is the opposite of what Republicans have been preaching for 20 years," said Patrick Buchanan, who ran for president twice in the 1990s as a populist Republican. "But what we saw in the speech to Congress was amazing: [House Speaker Paul D.] Ryan and those guys, standing and cheering for economic nationalism! Cheering for enormous public-works undertakings — the Republicans! It's Trump's party now."

But what I think is really different about Trump is that while US conservatives have resisted acting on climate change and other progressive causes, Trump rages against these concerns and is out to destroy the influence of intellectuals and journalists who, and government structures which, support them or are seen by Trump as doing so. Consider the words of Michael Hayden quoted in Michael Gerson's *Washington Post* op-ed, ["Reality Will Get Its Revenge on Donald Trump."](#) Hayden characterizes Trump's activities as

"a systematic effort to invalidate and delegitimize all the institutions, governmental and nongovernmental, that create the factual basis for action . . . so they won't push back against arbitrary moves."

Trump may seem continuous with past conservative advocacy of free markets, reduced regulation, and lower taxes. What is new and different about Trump and not a part of a logical progression is the extent to which Trump, refusing the customary regard for conflicts of interest, brings his personal and family business interests into the White House. On March 8, 2017, Eric Trump proudly stated, "I think our [Trump] brand is the hottest it has ever been." See Eric Lipton and Susanne Craig in the *New York Times* article ["With Trump in the White House, His Golf Properties Prosper."](#) Membership at Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club now requires a \$200,000 fee, a fee that increased by \$100,000 after his election. See Drew Harwell's *Washington Post* article, ["At Trump's Mar-a-Lago, the Price for Joining the 'Winter White House' Has Doubled."](#) Further, while engaging in politics almost always requires a strong ego, Trump stands out for his narcissism, vindictiveness, and perhaps megalomania.

Trump rails against the system and the "deep state." He makes a mockery of rational discourse and is intent on creating perpetual chaos and distraction while filling government with the people who disdain the agencies to which they are appointed. Like a child he churlishly rebels against all restraints, including ecological restraints, except the ones that please him which he is determined to enforce, such as the travel ban, the refugee restrictions, the border wall, and his understanding of law and order.

He has peculiar and uninformed ideas of what promotes the public welfare. For example he promised a “sensational” health plan that would cover everyone only to find out that health care is complicated. See Kevin Liptak, CNN, “[Trump: ‘Nobody Knew Health Care Could Be So Complicated.’](#)” Now he backs a plan he did little to craft, one that promises universal “access” rather than universal coverage; provides “roughly \$157 billion [in tax cuts] over the coming decade to those with incomes of \$1 million or more according to a congressional analysis,” see Jesse Drucker, *New York Times* “[Wealthy Would Get Billions in Tax Cuts under Obamacare Repeal Plan](#)”; would restore “choice” by allowing interstate health insurance sales, which would deprive states of the ability to regulate what is covered in the plans (except as required by the federal law); would take away the Affordable Care Act’s subsidies to lower income earners and substitute a fixed refundable tax credit by age group for people making under \$75,000 (\$150,000 if married) that is not adjusted for the cost of insurance or income level; and would keep the Affordable Care Act’s requirement for insurance companies to disregard pre-existing conditions as a condition for enrollment, but not require uninsured people to obtain coverage, which will presumably lead to higher premiums for the insured. He proposes a trillion dollar infrastructure plan which isn’t a government spending plan at all but rather tax incentives for private companies, many of which would no doubt use the tax cuts (on top of the further corporate tax cuts Trump proposes) for projects that they would do anyway and not use them for projects that are undesirable from a profit standpoint. See Ronald Klain’s *Washington Post* op-ed, “[Trump’s Big Infrastructure Plan? It’s a Trap.](#)”

Whatever Trump’s weaknesses in policy are, however, he is a skilled pied piper. His ostensibly pro-business, pro-growth, pro-tax cuts orientation has fueled a surge in stock prices and possibly employment (though on employment it’s too soon to tell because US employment has been expanding every month for more than six years). He feeds his base with distorted information, such as that 122 people released from Guantanamo Bay by Obama returned to the battlefield (113 of those were released by Bush and 9 by Obama, see Rebecca Shabad, *CBS News* “[Trump Incorrectly Claims 122 Gitmo Detainees Released under Obama Returned to Battlefield](#)”) and unsupported claims (most recently that he had been wiretapped by Obama, see Eugene Kiely in *USA Today*, “[Fact Check](#)” [Examining Trump’s Wiretap Claim](#)”) and is, in part because of the information and claims, perceived by them as a man of conviction and decisive action. As one of my Facebook friends wrote, “Trump has brought us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with pride.”

With regard to Trump, we can see some parallels with populist leaders and movements elsewhere, but this is the United States. The United States has a history of strong democratic institutions. Trump is testing the limits of those institutions. For the populist leader, the existing government structures are corrupt and they must be changed in a radical way to achieve the desired end for the forgotten people. Ronald Reagan and other American presidents have had a populist orientation, but there has never been a populist president of the United States of the kind that Trump is with the possible exception of Andrew Jackson. See Geoffrey Kabaservice’s article in *The Guardian* “[Wild Populism Has a Long History in US Politics, but Trump Is Surely Unique.](#)”

Speaking as a citizen of the United States, I think Trump is sowing the seeds of the potential destruction of our democracy, our economy, and our ability to participate in and influence the world in a meaningful way just when it is most needed in the long emergency of climate change and global social disorder. The way he is responding is, in my opinion, the opposite of what is needed and will dearly cost all of us globally, including other species and future generations.

One can only wonder what the end game is. Here's my best shot at that: Trump is not respected by the New York business community despite his considerable wealth and fame. He wants to build his own wealth and that of his family to become unmistakably great as he sees it. He wants constant attention and to be seen in the company of those who matter to him. He wants the United States to become a protective fortress for white patriarchal nationalists. He wants a world order that serves America first. He wants it understood that selfishness and self-interest are the basis of social order and lavish excess is the reward for virtue.

There are other people who could have arisen in Germany in the wake of the difficulties of the Weimar Republic, but only Hitler could have done what Hitler did.

In the United States, only Trump can do what Trump is doing. He is a dangerous anomaly.

Fortunately Trump is not Hitler.

I do not expect Trump to perform horrendous acts of the type performed by Hitler, though Trump's potential for brutality (in light of his avowed support for torture and his determination to bomb the s\_\_\_\_\_ out of ISIS) if provoked by a terrorist or other assault that is disturbing to him is untested. His violence may come not so much from what he does as from what he leaves undone (such as America's commitments under the Paris Peace Treaty), what he blocks (such as scientific information on climate change), and what he permits others to do (such as build oil pipelines, frack natural gas, and perpetrate violations of human and animal rights).

Trump attends to the impulses of the present, while disregarding the imperatives of the future. He is oblivious to the continuing devastation of Earth's life systems and the reasons for the deterioration of the global social fabric. What will come of all this is not foreseeable, but the probable outcomes I see are not good.

For some Trump is an extension of recent trends. For me, however, Trump is a dangerous anomaly.

He changes my calculus of what needs to be done. I will speak to this in a later article.